



A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONS IN  
PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PAKISTAN

*by*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**All praise and glory to**

*Allah (swt),*

*Our Creator, Nourisher, Sustainer,*

*To Whom We Show Our Gratitude*

*For the Countless Bounties Upon Us All*

**May peace and blessings be upon**

*Muhammad (saw),*

*A Role Model for all Humanity*

## **DEDICATION**

**To my loving parents**

*Syeda Hayat Begum Nasim*



*Dr Mian Bashir Ahmad Kakakhel*

*For Their Love, Forbearance, and Sacrifices;*

**and to my loving wife**

*Syeda Ambarin*

*for her Unending Support, Encouragement, and Sacrifices.*

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explores parent-teacher relations in public secondary schools in Pakistan in order to understand the interaction and communication between parents and teachers. The study is guided by Bourdieu's conceptual and analytical tools of capital, habitus and field and uses these to disentangle the underlying structures and practices of parents and teachers. The thesis argues that the relations and practices of parents and teachers are not inert entities; rather they are dynamic and multidimensional in character. In this, class and culture, power and structures are significant, as are the dynamics of reproduction and stratification.

Chapters Five through Eight draw heavily on empirical data from parents and teachers to explore the dynamics of teachers' communication with parents. The thesis demonstrates that teachers' communication with parents is individually and collectively underpinned by the teachers' habitus and the field influence of the schools. The thesis argues that the underlying influences and structures of the teachers' habitus and the schools lead most teachers to portray parents as uninterested in school visits and present them as homogenised. However, there are variations in the way teachers share their experiences. The pattern that emerges suggests that generally schools do not have formalised and institutionalised procedures for contact with parents. However, teachers' communication with parents emerges as a complex, dynamic and patterned process, which is not only engrained in specific situations but is also underpinned by the power and class dynamics of the stakeholders.

The parents' data show them to be deeply attuned to their children's world, through which they demonstrate that they are not 'hard to reach'. Rather the schools themselves are hard to access. The thesis illustrates the variety and richness of the parents' lives by examining the interplay between their habitus and field. The thesis demonstrates that whilst parents differ individually in terms of their habitus, the role of culture and field implicitly determine and collectively shape and inform parental practices and the realities around them. The interplay between parental habitus and the dynamics of the field provides a structuring structure that shapes and in some ways redefines parental habitus.

The thesis also demonstrates that the interplay between parental habitus and capital, field and class provide a deep, rich and complex structure of thought and practices of parents. This interplay results in a paradox for most parents, as on the one hand, they see no bounds in harnessing their ideals and potentials but on the other hand, they do not possess the right amount and quality of structures to be able to realise these ideals.

Finally, the thesis considers the implications and limitations of the study and offers recommendations designed specifically for teachers, parents and policy makers. The discussion focuses on the originality of the research and on the justification of the contribution to knowledge, which is followed by reflections on the research experience and suggestions for further research.

**Keywords:** parent-teacher relations; interaction; communication; cultural capital; social capital; *habitus*; *field*; gender; power dynamics; barriers

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*Syed Munir Ahmad*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEPM	Academy of Educational Planning and Management
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
BERA	British Educational Research Association
DfID	Department for International Development
EDO	Executive District Officer
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoNWFP	Government of North-West Frontier Province
GoP	Government of Pakistan
M.Ed.	Master of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)
PETs	Physical Education Teachers
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RBS	Rural Boys' School
RGS	Rural Girls' School
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SMCs	School Management Committees
UBS	Urban Boys' School
UGS	Urban Girls' School
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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## Chapter One — Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with an introduction to the research context. Following this, I provide a discussion of my personal and professional trajectory that aims to situate and justify my role and position as an ‘insider’ and as a researcher. Thereafter the chapter considers the significance of the study, highlighting it as one of the first and important empirical research works attempted at such a level and detail in the context of Pakistan. Following this, research questions are introduced that are stated with the subsidiary research questions. An introduction of the theoretical framework then follows, which uses the conceptual and analytical tools of capital, habitus and field to interpret and understand the practices of parents and teachers. The chapter then introduces the methodological orientation of the study, which uses qualitative case study design and a number of qualitative research tools for data gathering. In the final part, the organisation of the thesis is discussed which is followed by chapter summary.

### 1.1 Research context

Pakistan has a unique status in South Asia and internationally. The region it represents has been at the crossroads of history, culture, trade, commerce, politics and conflicts. Thus, given the current national and international geo-political context and debate, Pakistan has been the focus of attention, both regionally and internationally. Given these dynamics, it is more important than ever to know and understand the culture and traditions that structure and regulate its people’s behaviours and practices, which not only have implications for the country’s progress and development but also have political ramifications at both national and international level.

From the perspectives of education and sociology of education, it is of utmost importance in the context of Pakistan that we begin to explore and understand the interplay between people’s perceptions and experiences of their various spheres of life and the children’s role in it. This will help to explicate how the practices of the various stakeholders are played out, structured and mediated through the dynamics of education, which is underpinned by social and cultural traditions and related constructs. The knowledge thus acquired may be helpful in charting the various dispositional, personal, and collective trajectories of the stakeholders-such as parents and teachers-in the respective social and institutional spaces of home and school. This

may also be of help in developing policies and structuring practices that aim to bring parents and teachers, and home and school closer to one another, in order to work in harmony for the success of the common good (i.e. children and their future). This may have far-reaching implications for the future of Pakistan.

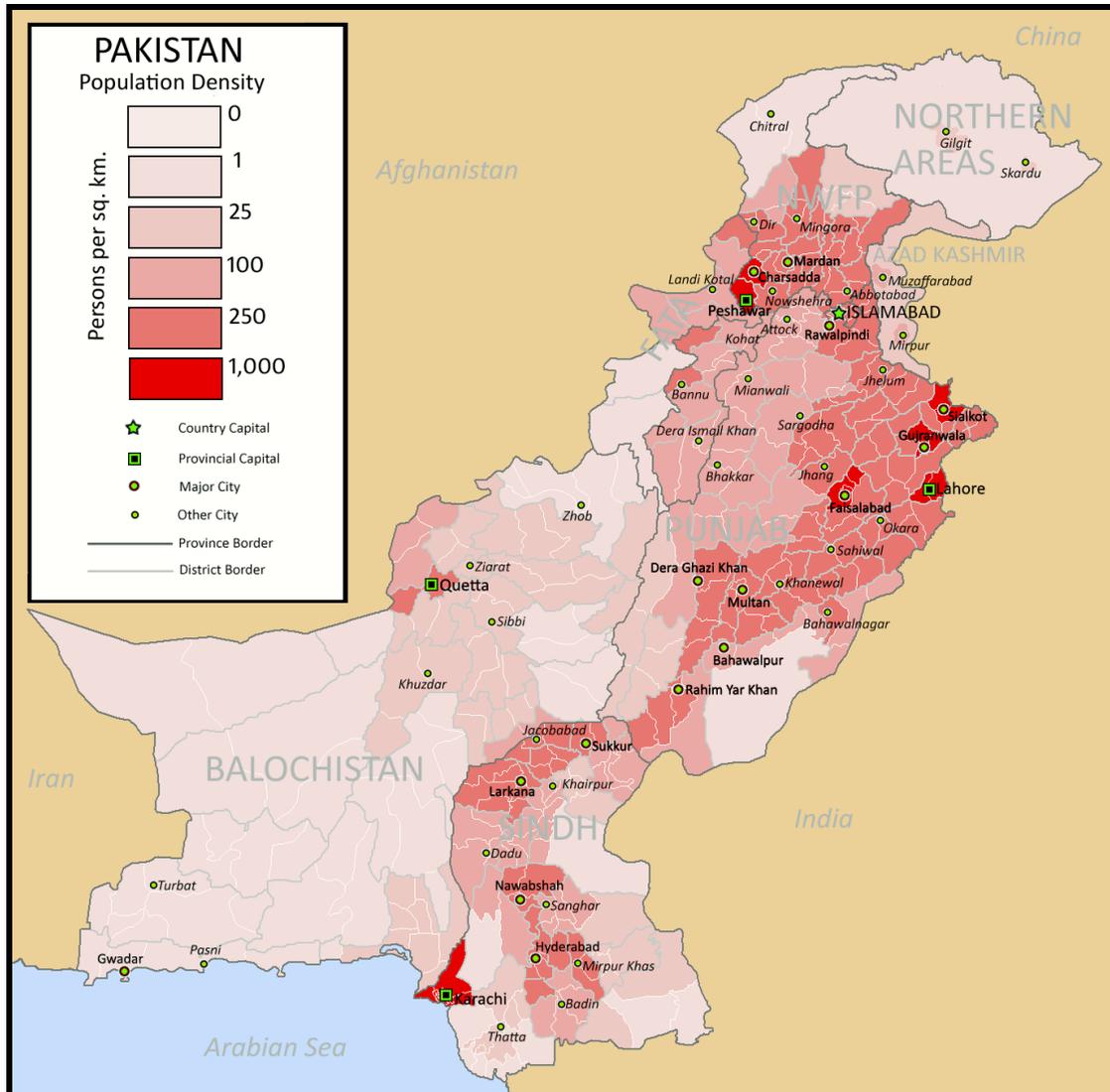
Administratively and politically, Pakistan is a federation of four provinces, which are Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly NWFP), Punjab and Sindh. In addition, there are other administrative units, which include Islamabad Capital Territory, FATAs, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan (see **Map 1.1**).<sup>1</sup> Pakistan has a total area of 796,095 sq.km and shares borders with India, China, Afghanistan and Iran, with the Arabian Sea to the south of the country (GoP, online at <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk>).



**Map 1.1 Map of Pakistan (administrative and political)**

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/thumb/2/2f/Map\\_of\\_Pakistan.png/350px-Map\\_of\\_Pakistan.png](http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/thumb/2/2f/Map_of_Pakistan.png/350px-Map_of_Pakistan.png)

It is also important to have some understanding of the population density in Pakistan, as it has implications for various aspects of people's lives. Since at least the last four decades, Pakistan has seen a sharp increase in its population (see **Map 1.2**).<sup>2</sup>



**Map 1.2 Population density of Pakistan**

Pakistan is now the sixth most populous country in the world, with China, India, United States, Indonesia and Brazil occupying the top five slots respectively. According to some recent estimates, the population of Pakistan is 177,276,594 (July 2010 est.) (CIA, online).<sup>3</sup> Some of the major cities, including Peshawar, have a population density of over 1,000 persons per sq. km. Moreover, according to

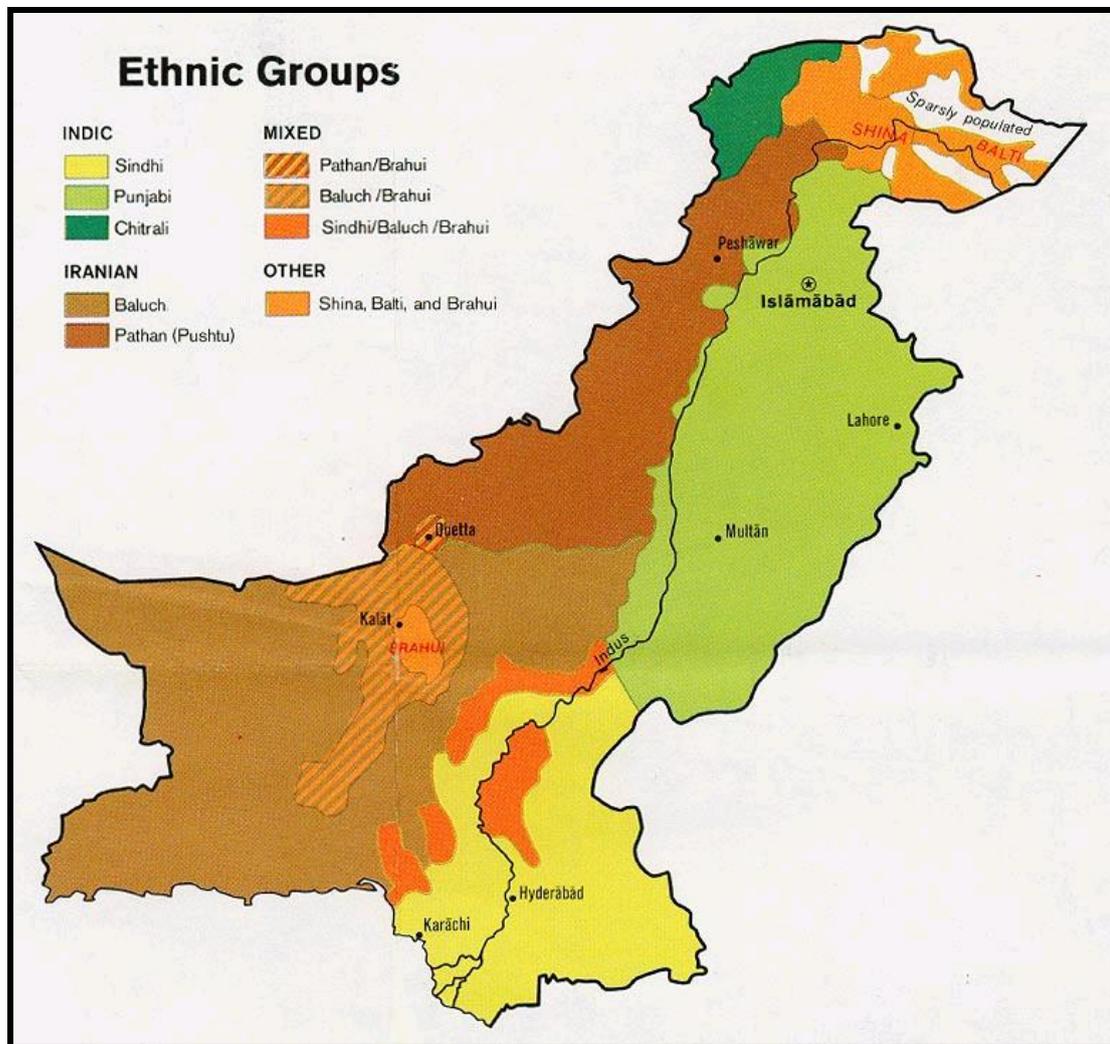
<sup>2</sup> Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan\\_population\\_density.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pakistan_population_density.png)

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>

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population statistics of 1998 of the GoP, the urban and rural population density was 32.5% and 67.5% respectively (GoP, online).<sup>4</sup>

A look at the religious categorisation is also important. According to the 1998 census of the GoP,<sup>5</sup> whilst the majority of population of Pakistan is Muslims (96.28%), Christians (1.59%), Hindus (1.60%), Qaidianis (Ahmadi 0.22%) and Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists, Jews, Baha'is, Animists (mainly the Kalasha of Chitral) and Other (0.32%) formed around 3% of the total population. Pakistan is a multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic nation, where more than sixty languages are spoken. The ethnic makeup of the population is Punjabi 44.68%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.42%, Sindhi 14.1%, Sariaki 8.38%, Muhajirs 7.57%, Balochi 3.57%, Other 6.28% (see **Map 1.3**).<sup>6</sup>



**Map 1.3 Ethnic groups in Pakistan**

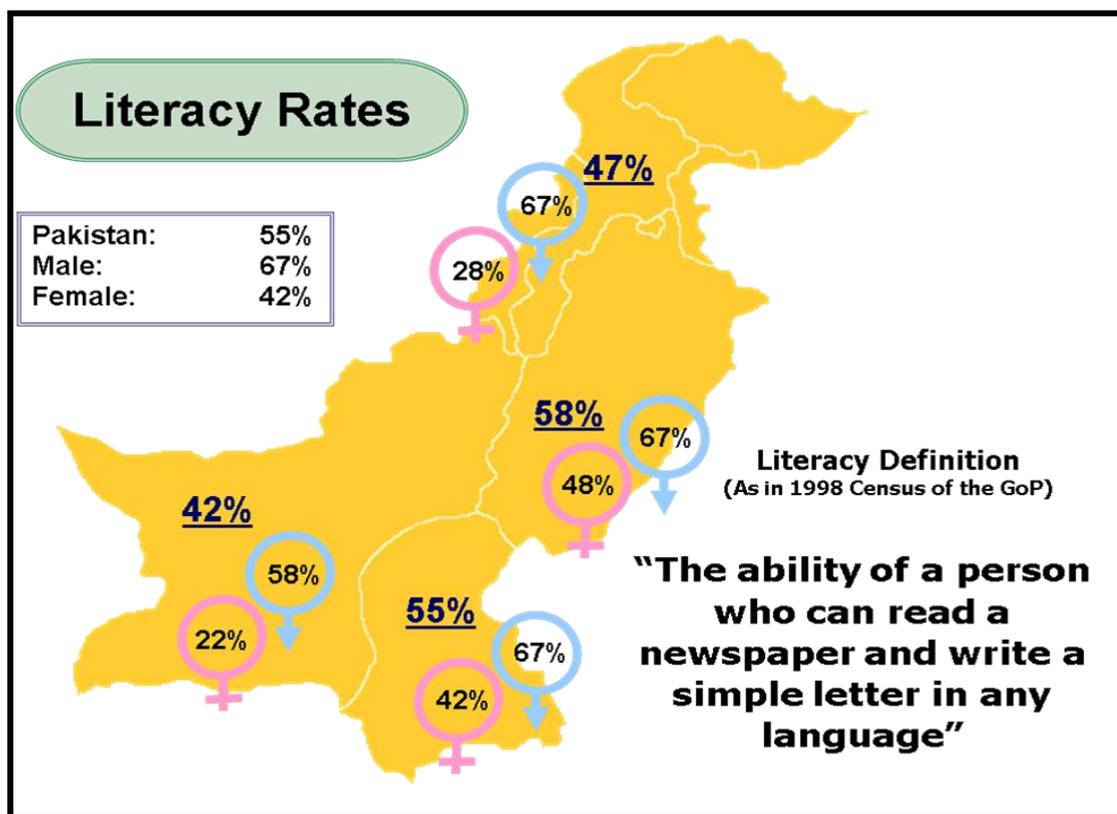
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<sup>4</sup> Source: [http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/area\\_pop/area\\_pop.html](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/area_pop/area_pop.html)

<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other\\_tables/pop\\_by\\_religion.pdf](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/other_tables/pop_by_religion.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Pakistan\\_ethnic\\_1973.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Pakistan_ethnic_1973.jpg)

In terms of education provision in Pakistan, a number of education systems run parallel to one another. At one end of the spectrum are the elite (English-medium) private fee-charging schools, designed and run on the contemporary Western education model, offering an O and A level curriculum, which are followed by a varying range of private (English-medium) fee-charging schools and other non-profit private schools (run by NGOs etc). Towards the other end of the spectrum—at the lower rung of the education ladder—are the State or public (Urdu-medium) schools, which offer education to the masses, which include mostly working-class and poor parents. There is a further stream of non-profit charitable institutions, called *madaris* or *madrasas*, which provide religious and some contemporary education to children and adults of various class backgrounds, but their share in the education provision is around 1% to 2.6% (Andrabi *et al.* 2006; Cockcroft *et al.* 2009; McClure 2009). According to the Federal Bureau of Statistics of the GoP,<sup>7</sup> the current total literacy rates in Pakistan stand at 55%, further details below in Fig. 1.4.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1.1 Literacy rates in Pakistan**

<sup>7</sup>Source: [http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/statistics/pslm2006\\_07/report\\_pslm06\\_07.pdf](http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/statistics/pslm2006_07/report_pslm06_07.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Source: Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement (PSLM) Survey 2006-07

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Since the focus of the present research study is on public schools in Pakistan, I will explain the structure of the formal education system before moving on to provide some related statistics about the educational trends and will later focus on the dynamics of the educational scene in Peshawar.

The public school system in Pakistan consists of five stages: pre-primary, primary, middle, high, and higher secondary (Shah 2003:3-4).

Pre-primary (or ECE) education is offered in the existing primary schools to children in the age range of 3-5 years. The class or grade that these students attend is called as *Kachi* (colloquial for ‘beginners’). The *Kachi* is now a formal class in primary schools.

Primary school education consists of five grades or classes from I-V, which is for children aged 5-9 years. Whilst primary schooling in Pakistan is mandatory for all children, there are still huge disparities in terms of children out-of-school and the ones that drop out through the first five grades.

Middle school education is of three years duration and consists of classes VI-VII. This stage is for children aged 10-12 years. There is some variation in the way middle grades are adjusted in primary and high schools. For many primary schools, it may be normal to have middle classes. Similarly, it may be normal for many secondary schools to have accommodated middle grades.

Secondary or high school education is of two years duration, offering education in two classes i.e. IX and X. This stage is for children aged 13-14 years, but older children may also be attending these classes. Towards the end of the X class, throughout the country, Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) conduct examinations for a qualification of Secondary School Certificate (SSC), which is also called ‘Matric.’ Secondary education is a stage where not only vocational education may be provided, but also it may be a terminal stage for many children who may then move into various professions, either skilled or unskilled.

The final stage of schooling is the higher secondary stage. Also known as the ‘Intermediate level,’ this stage is also considered as part of the college education, which consists of classes XI to XII. Most of the secondary schools were to be upgraded to include intermediate classes. However, this had limited success. Students at the intermediate level can opt to study general education (Arts and Humanities),

professional education (Sciences, commonly known as pre-medical/pre-engineering) and other technical and vocational education. The BISE conducts the examination for a qualification leading to a Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC), which is also called an F.Sc. The students can then move on to study at various colleges and universities for higher qualifications, such as Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

Table 1.1 provides educational statistics of public and private schools in Pakistan, beginning with pre-primary up to the higher secondary. As can be seen from the table, at the primary school level, public sector by far is the major provider of education.

**Table 1.1 Pakistan education statistics: summary 2004-05**

Institutions Type	Institutions				Enrolment by Stage			Teachers			
	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Pre-Primary	Public	-	-	-	-	2,185,321	1,860,754	4,046,075	-	-	-
	Other Public	-	-	-	-	16,759	12,424	29,183	-	-	-
	Private	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	-	-	2,202,080	1,873,178	4,075,258	-	-	-
Primary	Public*	74,081	43,811	17,435	135,173	6,263,943	4,428,532	10,692,475	215,389	125,747	341,136
	Other Public	113	104	3,265	3,482	228,388	159,048	387,436	6,914	7,006	13,920
	Private	315	592	15,155	18,502	3,547,110	2,630,927	6,178,037	21,321	73,758	95,080
	Total	74,509	44,507	35,855	157,157	10,039,441	7,218,507	17,257,948	243,624	206,511	450,136
Middle	Public	7,140	6,857	565	14,609	1,955,605	1,250,952	3,206,557	58,425	52,838	111,263
	Other Public	20	20	20	60	42,639	30,226	72,865	773	1,415	2,188
	Private	283	126	15,340	15,749	689,607	581,444	1,271,051	36,011	97,204	133,215
	Total	7,443	7,003	15,925	30,418	2,687,851	1,862,622	4,550,473	95,209	151,457	246,666
High	Public	5,951	2,736	254	8,995	855,339	530,255	1,385,594	108,529	52,763	161,292
	Other Public	38	48	38	124	24,223	19,205	43,428	975	1,375	2,350
	Private	461	240	6,769	7,471	244,158	206,842	450,999	34,003	84,468	118,471
	Total	6,450	3,024	7,061	16,590	1,123,720	756,302	1,880,021	143,507	138,606	282,113
Higher. Sec/ Inter Colleges (XI-XII)	Public	550	392	36	1,023	82,516	78,201	160,717	16,263	10,316	26,579
	Other Public	5	4	25	34	11,354	9,786	21,140	405	251	656
	Private	103	92	353	547	50,033	36,704	86,738	9,157	8,271	17,428

Source: AEPM, GoP<sup>9</sup>

Following on from the above, student dropout from the public schools has been one of the major issues facing the education system in Pakistan, which has been attributed to a number of reasons, such as poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. At the end of primary schooling, i.e. class 5, more than 50% of students drop out of schools. This trend continues in the middle and secondary schools. Towards the end of the

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.aepam.edu.pk/summary%2004-05.htm>

secondary stage, only 27% of students remain to graduate (see **Table 1.2**). The situation is also discouraging for girls, as **Table 1.3** documents.

**Table 1.2 Total enrolment (boys and girls) by year and class (public schools)-2003**

	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
<b>Class 1</b>	2,785,199* (100%)	2,879,698*	2,410,512	2,486,371	2,678,433	2,765,058	2,687,703	2,833,726	2,765,496
<b>Class 2</b>	1,981,984	2,008,955	1,981,792	1,791,741	1,927,099	2,050,364	2,163,886	2,172,693	2,119,625
<b>Class 3</b>	1,780,282	1,799,494	1,768,561	1,553,514	167,894	1,723,011	1,829,369	1,889,439	1,950,152
<b>Class 4</b>	1,618,586	1,636,772	1,616,275	1,357,686	1,527,325	1,521,503	1,587,541	1,620,725	1,765,947
<b>Class 5</b>	1,415,192	1,443,612	1,424,860	1,153,502	1,310,117	1,339,103	1,350,576	1,389,036	1,534,357
<b>Class 6</b>	1,172,684	1,217,582	1,197,493	1,199,759	1,156,240	1,052,388	1,066,527	1,097,875	1,162,212
<b>Class 7</b>	969,626	988,421	991,331	1,014,172	1,013,035	939,827	931,765	945,328	1,007,045
<b>Class 8</b>	857,284	854,646	844,754	866,334	904,663	855,402	865,630	869,771	908,960
<b>Class 9</b>	692,247	720,895	711,363	719,444	752,911	714,402	708,908	706,384	753,891 (27%)
<b>Class 10</b>	517,100	538,682	554,336	576,665	558,196	535,539	534,523	535,249	586,789

Source: AEPM, GoP<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.3 Enrolment of Girl Students by Year and Class (public schools) - 2003**

	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
<b>Class 1</b>	1,139,669* (100%)	1,228,088*	955,032	850,810	956,592	1,041,210	1,061,290	1,144,931	1,121,631
<b>Class 2</b>	736,368	768,405	770,242	637,062	723,908	764,583	845,986	861,221	840,362
<b>Class 3</b>	655,087	678,168	681,456	548,090	633,329	662,286	715,102	743,819	773,023
<b>Class 4</b>	582,562	606,760	606,852	475,946	573,898	583,064	624,842	634,800	692,474
<b>Class 5</b>	488,321	518,989	523,228	395,397	485,538	503,654	519,810	537,858	586,492
<b>Class 6</b>	389,544	413,290	416,843	425,611	416,068	482,290	400,581	415,555	439,700
<b>Class 7</b>	316,374	334,514	340,338	353,234	363,088	422,033	349,441	353,970	386,320
<b>Class 8</b>	269,934	285,692	289,957	302,801	320,841	384,173	318,151	321,966	345,084
<b>Class 9</b>	210,868	228,175	239,083	249,415	256,296	302,344	281,229	285,685	272,846 (23.9%)
<b>Class 10</b>	157,499	168,808	180,713	190,570	194,074	228,660	211,429	212,580	226,346

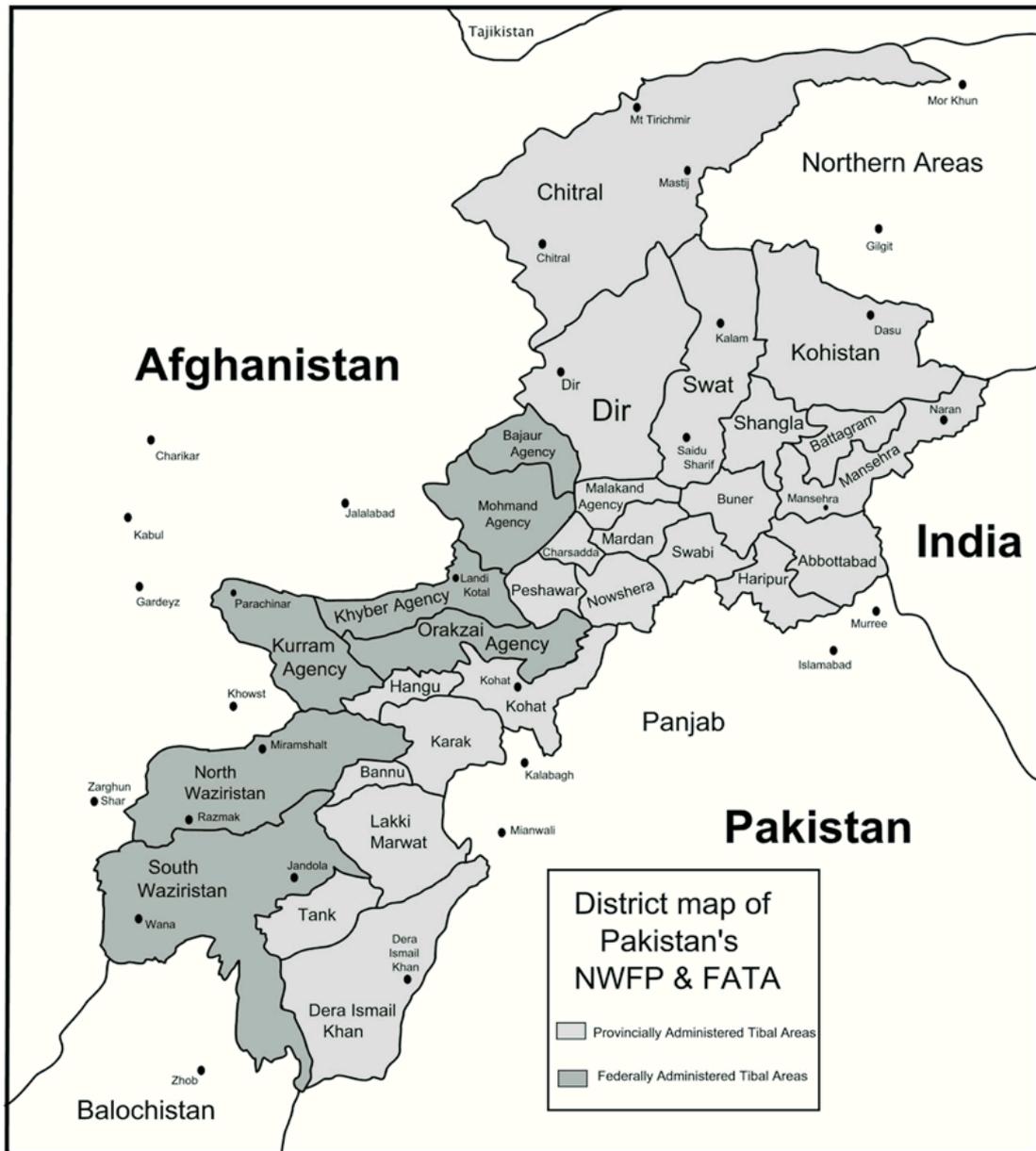
Source: AEPM, GoP<sup>11</sup>

The present qualitative study was conducted in Peshawar, which is the provincial capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see **Map 1.4**).<sup>12</sup> As can be seen from the map below, Peshawar is not only the provincial capital of the province, but has also been at the centre of the province. Historically, the city has been at the centre of trade, commerce and politics between Afghanistan, Central Asian States and the rest of the Subcontinent, through the historic Khyber Pass and Grand Trunk (GT) Road.

<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.aepam.edu.pk/survivalrate.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.aepam.edu.pk/survivalrate.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Map\\_showing\\_NWFP\\_and\\_FATA.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Map_showing_NWFP_and_FATA.png)



**Map 1.4 Map of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

The aims of this study were to explore and document parent-teacher relations in two contrasting but mutually reciprocating urban and rural contexts with a specific focus on secondary schools. The study was conducted in four schools, in two boys' and two girls', with one each from urban and rural areas of Peshawar. The research context mainly underpins Pashtun culture, of which I am also a member, which proved of immense help as an 'insider' as well as because of having 'a feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1998:80). This meant that I needed to play by the rules, not only given the cultural intricacies, but also and more importantly by doing my utmost to maintain my integrity as a researcher to be as ethical, objective and reflexive as possible. Having

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this in mind, I now move on to present my personal and professional background in more detail.

## **1.2 My personal and professional trajectory**

In writing about my personal and professional background, I see a number of overlapping influences in my life that can broadly be classified at least into three stages, schooling and education related experiences, secondary school-teaching experience that spans around eight years and a move into academia, as a lecturer in a teacher-training institute at the University of Peshawar. All these overlapping and mutually reciprocating trajectories seem to have a strong bearing on the nature and selection of the research topic and on the manner I conducted the various stages of the study and the processes therein. To chart these influences and stages, I need to take the reader back in time to my childhood.

Being born and raised in Peshawar to a self-made teacher-educator, my socialisation had exposed me to a number of parallel and competing influences. As a result, not only could I understand a number of different languages and dialects, and became multilingual, but also in the process I was thoroughly grounded in an eclectic mix of cultures and sub-cultures that had a profound influence on my own habitus and life trajectory. In many ways, I would see myself as privileged as my primary and secondary education was done in ‘English’ medium schools that were semi-private and considerably different from public (government) schools. Nevertheless, due to similarities in teacher habitus and of cultural and field structures and practices, my schools (especially the secondary one) did mirror many of the aspects of public schools that included corporal punishment, strict and stern teacher behaviour, immense control of children’s actions and the like. Whilst we (students) grew out of these, the resultant experiences nevertheless left lasting impressions, which in many ways seemed engraved in the habitus of the children, albeit differently.

Having done a college science degree (B.Sc.), I then enrolled on a B.Ed. programme before completing my Master’s in Education (M.Ed.). I had some knowledge and understanding of how, and in what manner, public schools functioned and how these were viewed by the society at large. However, it was only in my B.Ed. teaching practice that I became closely involved in learning-to-teach to be able to see the difference in the physical infrastructure of the school buildings and related physical

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and material constraints, which in many ways were overwhelmed by the sheer overcrowded classrooms, some exceeding 150 students in number. These differences and constraints were equally matched by a population of students that attended these schools, who in most cases were considered disadvantaged and were seen as coming from a poor background.

The next significant stage that steered my life trajectory into a professional arena came when I had just completed my M.Ed. degree. I was appointed to a university's secondary school as a trained graduate teacher, with the responsibility of teaching computer studies to students of Classes VII-X, having previously done a diploma in computer software applications. This was a significant stage as I grew in confidence and professional teaching competence and began to relate to my practice a number of theoretical and conceptual teaching and education based ideas. However, as I can recall in some ways, I was no more than a 'traditional' teacher as the institutional habitus (Reay 1998a) and teacher habitus, and my own habitus, though un-phased, had a contagious influence on my practice and teaching, which were partly replicated from my childhood experience and more importantly became conditioned in the *field* of school. This is not to say that I did not like teaching, though initially it felt like a burden and later at many a times felt exhilarating, rewarding and became a passion, which underpinned an agenda for change.

During my teaching at the school, the school held an Annual Day for parents and other concerned officials from the university in which students would perform skits, did parodies of teachers and others and held debates, which also had a separate component of student sports activities. However, in children's school and academic life, parents had rarely been involved, except in circumstances when they had quarrelled or something else of an extreme nature would have happened that parents were required to visit the school. However, the practice that the school or teachers take the initiative to be in frequent contact with the parents of their students was not a norm. In my personal experience, I had very few encounters with the parents and the ones that I did have were either because of parental concern about their child being mischievous or troublesome with a parental request to keep him under strict check and balance. Some would even go to such lengths in saying: "the flesh is yours and the bones are ours," which is a reference to severe corporal punishment, 'with no strings attached!'

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The third shift in my personal and professional trajectory happened when my selection as a Lecturer in Education sealed my place in academia. My initial experience at the postgraduate level had not been a welcome one. It was a different field and medium that required adaptation of my habitus. This needed time, energy, patience and commitment to lay claims to the stakes that I had willingly opted to brace. However, it was not long that I roared in confidence and energy and started to enjoy teaching and lecturing at the pace of my own choosing, still with an agenda for change and a sincerest passion for teaching.

It was here at the university level that I began to reflect and compare more the role that I had as a ‘traditional’ teacher and added that voice to the agenda for change, and to discuss that more with my students for our effective practice in the schools. In addition, I began to supervise my student teachers in their teaching practice that provided another dimension to my professional expertise and due to which another dispositional shift was in the making. These varying dispositions greatly influenced my professional orientations and my initial research interest centred around researching ‘student self-concept’ and related dimensions.

However, it was here in the UK that at the start of my PhD programme, my initial interest in researching ‘classroom interaction’ led my writing and research questions to take a more broader and overarching perspective and aim of the secondary education system in Peshawar, Pakistan, concerning patterns or modes of interaction between parents and teachers. Whilst exploring the patterns of relations and interaction between parents and teachers formed the main theme of the study, a number of overlapping and reciprocating aspects formed subsidiary themes of the study. With this in mind, I now move on to discuss the significance of the study.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

In the West, parent-teacher, home-school, home-school-community relations, parental involvement and other related variants have had established presence and influence, since at least the works of Plowden (1967) and Coleman (1966). These areas have not only been established as important fields of research, expertise and knowledge, but they have also been of tremendous influence on policy and practice. Due to the longstanding commitment of the researchers in this field and their contribution, relations between families and schools have been teased out carefully and

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painstakingly to almost every and any dimension imaginable. The resultant scholarship has greatly enhanced awareness and understanding into children's worlds and learning as well as thoroughly enriched the lives of both parents and teachers. This has resulted in greater understanding, coherence and collaboration between parents and teachers in sharing the responsibilities of children's education as a mutual undertaking.

The significance of research in this field of study can be established from the available literature that has diversified into a range of important fields. This being said, home-school and community relations as an umbrella and parent research focus has led to the development of a range of typologies. These provide a rich, diverse and eclectic range of conceptual and analytical frames for parental involvement in the children's academic and personal lives, as well as chart the trajectories of parent-teacher relations. These typologies and models include the conceptual and empirical works of a number of scholars (e.g. Bastiani 1983; Beveridge 2005; Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986; Edwards & Alldred 2000; Epstein 1995; Goode 1982; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995, 1997; Pugh 1989; Pugh *et al.* 1987a, 1987b; Todd 2007; Tomlinson 1991; Vincent 1996a).

In addition, one of the major contributions of immense significance has been the establishment of an abundant literature and research that has consistently proved the importance and efficacy of home-school and parent-teacher relations on various aspects of student outcomes, performance and related determinants. At the outset, these include student achievement and outcomes (Bogenschneider 1997; Booth & Dunn 1996; Catsambis 2001; Fan & Chen 2001; Ferguson 2008; Georgiou & Tourva 2007; Grolnick *et al.* 1997; Henderson 1987; Henderson & Berla 1994; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Jeynes 2005, 2007; Jordan *et al.* 2002; Pomerantz *et al.* 2007; Schneider & Coleman 1993; Sheldon 2003; Spera 2005; Sui-Chu & Willms 1996).

Moreover, it is also of note that the interplay of parental involvement and student achievement have also been looked into with the lenses of class, gender, race and related perspectives (Abdul-Adil & Farmer Jr. 2006; Abd-El-Fattah 2006; Griffith 1996; Harris & Goodall 2007; Hong & Ho 2005; Hung & Marjoribanks 2005; Keith & Lichtman 1994; Lee *et al.* 2007; McNeal Jr. 1999; Rätty & Kasanen 2007; Shumow 1997).

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The significance of parental involvement on the measures of student literacy and learning (Dearing *et al.* 2006; International Reading Association 2002; Li 2006; Uludag 2008; Wößmann 2005), student motivation (Anguiano 2004; Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.* 2005; Pomerantz *et al.* 2007), and patterns of student adjustment in the school (Brown & Beckett 2007; Izzo *et al.* 1999; Ketsetzis *et al.* 1998; McNeal Jr. 1999) have also been of help to practitioners and interest to researchers. In addition, student attendance (Sheldon & Epstein 2004; Sheldon 2007; Sheppard 2009), student behaviour and discipline (Brown & Beckett 2007; McNeal Jr. 1999, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein 2002) and student homework (Grolnick *et al.* 1997; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 1995; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 2001; Li 2006; Walker *et al.* 2004) are the areas that have benefited from parental involvement and close working relations of teachers with parents.

In addition to the above, research into the interplay of social class and home-school relations has produced significant literature that has greatly contributed to the discourse of equality and equal opportunities for all concerned. The interplay of class with the central themes of race, culture and gender, and social and cultural capital has greatly contributed to our understanding (Crozier 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Lareau 1989, 2003; Mirza 2009; Reay 1995a, 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1993, 1996a).

However of particular importance is the fact that most researchers have shown an increased interest in primary school research to explicate the impact of social class discourse and dynamics on parent-teacher relations (e.g., Alexander *et al.* 1987; Bakker *et al.* 2007; Borg & Mayo 2001; Freeman 2004; Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 1987; Jones 2007; Kroeger 2005; Lareau 1989; Levine-Rasky 2009; Lewis & Foreman 2002; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a, 2001b; Tizard *et al.* 1981; Vincent 1996a; Weininger & Lareau 2003). The particular strength of the present research can be that at the secondary school level few researchers have ventured into these uncharted waters to explore its tides and currents from a number of perspectives, including social class discourse (Roberts 1980; Connell *et al.* 1982; Johnson & Ransom 1983; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a; Crozier & Davies 2007, Reay 2001b, 2006; Vincent 2001).

The interplay of gender, race and ethnicity are undeniably of no less significance and have increasingly been used by researchers to show how the dynamics of these are

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underplayed to dispossess, disempower and disadvantage a section or ‘class’ of people or parents in their various personal and social contexts (Crozier 1996, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Crozier & Davies 2007; David 1993; David *et al.* 1993; Lareau 1989, 2003; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Mirza 2009; Reay 1995a, 1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2004c, 2004e, 2004f, 2005b; Reay *et al.* 2007; Vincent 1993, 1996a; Wright & Smith 1998). In addition, scholars have also empirically established that social class and social and cultural capital intersect to structure and influence parent-teacher relations in a multitude of ways for different class backgrounds (Hango 2007; Horvat *et al.* 2003; Lareau 1987; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Lareau & Shumar 1996; Pichler & Wallace 2009; Ream & Palardy 2008; Reay 2004b).

In a similar vein, the relationship of power dynamics in parent-teacher relations has also been one of the important dimensions of home-school relations that is shown to have a profound influence on a number of key determinants in this area of research (Abrams & Gibbs 2002; Das 2007; Fine 1993; Lasky 2000; Lewis & Forman 2002; McGrath 2007; Ranson *et al.* 2004; Todd & Higgins 1998). Moreover, an important area of research that can have a significant impact on parent-teacher relations has been the area of barriers and obstacles. There can be numerous barriers to parent-teacher relations and home-school cooperation that have been analysed through a number of lenses (see Adler 2004; Bastiani 1993; Bauch 1993; Bermúdez 1993; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999b, 2000; Davies 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Flynn 2007; Gestwicki 2003; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003; Hornby 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Khan 1996; Lawson 2003; Lazar & Slostad 1999; Leitch & Tangri 1988; Moles 1993; Moon & Ivins 2004; Morris & Taylor 1998; Reay 1998a; Russell & Granville 2005; Turney & Kao 2009; US Dept. of Education 1997; Williams *et al.* 2002).

Having established the significance of the study of parent-teacher relations in the international literature that has a broad scope, covering a number of overlapping themes, I turn to see what literature is available in the context of Pakistan regarding the interest of the present study. A literature review would reveal that researchers have shown interest in a number of issues concerning the system of education in Pakistan. These include student achievement studies with a particular focus on primary education (Iqbal & Shayer 2000; Salfi & Saeed 2007; Stewart *et al.* 2000) and comparative institutional research (Arif & Saqib 2003; Aslam 2009; Khan 2003;

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Khan & Kiefer 2007; Khan *et al.* 2005). Increasingly in educational research in Pakistan, researchers have shown interest and have found stark disparities for girls and women, both in the school environments and more generally concerning the various aspects of their lives, in home and social contexts (Arif *et al.* 1999; Aslam 2006, 2009; Aslam & Kingdon 2008; Filmer 1999, 2000; Ismail 1996; Lloyd *et al.* 2007; Mahmood 2004; Mukhtar 2006; Sathar & Lloyd 1994; Sawada & Lokshin 2001; Shami & Hussain 2005a; Winkvist & Akhtar 2000).

Other research in the primary school context has explored various learning and achievement related aspects of both boys and girls in both urban and rural contexts (Das *et al.* 2006; Fernando 1991; Glewwe & Kremer 2006; Reimers 1992; Stewart *et al.* 2000; Warwick & Reimers 1995), with others interrogating the area of school quality, student achievement and progression (Behrman *et al.* 1997; Behrman *et al.* 2008; Lloyd *et al.* 2009). Still others have documented inequality, stratification, child labour and corporal punishment research and have shown their implications for children's schooling and wellbeing (Ahmad 1970; Gautam & Arjun 2003; Khan 2003; Mahmood *et al.* 1994; Rahman 2004; Robson 2004).

Some research that has relevance to one of the aspects of the present research has considered school based governance issues and that which has explored the role of PTAs/SMCs concerning their structure, functioning, and related comparative dynamics between private and public school performances (Fullan & Watson 2000; GoNWFP 2001; Khan *et al.* 1956; Khan 2003; Usmani 2003; Zafar & Khan 2001). However, of particular significance to my research has surprisingly been one dated conference report in Peshawar that had considered in considerable detail Parent-Teacher-Community programme (Khan *et al.* 1956). The recommendations of this Conference and the problems it has identified concerning secondary education may appear to resonate strongly with the current school practices in Pakistan.

However, the significance of the present research can be established from the fact that in the above discussion and research there seems to be a significant gap in knowledge concerning the way the present study has been designed to explore the various dimensions of parent-teacher relations, with a specific focus on secondary education. Exception to this has been the work of Gill Crozier, whose empirical research on Pakistani parents I have found to be of considerable depth and relevance. This is not only because of the focus but also because of its relevance and impact on secondary

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education (Crozier 2009; Crozier & Davies 2005, 2006, 2007; Crozier *et al.* 2003; Crozier *et al.* 2005). There has also been some international literature that has some relevance to the context of Pakistan education system, which include language and literacy research (Huss-keeler 1997) culture, identity and diversity (Conteh & Kawashima 2008), social class disparities research (Siraj-Blatchford 2010), and educational attainment comparisons (Sunder & Uddin 2007).

Having highlighted the significance and importance of my research and its potential weight both to Pakistani and international research and knowledge, my study not only aims to fill the gaps in the existing scholarship but will also be of immense significance to practitioners and policy makers. With this in mind, I now state my research questions.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

This research is guided by two key research questions, which are followed by a number of complementary subsidiary research questions. These are:

##### ***Main research questions:***

- How do parents and teachers interact and communicate in public secondary schools in Peshawar, Pakistan?
- How do their relations become structured and influenced in the respective environments of home and school?

##### ***Subsidiary research questions:***

- Do schools and parents share harmonious or conflicting perspectives?
- What social and cultural factors influence and affect relations between home and school?
- What attitudes do teachers have towards parental involvement in school?
- What perceptions do parents hold for educating their children in schools?
- What problems do parents face in communicating with schools?
- How effective is the role of PTA in schools?

Given the nature, scope and depth of the research questions, I needed to adopt a theoretical stance that was helpful in effectively interpreting the social and cultural practices that underpinned the structure and practices of both the teachers and parents in the context of home-school relations in Pakistan, introduced below.

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### 1.5 Theoretical framework of the study

The theoretical framework of the study is an eclectic mix of analytical tools. Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual tools of capital, *habitus* and *field*, I deploy and operationalise these tools to help me understand the underlying dynamics of the practices and interactions of parents and teachers in the contexts of home and school. I use social and cultural capital as broader theoretical lenses to interpret how parents and teachers use socially and culturally embedded identities and structures to interact in the way they do. I refer to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to illustrate the underlying logic that structures people's perceptions, practices and interactions in their own contexts as well as with one another. I draw on the concept of *field* to demonstrate its significance and relevance in the fields of home and school. Given their socio-cultural background, I explain the logic and practice of home and school as fields and illustrate how parents and teachers might appropriate their respective capitals and *habitus* to interact and communicate within their diverse field settings individually and reciprocally.

Using these tools, throughout the thesis I argue that the relations and practices of parents and teachers are not inert entities; rather in practice, they are dynamic and multidimensional in character. At the heart of these are not only class and culture, power and structures, but also the dynamics of reproduction and stratification, stakes and the struggle for appropriation of stakes are important determinants of this 'social game.' Therefore, the notion of social and cultural capital as broader sociological concepts aid in how, their interplay with and through the *habitus*, agents negotiate structures and appropriate practices within their various respective field(s) settings that each require a different set of logic and practice underpinned by their respective set of strategies. A more thorough discussion of the theoretical framework follows in **Chapter Three**.

### 1.6 Methodology of the study

The research methodology and methods that I adopted in the research underpinned qualitative research traditions. A social constructivist approach guided the research, as it required exploring an in-depth understanding of the relations between parents and teachers in their respective environments of home and school. A qualitative case study methodology was used that involved the use of various methods to generate data of various types. The methods used in the study were semi-structured interviews, focus

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group discussion, documentary analysis and use of field notes and photographs documentation. The data gathered were analysed and interpreted through an analytical framework adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clarke (2007:129). The issues of validity and reliability arising out of the interpretation of the findings have been considered. The research followed the ethical guidelines of the University of Nottingham and BERA. Ethical issues have been discussed thoroughly in the light of the research and issues concerning the rights of the respondents/participants, and confidentiality and anonymity of their data addressed. All these topics have been explored in considerable detail in **Chapter Four**.

### **1.7 Organisation of the thesis**

The structure of the thesis is in the following order.

**Chapter 1** as the introductory chapter discusses the overall design and framework of the research study and begins by an introduction of the research context. This is followed by my personal and professional trajectory, which aims to situate, clarify, and justify my role and position as an ‘insider’ and as a researcher, juggling with the interplay between reflexivity and subjectivity. Thereafter the chapter discusses the significance of the topic, with an aim to establish it as one of the first and important empirical research works attempted at such a level and detail in the context of Pakistan. This leads to introducing the main and subsidiary research questions that have an inbuilt qualitative veneer.

An introduction of the theoretical framework then follows, which uses the conceptual and analytical tools of capital, *habitus* and *field* to interpret and understand the practices of parents and teachers in their own right and with one another. The chapter then introduces the methodological framework of the study, which has social-constructivist philosophical underpinnings, with a qualitative case study design that uses a number of qualitative research tools for data gathering. Finally, organisation of the thesis follows, which briefly details the overarching theme and structure of each chapter.

**Chapter 2** presents and reviews research literature that concerns parent-teacher relations and related issues that impinge upon their communication and interaction in a number of ways. It explores and discusses literature that pertains to parent-teacher relations, considers typologies of parental involvement and highlights how parental

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involvement influences student achievement and their related academic and personal aspects. The literature on social class in the light of parent-teacher relations has been considered in much detail as a number of concurrent themes underpin the discussion, which is of much relevance to the present study. Thereafter, the chapter considers literature that has used the conceptual tools of capital, *habitus* and field as variables to explore their interplay with parent-teacher relations. It also explores literature on the role of power dynamics between parents and teachers before moving on to explicating barriers in their way. By reviewing national (Pakistani) and international literature, my aim is not only to critically analyse the various discourses that have origins in the myriad and overlapping broader concerns and issues and their finer tributaries, but also to make a case for my argument that identifies and locates the research significance and gaps in knowledge.

Although much of the focus of my research is on understanding the perspectives and practices of working-class/poor parents and their corresponding working-/middle-class teachers and schools, their practices only make sense when they are understood against the perceived/different middle-class backdrop of social and cultural practices and related ‘dominant others’ within the overall social space. Yet, culture, gender and capital are also central to and important themes of my research that may seem to interweave and overlap in many different ways in the voices of parents and teachers.

**Chapter 3** focuses on the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter illustrates the use of capital, *habitus* and field as theoretical tools to help me understand the underlying dynamics of the practices and interactions of parents and teachers in the contexts of home and school. In so doing, it first discusses social and cultural capital as broader theoretical lenses to interpret how parents and teachers use the socially and culturally embedded identities and structures to interact in the way they do. It then moves on to consider Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* to illustrate the underlying logic that structures people’s perceptions, practices and interactions in their own contexts as well as with one another. In drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of *field*, the chapter demonstrates its significance and relevance in the fields of home and school. Given their socio-cultural background, the chapter explains the logic and practice of home and school as fields and illustrates how parents and teachers might appropriate their respective capital and *habitus* to interact and communicate within their diverse field settings individually and reciprocally.

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The underlying argument of the chapter is that the relations and practices of parents and teachers are not inert entities; rather they are dynamic and multidimensional in character. At the heart of these are not only class and culture, power and structures, but also the dynamics of reproduction and stratification, stakes and the struggle for appropriation of stakes are central to the ‘social game’ that is enacted in the context of schools and more broadly in parents’ social lives. Therefore, the notion of social and cultural capital as broader sociological concepts will aid in how their interplay with and through the habitus, agents negotiate structures and appropriate practices within their various respective field(s) settings that each require a different set of logic and practice underpinned by their respective set of strategies.

**Chapter 4** is about the research methodology and methods that aims to explore the main research questions: ‘*How do parents and teachers interact and communicate in public secondary schools in Peshawar, Pakistan? How do their relations become structured and influenced in the respective environments of home and school?*’ With these research questions in mind, the chapter first discusses the philosophical assumptions and research paradigm that guided the study before considering qualitative case study design as the research enquiry. Thereafter, a discussion of the plan and conduct of the fieldwork follows, which details the various data gathering tools and procedures used for the research, which then leads into the discussion of the procedures and processes of data analysis. Towards the end of the chapter, the issues of validity and reliability in the light of the research are explored. Finally, the chapter considers ethical concerns pertaining to the research participants and the overall research practice.

**Chapter 5** is the first of two chapters on schools and teachers, and discusses the empirical data that explores teachers’ communication and relations with parents. The chapter discusses the dynamics of teachers’ communication with parents that seems individually and collectively underpinned by the respective teachers’ habitus and field influence of the schools. The chapter shows that the underlying influences and structures of the teacher habitus and field lead most teachers to portray parents as uninterested in school visits and present them as homogenised. However, it also highlights the variations in the way different teachers share their experiences, which establishes the role that the habitus plays in the respective teachers’ lives. The pattern that emerges from the teachers’ experiences suggests that generally the schools do not

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have formalised and institutionalised procedures for contact with parents. However, communication with parents emerges as a complex, dynamic and patterned process that is far from random, which is not only engrained in the specific situations but is also underpinned by power and class dynamics of the stakeholders.

**Chapter 6** extends the discussion further and explores four aspects of teachers' communication practices with parents, which involve teachers' perceptions about power relations, parental involvement, barriers to parental visits and the role of PTA in school. The chapter therefore first explores various power relation structures between teachers and parents, with emphasis on the role of culture, habitus and field dynamics in teachers' practices. The chapter also shows that for some teachers relations with some parents are marred by confrontation, squabbling, tension and power tussles, which involve both educated and uneducated parents.

The chapter then provides a discussion of teachers' perceptions and experiences of parental involvement and visits to school. It shows that generally for most teachers, at an individual and institutional level, parental involvement and visits to school is not a structured component of their practices in school. This also means that for some teachers, parental involvement has a 'layered' influence that operates from the home, which influences decisions about girl students in school. In addition, the chapter also throws light on some teachers' specific initiatives in organising co-curricular activities for students that lead to instances of parental involvement and benefits that the school accrues from such engagements.

It also discusses teachers' perceptions of barriers to parental visits or participation in the school, which highlights the individual and collective experiences of teachers and the role of school culture. The chapter also considers the various aspects of school culture or field influence that many teachers say act as obstacles to parental involvement. Lastly, the chapter explores the dynamics and role of the PTA in school. In particular, it considers and examines policy provisions regarding the importance of parents and their involvement in the education of children and considers teachers' views on the structural and functional aspects of the role the PTA has in school.

**Chapter 7** as the first of two chapters on parents provides an introduction to parents, their background and their communication and interaction dynamics; and in so doing acts as a cushion and base for chapter eight for effectively understanding parents'

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perceptions of their relations with the school and teachers. The aim of this chapter is therefore to illustrate the variety and richness of the parents' lives by examining the interplay between their habitus and their home and social fields that structures their realities and practices in their own unique ways heard through their 'voices.'

To show the uniqueness of parental perspectives and experiences the chapter diversifies into three themes. Firstly, it introduces and discusses the difference and diversity of parental habitus and their perceptions and experiences about various practices and demonstrates that whilst parents differ individually in terms of their habitus, the role of culture and field implicitly determine, shape and inform parental practices and the realities around them. Secondly, in the theme of the interplay between parental habitus and the dynamics of field structures it argues that the use and appropriation of capital and the field influence provides a structuring structure that shapes and in some ways redefines parental habitus. Lastly, the chapter discusses the theme of parents' views on education. It demonstrates that the interplay of parental habitus and capital, field and class provide a deep, rich and complex structure of thought and practices of parents. This interplay results in a paradox for most parents, as on the one hand, they see no bounds in harnessing their potentials but on the other hand, they do not possess the right amount and quality of structures to be able to realise these ideals.

**Chapter 8** focuses on parental perception of interaction and communication with the teachers and school. The chapter consists of five sections. Firstly, it discusses the communication dynamics of parents, which focuses on the diversity and dimensions of parental perception and experience of communication with teachers. Secondly, it extends the discussion by analysing and discussing communication uncertainties, inhibitions or stereotypes of parents with teachers that underpinned parental habitus. Thirdly, the chapter considers parental perception of power relations with teachers. The issue of class, status, and capital that form the basis of the dynamics of parental perception of power relations with the teachers and school are explored. Fourthly, it explores parental perception of communication barriers with teachers, which analyses various perceptions that parents see as obstacles to their communication. These include, for instance, parental unawareness as a barrier, issues of time and work constraints and teacher attitude, authority and lack of accountability as barriers. Finally, the chapter explores parental perception of institutional habitus and culture

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and its relationship with the communication dynamics of parents. In so doing, it focuses on the role of structural discontinuities, the dynamics of power relations and class, the issue of giving importance to and valuing parents and parental perception of the ‘field’ culture of school.

**Chapter 9** is the final chapter of the thesis, which draws on the findings of the previous four chapters and provides the key conclusions to the thesis. The chapter presents the ways through which parents and teachers perceived and experienced their relations with one another and how they acted and interacted within the contexts of home and school. In presenting a summary of findings and conclusions, the main research questions and subsidiary research questions act as a guide. The chapter then considers implications of the study, before discussing limitations of the research study. It then proceeds to discuss recommendations from the study designed specifically for teachers and parents, and policy makers. Towards the end of the chapter, the discussion focuses on the originality of the research and on the justification of the study’s contribution to knowledge, which is followed by suggestions for further research and my reflections on the research experience.

### **1.8 Chapter summary**

The discussion in this chapter painted with broad brushes the nature and scope of the study, and highlighted some contextual details, concerning my role as the researcher as well as in making a pitch for a sound argument about the significance of the study both in the Pakistani and in international context. I also introduced the methodological orientation of the study that is closely interwoven with the theoretical tools of capital, habitus and field, which are guided by the research questions. In the next chapter, I begin to present a review of the relevant literature.

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## Chapter Two — Investigating the *Field*: Research into Parent-Teacher Relations

In this chapter, I present and review research literature that concerns parent-teacher relations and related issues that impinge upon their communication and interaction in a number of ways. Firstly, I explore and discuss literature that pertains to parent-teacher relations and then consider typologies of parental involvement and highlight through literature how parental involvement influences student achievement and their related academic and personal aspects. Thereafter, I review national and international literature that has a focus on Pakistani education system and parents. The aim in so doing is not only to analyse critically the various discourses that have origins in the myriad and overlapping broader concerns and issues and their finer tributaries, but also to make a case for my argument to identify and locate the research significance and gaps. I then consider literature on social class in the light of parent-teacher relations in much detail as a number of concurrent themes underpin the discussion, which is of much relevance to the present study. Thereafter, I explore literature that has used capital, *habitus* and field as variables in the studies. I then move on to analyse literature on the role of power dynamics between parents and teachers before discussing barriers that might be in their way of successful relations.

### 2.1 Home-school relations: looking at the larger picture

This section looks at the literature on home-school and parent-teacher relations. By reviewing national (Pakistani) and international literature, my aim is not only to analyse critically the various discourses that have origins in the myriad and overlapping broader concerns and issues and their finer tributaries, but also to make a case for my argument that identifies and locates the research significance and gaps in the existing knowledge. To do this, I first discuss the literature on home-school relations and then consider various typologies and models of parental involvement, which is followed by a discussion of student achievement and associated outcomes literature. Finally, I consider Pakistani national and international literature to throw light on issues and debates on education in Pakistan specifically and in terms of parent-teacher relations generally.

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### **2.1.1 Mapping the research terrain: the interplay between home-school relations and parental involvement**

One may argue that the relations between home and school and parents and teachers are as old as the institutions themselves, having had competing trajectories and based on the notions of parental deficit and mutual contestation. However, there was and there still is an implicit and explicit understanding of home and school as operating on 'separate spheres of influence' (Epstein 1995) and a consideration of parental 'deficit' and seeing them as 'hard to reach' (Crozier & Davies 2007). There is therefore no wonder that one could read signs as 'No Parents Beyond This Point' (Vincent 1996a; Crozier 1998).

However, since, at least, the influential works of James S. Coleman (1966) in the US and Plowden (1967) in the UK, there has been a phenomenal interest in the ways and means of developing and strengthening relations between parents and teachers for effective student learning and development. With an extensive research base at hand, not only have specific roles and responsibilities of both parents and teachers, at both home and school been clearly classified and pinned down, increasingly parents have been given more statutory rights and have been empowered to have a say in their children's education. Yet, though great strides have been made to provide effective learning environments for children at school and at home, more than ever there has been much awareness of their individual needs and related issues. The situation is far from ideal as a number of competing and overlapping factors pertaining to gender, race, ethnicity, and class, culture and power interact to constrain the relations of teachers and parents and the learning of students within it, particularly of those of disadvantaged and working/poor backgrounds. By locating and discussing these debates, my aim is not only to contribute to the existing knowledge of home-school relations literature internationally, but also, in the context of Pakistan, to provide and develop a research base from which lessons can be learned and policy and practice decisions can be made.

### **2.1.2 Typologies/Models of partnerships between families and school**

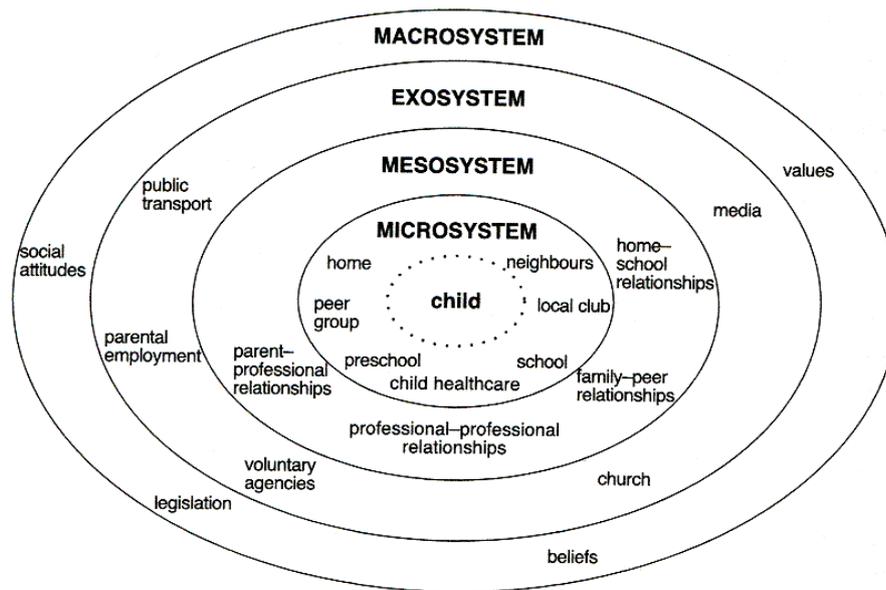
In this section, I discuss various typologies and models of home-school relations that researchers have propounded from time to time. A review of the literature in this area reveals that these models and typologies have been designed, developed and applied in the context of the developed and industrialised countries, according to the specific

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systems of education and social and cultural contexts. However, some aspects of these models may have generic relevance to the systems and structures of the Pakistani education system. These typologies may therefore have some relevance to the way parents in Peshawar interact and communicate with teachers and schools and vice versa, which are intertwined within the complex socio-cultural framework.

From their respective research backgrounds and interests, a number of researchers have suggested a range of typologies centering on parent-teacher relations and home-school cooperation and partnership, with an aim for improving and enriching the learning experiences of children. These include Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986), Goode's four models of home/school relations (Goode 1982; Bastiani 1983), Pugh's framework for parental involvement (Pugh 1989; Pugh *et al.* 1987a, 1987b), and Sally Tomlinson's typology of home-school relations (Tomlinson 1991). Others include Epstein's six point typology of parental involvement (Epstein 1995), Vincent's four roles of parental involvement (Vincent 1996a), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995, 1997), Edwards and Alldred's typology of parental involvement centering on children and young people (Edwards & Alldred 2000), Beveridge's ecological framework (Beveridge 2005), and Todd's Practice-People-Context model (Todd 2007).

One of the most widely cited, adopted and adapted empirical works, Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1986) model of human development places the child at the centre of an overlapping and mutually reciprocating four layered ecological framework. In *Children, Families and School* that has a specific focus on inclusive education, Beveridge (2005) drew on Bronfenbrenner (1977) and adapted his ecological model according to the theoretical and practical significance of specific learning needs of children and that concerning home-school relations and their aggregate impact on the development of children. The model thus gives centrality to the importance of the child in the entire framework and regards the child as an active participant in both home and school contexts (Beveridge 2005).



**Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework**

Source: Beveridge (2005:8)

Bronfenbrenner defines the ecology of human development as:

... the scientific study of the *progressive, mutual accommodation*, throughout the life span, between a growing human organism and the *changing immediate environment* in which it lives, as this *process* is affected by *relations* obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger *social contexts*, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded. (1977:514, *italics my emphasis*)

In the 'progressive, mutual accommodation' the child is not only influenced by their interactions which they make within their 'immediate settings' or 'larger social contexts,' but also these environments in turn are affected and shaped by the contacts made by the child. This process starts with the birth of a person and proceeds outwards from the home, as the person grows and interacts with systems that are more complex and the practices underpinning these, each influencing and dependent on one another. The framework is therefore a nested array of structures, extending from inwards to outwards at four levels namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

Undoubtedly, all these layers of influence are of high importance regarding the child. However, of particular relevance to the present study are the microsystem and mesosystem as the interplay between these two levels determines much of the quality and quantity of practices enacted between parents and teachers about children. Most importantly, the quality of their own interactions that parents and teacher make

directly with children matters the most. If the quality of these interaction is based on an understanding of benefitting children and have child-centred mechanisms built into them, the learning and social experiences of children, in both their home and school contexts, will be rich and varied. On the contrary, if the quality of interaction between parents and teachers is based on conflict and contested points of view, the resulting experiences of both teachers and parents and the children they are responsible for will be unpleasant and affect the learning and development of children. Jackie Goode (1982) has identified these issues in her study.

Goode (1982) has identified four models of home/schools relations, namely the pathological model, the relationship model, the democratic model and the consumer model (see **Figure 2.2**). This is a useful illustration of how the various types of relations between parents and teachers can be categorised, from which comparisons can be drawn and the quality of relationships between home and school can be determined. However, in real life, practices between parents and teachers overlap and these models may not be seen as tightly fitting into their specific compartments (Goode 1982).

Model of H/S Relations	View of the Teacher	View of the Parents	View of the Curriculum	Role for the Parent	Practices, Programmes and Policies
<b>Compensation</b> The 'pathological' model (overt conflict)	The professional with monopoly on expertise Teacher as social worker	All working class parents viewed as ... suffering from 'cultural deficit', 'language deprivation' etc. failing adequately to perform parental role, so that this as well as educational one has to be taken on by teacher	A middle-class curriculum not subject to non-professional scrutiny.	Being compensated for.	Positive discrimination. Some EPA programmes. Pre-school intervention programmes, language enrichment, parent education programmes. Changing parental attitudes by persuasion.
<b>Communication</b> The 'relationship' model. (overt consensus covert conflict)	The professional-with monopoly on information. Notion of 'partnership'-unequal partners, however, since flow of information tends to be one-way, from teacher to parent.	Ignorant amateurs. Are capable of understanding educational practices if these are properly explained to them. Need to be given sufficient information to equip them to support the work of the school.	Calls for the curriculum to be 'relevant' and intelligible. 'New Maths' the subject of many a workshop for parents.	Being educated-in order to supply an educative environment at home. Regular attendance at school functions designed for their benefit. No direct involvement in the curriculum.	Plowden 'minimum programme', Examples of 'good practice'. Increased teacher/parent contact. Well designed publications, 'Education shops'. Parents in the classroom as: teacher -aide, auxiliary, or sometimes as apprentice-from which vantage point they can observe and learn.
<b>Participation</b> The 'democratic' model. (negotiation)	The professional-retains expertise in certain areas, but recognizes and confirms others' skills. Teacher as 'organiser', 'enabler', 'facilitator', 'catalyst'.	'Equal' partners, with unique skills to offer.	Curriculum open to evaluation and augmentation.	Being co-ordinator - a different but complementary role to that of the professional teacher.	Taylor Report. Parents on governing body. Curriculum groups of teachers and parents. Parents in the classroom as: parents, either giving talks, sharing skills, or as a representative of the local community, or as a non-professional volunteer who can contribute to the learning process e.g. involvement with remedial reading schemes.
<b>Accountability</b> The 'consumer' model. (conflict)	Teacher as expert, who can be expected to 'deliver the goods'.	A layman, who has the right to make valid demands on the educational system.	Curriculum as product or commodity. Accent on basic skills.	Parent as consumer. Parents as strategists.	'Standards' debate. Assessment of Performance Unit. Education Act 1930. Enhanced parental choice.

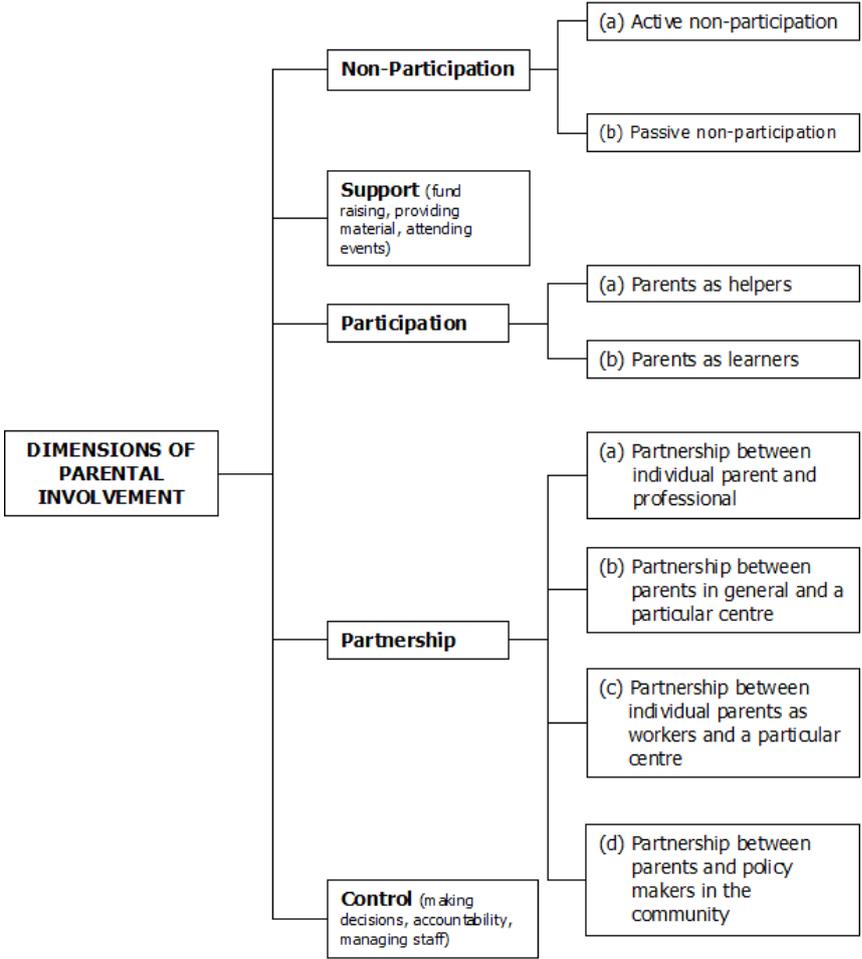
**Figure 2.2 A typology of Home/School Relations**

Source: Goode (1982:86)

In the context of developing countries, such as in Pakistan, the compensation or 'pathological' model, based on an overt conflict, may appear to be in practice in the public schools. Although generalization cannot be made over the entire system of

education, there may still be patches where the other models may be in practice depending on the individual schools, their environment and most importantly the type of leadership in charge of the respective schools. The need here is to see what kind of practices would signify the type of model in practice in the actual contexts of home and school, in developing countries, such as in Pakistan. Furthermore, a closer look at the various perspectives, roles and practices of the various stakeholders in the Goode’s Model can provide a scale with which to compare the practices of parents and teachers in my study (see **Chapters Five-Eight**).

In a similar vein, Pugh (1989) developed a framework for parental involvement, which sought to explain parental involvement patterns with teachers and school (Pugh 1989; Pugh *et al.* 1987a, 1987b). Although the framework was developed for pre-school centres, it may equally be used in primary and secondary schools. Figure 2.3 presents an adapted structure of the framework:



**Figure 2.3 A framework for parental involvement**  
Adapted from Pugh (1989:5-7)

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As might be evident from the above figure, whilst there are some evident differences between Goode's and Pugh's frameworks, there is also a sense of much overlap between the two models. This suggests that, in support of parental involvement in the various aspects of school life, the primary conceptual processes and related structural dynamics have a natural and logical flow. Various researchers may identify these differently according to their specific positional stance and theoretical lineage. However, what seems evident is that inherently the dimensions/constituents of parent and teacher interaction and of working together in support of the children are all the same and should be followed as such for their effective cooperation directed towards better learning experiences for children.

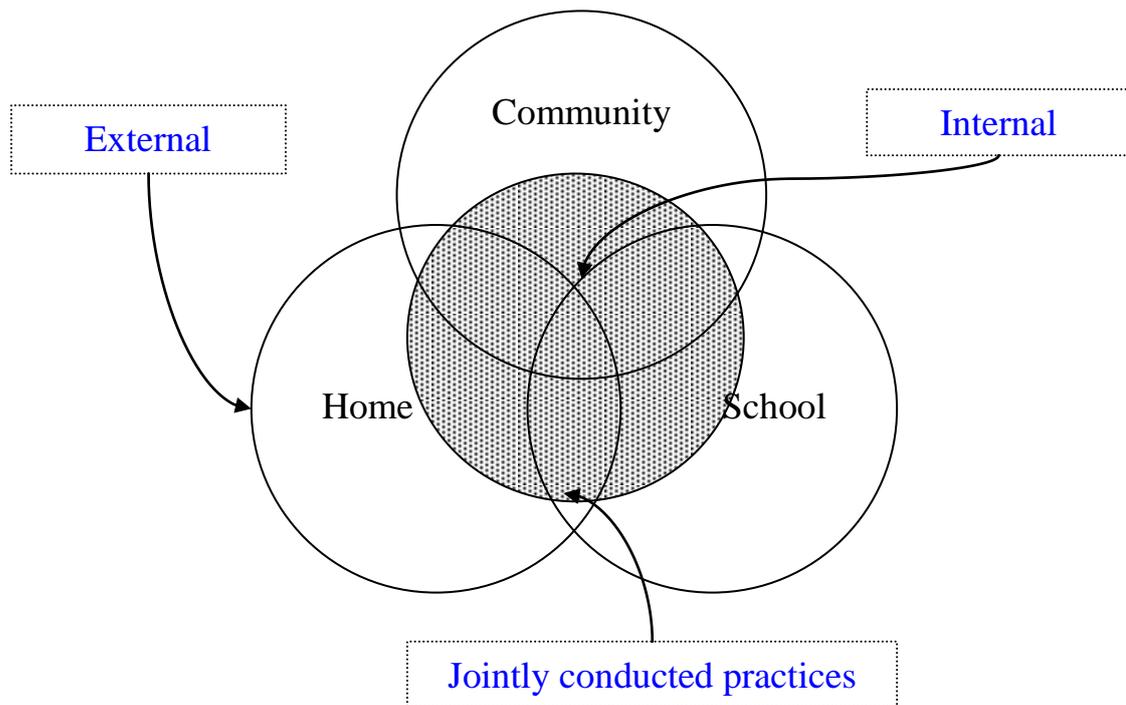
In the context of Pakistan, these dimensions of parental involvement, especially *support*, *participation* and *partnership*, and in some cases *control* may only be evident in schools and communities where concerted efforts have been made by all stakeholders to enhance parental participation in the school. This has been shown to improve the quality of education and learning experiences for children (Farah 1996; Jamil 2002; Khan 2003; Khan *et al.* 2005; Kim *et al.* 1998; Mashallah 2001; Rashid 2001; Sarwar 2006; Shams 2001; Tahira & Braathe 2007; Zafar & Khan 2001). However, the likelihood is that predominantly the dimension of parental *non-participation* may resonate strongly with the experiences of parents and teachers, which may appear intertwined in the respective social and cultural processes, and in the habitus of the agents (see **Chapters Five–Eight**).

Resonating with the above frameworks is the typology of parent-teacher communication and parental involvement offered by Sally Tomlinson (1991). In addition to emphasising communication between home and school, her typology covers parental involvement in learning and daily activities. Furthermore, Tomlinson suggests both informal and formal (i.e. legal) involvement of parents in education, which she argues is beneficial for effective home-school relations.

However, in the US, Joyce Epstein (1990a, 1990b, 1995) is one of the most cited authors regarding her work on home-school-community relations. She has developed a typology of parental involvement based on mutual reciprocating roles of home, school and community, which, the author contends, underpins a theory of 'overlapping spheres of influence' (1995). The theory offered rests on two models: *external* and *internal*. In the *external* model "there are some practices that schools,

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families, and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children’s learning and development” (Epstein 1995:702). The *internal* model shows “where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community” (Epstein 1995:702). Figure 2.4 presents the entire process of the model:



**Figure 2.4 Adapted from Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence**

In this theory, for Epstein, if the stakeholders in their individual and collective capacity hold contested points of view and position, they may communicate and interact only minimally. This will then represent ‘separate spheres of influence’ of the home, school and community, raising issues of discord and contestation. The theory of overlapping spheres operates on the assumption of ‘care.’ When parents, teachers, and community members converge on a single point of care, ‘learning communities or caring communities’ emerge, which results in school becoming *family-like*, and family becoming *school-like*, which are strengthened and supported by like-minded community members (Epstein 1995:702). Figure 2.5 below illustrates Epstein’s six-point typology of parental involvement:

Type 1: <i>Parenting</i>	School helping families in creating school-like home environment (giving suggestions, information, training and parent education)
Type 2: <i>Communicating</i>	Designing forms of communications of school-to-home and home-to-school for various activities and programmes.
Type 3: <i>Volunteering</i>	Ensuring and organizing parental support
Type 4: <i>Learning at home</i>	Providing information and ideas to families on how to support and help children do homework and other academic related activities requiring appropriate interactions.
Type 5: <i>Decision making</i>	Involving parents in school decisions, encouraging parent leaders and representatives.
Type 6: <i>Collaborating with community</i>	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and student learning and development.

**Figure 2.5 Epstein’s typology of parental involvement**

Epstein (1995) asserts that, to be effective and successful, the six types of parental involvement rely on one another. For one type to be productive, the type preceding it must be supportive and well functional, so much so that the absence or non-functionality of any of the types may mean problems in keeping effective partnership running between the partners. The crucial point here is that effective partnerships rest on a mutual feeling of “trust, respect” and “power sharing” between teachers, parents and community members where ‘care’ is central to the entire process (Epstein 1995:711). Whilst Epstein’s framework underpins an ecological and humanistic approach, Vincent (1996a) offers a typology based on parental roles.

In her research on parent-teacher relations, Vincent (1996a:43) has identified four parental roles in schools: the parent as supporter/learner, the parent as consumer, the independent parent, and the parent as participant. Figure 2.6 presents these parental roles, along with their function:

<b>Parents’ role</b>	<b>Supporter/learner</b>	<b>Consumer</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Participant</b>
Function	To support professionals and adopt their concerns and approaches	To encourage school accountability and high standards	To maintain minimal contact with the school	To be involved in governance of the school as well as the education of own child

**Figure 2.6 Parental roles in education**

As can be seen, the parental roles identified in the above figure resonate strongly with the frameworks discussed earlier. This suggests that there is an inherent natural and logical pattern to the way parents and teachers engage and interact, considering the

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various functional roles that may have been in practice or have risen out of the need for a closer relationship for effective children's learning.

In identifying the values and beliefs that underpinned parental perception of their modes of interaction with the school, Vincent (1996a:107) categorised her parent-participants into three main groups: supportive parents, detached parents, and independent parents. According to Vincent (1996a) the *school-supportive* parents adhered to teacher accepted notions of 'appropriate' parental behaviour, which signified attending school events, helping children with their homework, and taking initiative in developing personal relationships with their child's teacher. However, this 'good parent' ideal was overstepped at times when parents would start to monitor their children's progress or worked with their children's differently than teachers (Vincent 1996a). The *detached* parents were those few parents that held the views that frequent or even regular contact with the school was not required. However, whilst the *independent* parents maintained minimum contact with the school, they were the parents who were the silent majority, who had the desire to become closely involved in their children's school but felt constrained due to a number of factors (Vincent 1996a).

Following Vincent, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have suggested a model based on parental role construction and their sense of efficacy. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) offer a useful, detailed and process-driven five level model of parental involvement. The authors' model focuses on the specifics of conceptual and procedural aspects of a diverse set of parental background factors, needs and inclinations and on the resultant possible, varied and diverse patterns of parental involvement in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler argue that three major constructs are central to parents' basic involvement decisions.

First, parents' role construction defines parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education and appears to establish the basic range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of children.

Second, parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school focuses on the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes.

Third, general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement refer to parents' perceptions that the children and school want them to be involved. (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997:3)

The authors' model of parental involvement process follows below in Figure 2.7.

**Level 5**

<b>Student outcomes, including:</b>	
Skills and knowledge	Self-efficacy for school success

**Level 4**

<b>Tempering/mediating variables</b>	
Parent's use of developmentally appropriate strategies	Fit between parent's involvement actions & school expectations

**Level 3**

<b>Mechanisms of parental involvement's influence on child's school outcomes</b>		
Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

**Level 2**

<b>Parents' choice of involvement forms, influenced by:</b>		
Parent's skills & knowledge	Other demands on parent's time and energy	Specific invitations from the child and school

**Level 1**

<b>Parents' basic involvement decision, influenced by:</b>			
Parent's role construction	Parent's sense of efficacy for helping the child	General school invitations for involvement	General child invitations for involvement

**Figure 2.7 Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995, 1997) Model of Parental Involvement**

Source: Walker *et al.* (2005:86)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argue that well-designed parental involvement programmes will be successful only if they address the dynamics of parental role

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construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school. It means that for effective involvement of parents in school and with their children's education, teachers need to be aware of the nature and processes involved in parental role construction towards their children's education. Moreover, teachers can help towards enhancing parents' sense of efficacy by helping them to involve in those practices that positively enhance the educational outcomes of children. Moreover, communication with parents is highly important. Teachers need to communicate to and involve parents in varying practices and procedures of the school, which can ensue in enhanced parental involvement in various activities in the school and in the education of their children.

The models and typologies discussed above seemed predominantly designed in respect of parents and teachers, and related stakeholders for working together and developing relationships in creating positive environment for both adults and children, thereby ensuring effective learning and development of children. However, the 'voices' of children seemed to have been ignored in most typologies. Here, a typology was needed that filled the gaps in knowledge that centered on children and young people.

Lately, there has been an increased interest in researching the 'voices' of children in the dominant and adult-centered model of linking home with schools. Edwards and Alldred's (2000) research contributes towards this change in emphasis. The authors argue that children and young people need to be seen as reflexive agents who can exercise agency in the home-school relations process. Edwards and Alldred's (2000) typology underpins four categories:

**Category 1: children as active in parental involvement**

This category refers to children and young people working self-reflexively to forge parental (especially mother's) involvement in their education at home. The reason for being self-reflexive and active in engaging with parents in education/school related matters seems to be that such children are provided with a favourable and stimulating home environment in which they are encouraged and motivated to discuss issues concerning their school.

Edwards and Alldred (2000) provide some examples to explain how children are active in parental involvement, at home: by asking parents to help with homework or

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to provide further educational support, discussing educational issues and to seek their advice, or just telling them about what happened in school. They further report that children are far less active for their parents' involvement in school life. Hence, parental involvement in school is mainly limited to helping out in school outings or in the classroom and with formal or informal consultations with teachers.

Edwards and Alldred (2000) further throw light on the dynamics of the activeness of some of the children in parental involvement. They suggest that school may play an important role in promoting parental awareness for their involvement in their children education, which results in children being 'passively active'.

### **Category 2: children as passive in parental involvement**

Edwards and Alldred view this category as the existing pattern of relations between home and school, where parents and schools are active in their attitudes and actions towards one another. Here children are neither reflexively facilitating nor obstructing the process of involved home-school relations. It implies that children play their due role when asked to do their homework, or when offered other help, advice and support in education related matters either at home or at school by their parents.

### **Category 3: children as active in parental un-involvement**

In explaining this category, Edwards and Alldred (2000) argue that to have privacy in their lives and to keep their school life separate from their home life and parents, children and young people adopt a stance in which they actively discourage, evade and obstruct their parents' involvement. This is done in two ways. Firstly, through individualization, children see themselves as an autonomous person who could manage their own academic lives, without the help of their parents. Secondly, in attempting to resist institutional incorporation of home and family life, children actively block and evade their parents' involvement in their education. Edwards and Alldred go on to explain that this does not mean that children are alienated from their parents; they do not want to see them unnecessarily stressed. In addition to this, children and young people also tend to avoid their parents' involvement in school settings, which may seem to be embarrassing and constraining to them.

However, in the context of Pakistan, where families and schools may appear to be relatively distant from one another, children's relative interest in their parents' un-involvement may stem from very different circumstances. Children may be active in

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parental un-involvement to avoid punishment either by the parents or by teachers, to conceal their faults and academic failing, due to peer pressure and other social and cultural factors.

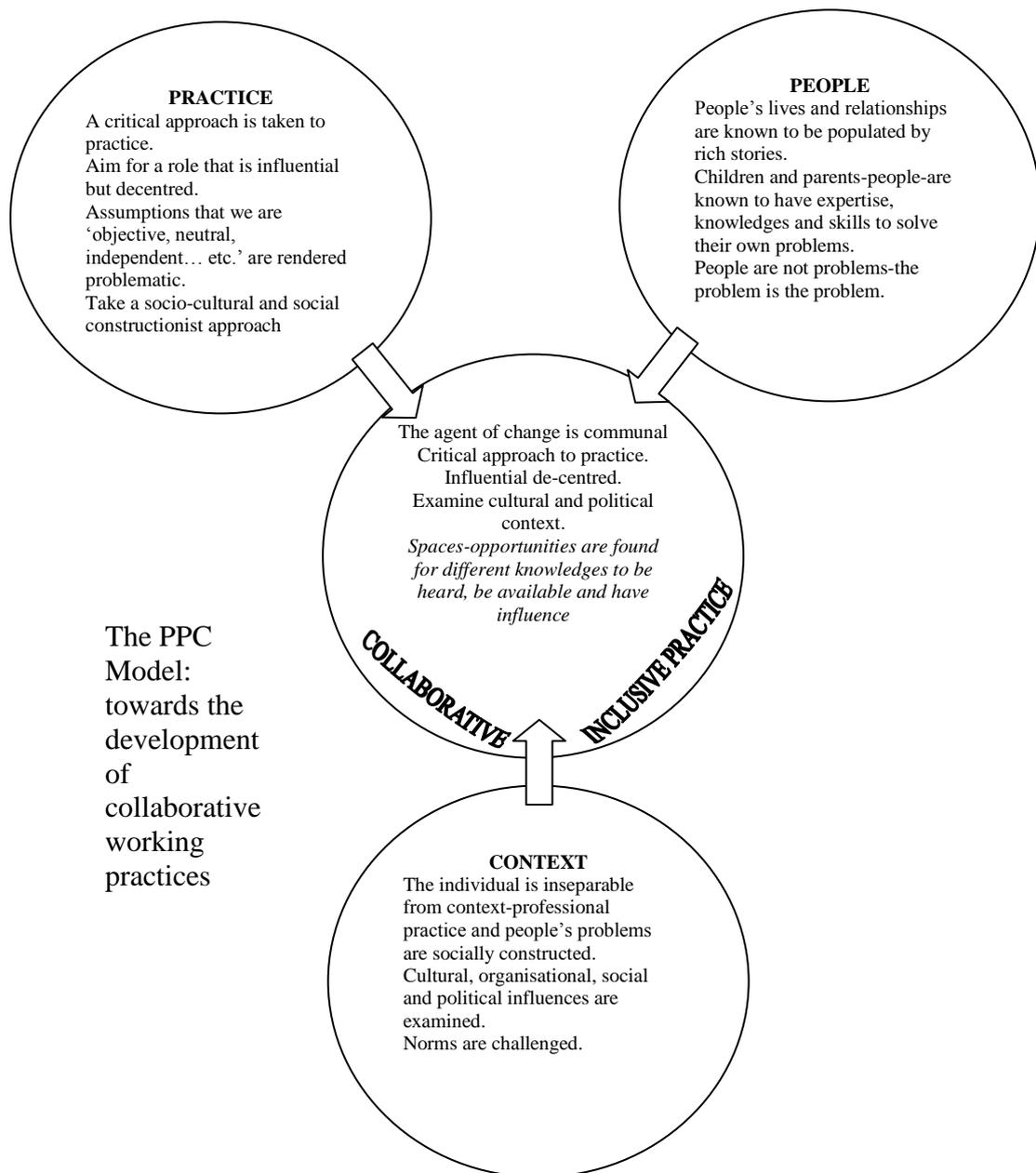
#### **Category 4: children as passive in parental un-involvement**

Children can be passive in parental un-involvement due to the constraints of their parents. This category may be seen as matching the “dominant political and professional understandings of the process of home-school relations as shaped by parents (as well as schools) ... in the ‘negative’ sense of ‘missing parents’” (Edwards & Alldred 2000:446). Parental un-involvement may not be wilful. The reasons may be that both mother and father have work commitments; they are not educated to provide the appropriate level of involvement; or their un-involvement may be due to their discomfort in going to school and talking to teachers in the school settings (Edwards & Alldred 2000). Whilst Edwards and Alldred explored and showed interest in the ‘voices’ of children and young people in their parental involvement model, others have developed context based models from the perspective of inclusive education.

In this regard, Todd (2007) has proposed a Practice-People-Context (PPC) Model. In order to understand the practices of the various actors in the context of school and services, participation can be understood in terms of three dimensions or set of interacting practices, which shape schools and services at the macro level and professional practice at the micro level. These are:

- Conceptualisations of *Practice*: discourses of practice, how we understand roles, the different frameworks and agendas that inform our practice.
- Assumptions about *People*: how we understand people, what assumptions we have about children, parents, families and workers.
- Relationship with *Context*: the meaning given to the context, how we understand the relationship between the individual, meaning either ourselves or those with whom we work, and the socio-cultural context. (Todd 2007:109)

Figuratively, the entire process can be represented as:



**Figure 2.8 Practice-People-Context Model**

Source: Todd (2007:110)

Todd suggests that the PPC Model should be seen as a series of social practices and sets of assumptions, which are available for developing collaborative learning. The author explains that, the outer three circles, which point to the inner circle, may suggest the manner in which participation could be encouraged. The inner circle, on the other hand, may represent the overall aims of the group, which are to be achieved.

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Thus, the thrust of the model is on achieving collaborative and inclusive practice in a given context.

The above discussion on parental involvement typologies, frameworks and models drew mainly on the empirical research and literature developed and applied in the Western contexts. However, evidence (Farah 1996; Jamil 2002; Khan 2003; Khan *et al.* 2005; Kim *et al.* 1998; Mashallah 2001; Rashid 2001; Sarwar 2006; Shams 2001; Tahira & Braathe 2007; Zafar & Khan 2001) from Pakistan suggests that, despite the contextual differences and the related structural and procedural mismatches and parental and school constraints, even in the remotest, underprivileged and conservative communities, parents inherently have a strong feeling about their children's wellbeing, education and progress and seemed to have the demonstrated ability of Epstein's six-point typology of parental involvement. With this in mind, I now move on to the next section that maps literature pertaining to student achievement, literacy, reading and related aspects.

### **2.1.3 Parent-teacher relations and student achievement and associated outcomes**

The focus of the present study is on parent-teacher relations and on the processes, structures and practices that impinge upon, shape and influence those relations. However, in this section, I will briefly highlight the range and scope of literature that has documented the influences of home-school relations and parental involvement on student academic achievement, literacy and learning, motivation, adjustment, attendance, and behaviour, discipline and homework.

Of all the aspects of student outcomes and development, researchers have consistently documented the positive influence of home and school on student academic achievement. Over decades, researchers have collated and documented research evidence that reiterates the importance and effectiveness of home-school and community relations on student achievement and outcomes (Booth & Dunn 1996; Ferguson 2008; Henderson 1987; Henderson & Berla 1994; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Jordan *et al.* 2002; Schneider & Coleman 1993). In addition, there is also meta-analysis research that establishes the efficacy of parental involvement on student academic achievement (Jeynes 2005; Fan & Chen 2001).

Researchers have also diversified their interests to show student achievement returns at different levels of their education. In this regard, Georgiou and Tourva (2007)

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focused on parental attributions and their relation to student achievement and parental involvement, whereas Sheldon (2003) demonstrated the interplay between parent, school and community liaison on elementary school student achievement. However, Domina (2005) is skeptical of other studies and notes that parental involvement does not independently improve children's learning, though suggests that involvement of parents with low SES is more effective.

Of particular interest to the present research is the literature that has explored the interplay between parental and secondary school student achievement. Concerning this, Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis research to explore the relationship of parental involvement and urban secondary school student achievement. Similar reviews and studies have been conducted by other scholars focusing on school achievement returns of students due to parenting practices and their styles (Spera 2005), parental involvement patterns (Catsambis 2001) and grade specific achievement (Sui-Chu & Willms 1996). In addition, Bogenschneider (1997) found that, irrespective of gender, class, race, ethnicity or family structure, the more involved parents are in their adolescents' schooling the better they perform in school, academically or otherwise. Another important finding is that mothers with fewer resources are more efficacious on children's grades. Pomerantz *et al.* (2007) in their review on academic benefits accrued to secondary school students explicated the dynamics of how and in what manner parental involvement can be beneficial to children. Grolnick *et al.* (1997) also report similar findings from their quantitative study.

There has also been research interest in the interplay of parental involvement and student achievement with class, race and related issues. In this regard, by focusing on the themes of empowerment, outreach, and indigenous resources, Abdul-Adil and Farmer Jr. (2006) argue that African American parents respond positively to parental involvement, which increases parental participation in school and student academic success. Research on gender specific and family pattern involvement (Lee *et al.* 2007), the interplay between social capital and parental involvement differentials (McNeal Jr. 1999), and parents' educational beliefs and school reforms (Shumow 1997) shows the impact of parental involvement on student achievement. In addition, parental involvement, empowerment, and school traits (Griffith 1996), school's efforts to engage parents (Harris & Goodall 2007), and parental differential vocational

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and academic standings (Räty & Kasanen 2007) have been shown to have a differential influence on academic achievement of children. Moreover, research in the US, focusing on ethnic groups, such as Taiwanese, Mexican American, and Egyptians, has explored various parental engagement patterns and their relation to academic achievement of students of various grades (Hung & Marjoribanks 2005; Hong & Ho 2005; Keith & Lichtman 1994; Abd-El-Fattah 2006).

A review of the literature has also revealed that researchers have shown interest in and explored the effects of parental involvement on measures of student literacy and learning (Dearing *et al.* 2006; International Reading Association 2002; Li 2006; Uludag 2008; Wößmann 2005), student motivation (Anguiano 2004; Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.* 2005; Pomerantz *et al.* 2007), and student patterns of adjustment in the school (Brown & Beckett 2007; Izzo *et al.* 1999; Ketsetzis *et al.* 1998; McNeal Jr. 1999). In addition, parental interaction with teachers and school has been shown to have an impact on a number of student related variables. These include student attendance (Sheldon & Epstein 2004; Sheldon 2007; Sheppard 2009), student behaviour and discipline (Brown & Beckett 2007; McNeal Jr. 1999, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein 2002) and their homework (Grolnick *et al.* 1997; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 1995; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 2001; Li 2006; Walker *et al.* 2004).

In this review, I wanted to show that whilst there is an abundant research and literature that has explored a range of student-specific issues involving the interplay of parents and teachers, the nature of such exploration is only possible owing to ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau 2003) of measures, and practices that has a sustained social-historical and related structural and dispositional underpinnings. In the context of Pakistan, this will require laying a sound framework and developing a culture of positive and productive parent-teacher interaction and cooperation that will pave the way for working towards the achievement of these student related variables. Having this in mind, I now look at Pakistan specific literature and documents.

#### **2.1.4 Pakistani context: literature review and analysis of policy documents**

In this section, I review both national and international literature to highlight the range of interest researchers and writers have expended to examine and document various aspects and problems of the Pakistani education scene and elsewhere, relating to both parents and teachers, and to students and their contextual and structural dynamics. By

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so doing, my aim is to help identify and justify the research gaps in Pakistan concerning parent-teacher relations in general and regarding secondary schools in particular.

A look at the literature in the Pakistani context reveals that in the secondary school context there is some literature (both national and international) that has explored some of the dimensions of school contexts and related student specific determinants. These include research on school size, culture and student achievement (Salfi & Saeed 2007), parent perceptions and student outcomes (Stewart *et al.* 2000), and measures and interplay of student cognitive functions and educational outcomes (Iqbal & Shayer 2000). In addition, whilst a dated conference document has dealt with the objectives (which includes an important component on parent-teacher relations, discussed later in the thesis) of secondary education in Pakistan (Khan 1956), a recent case study research has attempted to examine the quality of secondary school education in light of the decentralisation of institutions (Shah 2009).

Recently, predominantly at the primary school level, researchers have also undertaken empirical studies to compare and contrast public, private and NGO based educational provision, by focusing on issues of, for instance, cognitive and life skills comparisons (Arif & Saqib 2003), relative effectiveness of schools with a focus on gender disparities for girls (Aslam 2009). Furthermore, Khan (2003), Khan and Kiefer (2007), Khan *et al.* (2005) adopted a comparative stance to explore PTA related issues, educational production functions and institutional effectiveness in rural communities respectively.

However, as gender specific issues have been one of the important aspects of my research, a review of the literature reveals that since the 1990s increasingly researchers have started taking more interest in gender specific research concerning females. They report stark disparities for girls and women, both in the school environments and more generally concerning the various aspects of their life, in home and social contexts (Arif *et al.* 1999; Aslam 2006, 2009; Aslam & Kingdon 2008; Filmer 1999, 2000; Ismail 1996; Mahmood 2004; Mukhtar 2006; Shami & Hussain 2005a; Winkvist & Akhtar 2000; Sathar & Lloyd 1994; Sawada & Lokshin 2001; Lloyd *et al.* 2007).

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In addition to gender specific issues, researchers, primarily in the primary school context, have explored various learning and achievement related determinants of both boys and girls in both urban and rural contexts (Das *et al.* 2006; Fernando 1991; Glewwe & Kremer 2006; Reimers 1992; Warwick & Reimers 1995; Stewart *et al.* 2000). In the field of economics of education and developmental economics, researchers have shown increased interest in the educational production and rates of return to interrogate the topics of school quality, student achievement and progression of students (Behrman *et al.* 1997; Behrman *et al.* 2008; Lloyd *et al.* 2009). In a similar vein, scholars have also argued and documented that inequality, stratification, child labour and corporal punishment have implications for children's schooling and wellbeing specifically and for the society in general (Gautam & Arjun 2003; Khan 2003; Mahmood *et al.* 1994; Robson 2004; Rahman 2004; Ahmad 1970).

Of particular interest to the present research has been the literature that has considered school based governance issues and that which has explored the role of PTAs/SMCs concerning their structure, functioning, and related comparative dynamics of private and public school performances (Fullan & Watson 2000; GoNWFP 2001; Khan *et al.* 1956; Khan 2003; Usmani 2003; Zafar & Khan 2001). The recent literature has touched on various aspects of the role of parents and teachers on PTAs and has teased out their related structural, financial and managerial aspects; some have considered the effectiveness of community involvement in small-scale programmes directed towards disadvantaged communities. However, progress in this regard has been slow and patchy. Concerning this, Pakistan's recent National Educational Policy (2009) notes:

Most stakeholders consulted during policy development were of the view that various experiments with School Management Committees (SMCs) or Parent Teachers [sic] Associations (PTAs) have had limited success. Most cases of success are either owed to a dynamic head teacher or a local non-government organization that provides an interface between community and the school. ... In most rural areas, these organizations are controlled by politically influential persons who have little interest in school improvement. In other cases, finances remain unutilised because of fear of audit. Also, most head teachers have no training in working with communities and are unprepared for capitalising on the potential of SMCs. The main obstacle to greater success remains the lack of acceptance and comprehension of the concept at both the community as well as school level. (GoP 2009:22)

However, surprisingly one dated conference report in Peshawar had considered in considerable detail Parent-Teacher-Community programme (Khan *et al.* 1956). The

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nature of its recommendations and the issues it identified concerning secondary education still resonate strongly with the current research literature, policy documents cited above and has immense relevance as well.

From theoretical perspectives, this could mean that whilst the overall social fabric and practices within it would have changed in many ways, the habitus of the agents and the structural dynamics of the field related to education changed little, since the last more than five decades. Although a number of reasons could be attributed for such a state of affair, one of the aspects that researchers have considered pertains to teacher training and the role and effectiveness of the principal/head teacher in the school.

In this regard, it has only been relatively recently that researchers and institutions have started looking at the various aspects of teacher training in Pakistan. Whilst some researchers have looked into tensions in teacher training (Davies & Iqbal 1997) and educating teachers for improving quality of education (Kanu 1996), others have suggested models and proposals for teacher development (Ali 1998, 2000) and development of a cadre of teacher educators in this regard (Khamis & Sammons 2004). In addition, authors have also shown interest in looking at professional development of teachers (Halai 2001) and recently some have considered the transition of student teachers from training to actual classrooms in school (Westbrook *et al.* 2009). Still more, recently international organisation and donor agencies have been engaging in situational analysis of teacher training and professional development programmes in Pakistan and have been assessing their effectiveness (UNESCO 2006; Enge & Akbar 2007). All this adds up not only to the knowledge base but also strengthens the research base for home-school relations, which could help future research into developing effective parent-teacher relation programmes.

However, without an effective leader, teachers and schools could be in disarray and without much productivity both in teacher effectiveness and in terms of learning experiences for children. Recent research, therefore, highlights the roles and characteristics of principals in developing countries and in Pakistan. This literature also documents various constraining forces and practices that have implications not only for the management, administration and leadership of the principals but also hampers severely the overall school effectiveness and learning experiences of children (Oplatka 2004; Rizvi 2008; Simkins *et al.* 2003).

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All these issues have been shown to have been rooted in issues of democracy, trust, community and the strengthening of infrastructure. In this regard, since 2000 efforts have been made to devolve authority and empower communities both in social infrastructure and specifically in education. Whilst there has been some improvement in some education related indicators and delivery mechanisms and practices, in terms of public education specific issues and practices, the progress has been far from ideal (Cyan *et al.* 2004; Komatsu 2009; Lynd 2007; Shah 2003; Tim *et al.* 2005; UNESCO 2005; Winkler & Hatfield 2002; World Bank & GoNWFP 2005). Although a number of reasons could be attributed for such lapses in quality and quantity of education, a particular strength of the present research could be in highlighting the role and importance of the inclusion and a more participatory and mandatory role of all parents in support of their children. This could spell a revolutionary change not only in parent-teacher relations but also and more importantly could culminate into better and effective learning experiences for children.

With this in mind, there is now increasingly sufficient anecdotal and empirical evidence from Pakistan that has reported and documented a number of private, public and private-public partnerships programmes and initiatives of successful parent and community managed schools (Alderman *et al.* 2003; Chaudhury & Parajuli 2006; Farah 1996; Jamil 2002; Khan & Saleem 2003; Kim *et al.* 1998; Mashallah 2001; Rashid 2001; Sarwar 2006; Shah *et al.* 2005; Shams 2001; Tahira & Braathe 2007; Warwick *et al.* 1992; Zafar & Khan 2001). These studies report that even in the most deprived, disadvantaged, conservative and conflict-ridden places, (uneducated) parents and communities have the ability to design, support, manage and run schools even with no follow up support and sustain these into the future, with documented improvement in the quality of attendance, learning and education of both girls and boys. This suggests that the power and ability of parents and the community could do wonders, no matter how constrained they might be, negating the expression of seeing them as “hard to reach” (Crozier & Davies 2007).

For the purposes of the present research, and to explore the relative weight given to the role of parents in support of their children’s education and schools, I reviewed almost all the educational policy documents, conference reports, and related official formal and informal documents. These include GoNWFP (2001), GoNWFP (2008), GoP (1947, 1959, 1972, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d), GoP (2004,

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2005, 2006), and GoP (2009). Whilst some policy documents fleetingly refer to parent and community role in children's education, others seem to see them only in terms of having a deficit that needs to be dealt with through educating them:

“Ensuring active participation of teachers, students and representative of parents and the community at large in educational affairs” (GoP 1972:2).

... with the limited resources and time we cannot solve the innumerable educational problems of quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement through conventional methods ... We will, of necessity, have to involve community participation ... (GoP 1978:23)

The people must accept the fact that since it is they and their children who benefit most from educational [sic], the sacrifices required must be borne primarily by them. Acceptance of this principle would create an identification of the community with the schools that does not now exist. Such an identification finds expression in a deepening concern for the nature and scope of the educational programme; a spirit of co-operation between parent and teacher; and a genuine recognition of the contribution of the school to the life of the community. (GoP 1959:9)

A school should rightly be the centre of academic activity and social progress in a locality and an inspiration to young and old. It should be able to win the community's support and co-operate with it to serve its needs. (GoP 1959:132)

No hierarchy of officials can itself give the schools the spirit and quality needed. The attainment of such aims requires the combined efforts of administrations, headquarters [sic], teachers and the community. All efforts should be made to awaken the pride of the local communities in their schools by participation in school activities, attendance at school ceremonies, and the development of parent-teacher associations on a wide scale. (GoP 1959:143)

It is in the 'role of education in the building of character' that one report considers the influence of the school and community and parental responsibility in “the formation of a child's mind and character” (GoP 1959:236). This is followed by a concern for the children's 'character building' in which parents are required to be 'educated' to make them “aware of their obligations and duties towards their children” (GoP 1959:236). It further adds:

The influence of the home and the community upon the character of our children also requires the building up of a close relationship between them and the school to ensure that there is no conflict between the impact of either. The formation of parent-teacher associations has, therefore, a specific significance in this context. (GoP 1959:237)

However, the role of the school has also been considered important in taking the lead to contact parents and to develop relationships with them regarding children's character formation:

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Since in most communities the school is the most prominent and permanent institution outside the family, it should take the lead in establishing contacts with the home and the community to ensure a sound constructive approach to the total process of character formation. (GoP 1959:237)

Given this background, there is now a need to consider what the international literature talks about Pakistani parents, parental views about their children's education and contact with the school and vice versa. Away from the Pakistani shores, apart from the contrasting contextual and socio-cultural differences, in England, Gill Crozier (Crozier 2009; Crozier & Davies 2005, 2006, 2007; Crozier *et al.* 2003; Crozier *et al.* 2005) has conducted by far the most extensive empirical research on British-Pakistani parents. She has provided important insights into parental perceptions and experiences and has passionately argued that they are not 'hard to reach,' dispelling the many stereotypes and misconceptions about Pakistani parents and their children, which create barriers to their children's progress and disadvantages them in the mainstream. Other researchers have corroborated Crozier's findings in their research on Pakistani parents and their children. These include language and literacy research (Huss-keeler 1997) and its relation to culture, identity and diversity (Conteh & Kawashima 2008), social class disparities and children's success in education 'against the odds' underpinned by a 'concerted cultivation' and parental high aspiration (Siraj-Blatchford 2010), and educational attainment comparisons of Bangladeshi and Pakistani secondary school students (Sunder & Uddin 2007). With social class as the focus of discussion, I now discuss these issues at length in the following section.

## **2.2 Social class and parent-teacher relations**

In the discourse of home-school and parent-teacher relations, social class dynamics has been at the centre of debate and research since, at least, the significant works of Coleman (1966) in the US and Plowden (1967) in the UK. An analysis of the literature in this area reveals that the predominant focus of much of research has been on the middle-class and working-class/poor continuum. However, underpinning and intertwining class and social class dynamics, the central themes of race, culture and gender, and social and cultural capital have also been the focus of, and of interest to, researchers for a number of years (Crozier 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Lareau 1989, 2003; Mirza 2009; Reay 1995a, 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1993, 1996a).

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Although much of the focus of my research underpins understanding the perspectives and practices of working-class/poor parents and their corresponding working-/middle-class teachers and schools, their practices only make sense when they are understood against the perceived/different middle-class backdrop of social and cultural practices and related ‘dominant others’ within the overall social space. Yet, culture, gender and capital are also central to and important themes of my research that may seem to interweave and overlap in many different ways in the voices of parents and teachers (see **Chapters Five-Eight**). It is noteworthy that given the context and area of my research, no prior research is known to have been undertaken at such a level and detail. This makes this study even more important and provides a potential for a significant contribution to knowledge in this area of research (see **Section 2.1.4**).

Social class as a unit of analysis may appear to include a broad spectrum of determinants from economic and material possessions on the one hand to symbolic properties on the other hand. Therefore, given that, definitions of social class are problematic (Crozier 1997, 2000), due to the fluidity and malleability of social contexts and structures, social class determinants may appear to have different implications for parents and teachers in different contexts, such as in Pakistan. For instance, my experience of the fieldwork was that many teachers whom I interviewed and spoke to referred to themselves as ‘middle-class.’ However, what the teachers implied by ‘middle-class’ was that they actually perceived themselves to be ‘working-class:’ ones who do not have much resources, capital, power and related social and cultural networks that the teachers perceived the ‘upper-class’ possessed. However, in comparison to teachers, from a social frame of reference the majority of parents saw themselves, and their role and status as ‘different’ and subjugated to that of teachers; although in social class terms many parents may have been equal to or above the level of teachers, in material, symbolic and related resources. Hence, for both parents and teachers, it was a matter of perception and looking at the ‘class’ differently.

In defining class as a basic sociological concept, Connell *et al.* (1982:33) argue that notwithstanding the differences between the paradigms of ‘inequality’ and ‘reproduction,’ “classes or strata are basically understood as categories: sets of individuals who all share the same attributes or possessions (such as level of income, type of occupation, ownership).” In a similar vein, Bourdieu offers a more refined definition of classes, based on ‘knowledge of space of positions;’ classes are:

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sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances (Bourdieu 1985:725).

Thus, for instance, working-class/poor parents, being positioned differently to that of middle-class parents are more likely to exhibit ‘similar dispositions’ and ‘interests’ in their ‘practices’ and ‘stances’ and vice versa. Similarly, teachers, whether from the working- or middle-class background, being positioned in their respective social (institutionalised) spaces, are more likely to have and exhibit collective ‘dispositions’ and ‘interests’ in their ‘practices’ and ‘stances’ to agents (such as parents) who are outside and alien to their social, institutional and territorial space and jurisdiction. Whilst teachers/schools may not have a collective agreed understanding of their stances, yet to protect their stakes and positions (professional or otherwise) they are more likely to have similarity of dispositions. For instance, whilst most teachers may have a collective and agreed understanding of the benefits of working closely with parents, when asked about why parents are not as involved as they claim they should be, to protect their stakes and positions, a majority of teachers may blame parents for not visiting school.

During the fieldwork, in the selection and recruitment of participants, I took into account the various class based determinants such as their education, qualification, occupation (Crozier 2000) and related credentials. I find myself in agreement with Connell *et al.* (1982:33) that “Classes are not abstract categories but real-life groupings, which like heavily-travelled roads, are constantly under construction: getting organised, divided, broken down, remade.” However, following Crozier (2000) and others, and given their perceived and actual descriptions of their contexts, I have broadly allocated teachers and parents into two broad groups of middle-class and working-class (see **Appendix H**), discussed below.

### **2.2.1 The middle-class and working-class continuum**

A review of the literature on the discourse and dichotomy between middle-class/working-class parent and teacher interactions and relations reveals that most research has primarily focused on primary education. However, with few exceptions (e.g., Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Crozier & Davies 2007; Reay 2001b, 2006; Vincent 2001) there has not been enough interest into the myriad issues of the relations between parents and teachers at the secondary level.

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This is interesting and perplexing as notwithstanding the significance and criticality of parents and teachers working closely during the formative years of children at the primary level, evidence, research and experience suggests that the close working relationship of teachers and parents is vital and significant for the all-round development of adolescents at the secondary stage. My research therefore has been an attempt to contribute to the existing paucity of research in this regard, in the Pakistani context in particular and in the international literature in general.

Despite some differences in the nature and pattern of interaction between parents and teachers of primary and secondary schools, there seems to be an overwhelming overlap between the practices and experiences pertaining to social class dynamics of parents and teachers in both primary and secondary school contexts. The story therefore is hardly new (Crozier 2005b) and may seem to have a recurrent pattern and theme in cultures and societies other than industrialised ones. There is empirical evidence and research that supports that the issues of social class dynamics may resonate with the experiences and practices of parents and teachers in Pakistan (Crozier 2009; Crozier & Davies 2005, 2006, 2007; Crozier *et al.* 2003; Crozier *et al.* 2005).

### ***The primary school context***

Concerning primary schools, increasingly a number of researchers have used both ethnographic and sociological approaches to delve into the social class discourse of parent-teacher relations using a number of lenses (e.g., Borg & Mayo 2001; Freeman 2004; Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Jones 2007; Kroeger 2005; Lareau 1989; Levine-Rasky 2009; Lewis & Foreman 2002; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a, 2001b; Tizard *et al.* 1981; Vincent 1996a; Weininger & Lareau 2003). The findings of quantitative studies also resonate strongly with qualitative studies (Alexander *et al.* 1987; Bakker *et al.* 2007; Hoover-Dempsey *et al.* 1987).

Although, much has changed since Sara Lawrence Lightfoot wrote her influential work, *Worlds Apart* in 1978 in the US, many of the themes of her book still pervade the dynamics of home-school and parent-teacher relations. She vividly charts a struggle between families and schools as pitched between two seemingly opposing fields, which are deeply entrenched in the politics of class, discontinuity, power, conflict and mistrust. Her themes therefore weave through the voices of mothers,

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black families and teachers to construct not only the socio-historical journey and landscape between the two institutions of families and schools, but also to portray with vivid colours the dichotomy between the perceptions and practices of and relations between middle-class schools and teachers and working-class ‘others.’ Much of what she has written therefore may resonate with what the parents and teachers, and schools and families say and practice in the context of home and school relations in Pakistan (see **Chapters Five-Eight**).

In a similar vein, one of the pioneering works is that of Lareau’s (1989). In her work, Lareau challenges the notion that social class is of minor significance in influencing children’s lives in schools. To prove this, she sets out on a sociological journey of comparing and contrasting parental involvement in their children’s education through classroom activities in two different elementary schools i.e. one working-class and one upper-middle-class. Because “social class has a decisive influence on the connections between families and other social institutions” (Lareau 1989:167), Lareau captures the differences between the approaches and practices of working-class and middle-class families by using two terms: *separation* and *interconnected*. Because of the social class differences, relations between working-class families and the school are characterised by *separation*. Similarly, due to similarities in their social class and related practices, relations between middle-class families and the school are characterised by *interconnectedness*.

What seems clear from her work is that despite using ‘social class’ as the basic tool to analyse the micro interactional processes and practices of parental involvement and parent-teacher relations, Lareau’s analyses seem to revolve around the binaries of working-class and middle-class continuums, without much explanation and analyses of the micro-interactional practices and other constituents of social class. Reay (1995a, 1998a) and Vincent (1996a:74) have also identified this in their own work. Moreover, whilst Lareau (1989:177) suggests that “key elements of class cultures become forms of cultural capital because they give parents a pool of resources which they can activate,” she does not offer any explanation of what constitutes class cultures and how these can be differentiated from and contrasted with cultural capital. Finally, whilst Lareau paints a picture that projects differences in social class background of parents and their relations to/with teachers and schools, using the concepts of *habitus*, *field* and social capital she could have added vivid colours to her

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sociological portrait. This is where my study aims to fill the research gap in knowledge.

Using ‘power’ (alongside others) as a theoretical tool to gauge relations between and practices of working-class parents and (middle-class) teachers/schools and professionals, Vincent (1993, 1996a) conducted an ethnographic case study of home-school relations in two large primary schools, with an ethnically mixed population. Her main finding is that a fundamental imbalance in power relations exists between parents and educational professionals, which is highly skewed in favour of the latter. She also found that whilst opportunities for collective parental participation were restricted in the schools, to intervene in their children’s education, individual parental involvement was the accepted norm that prevailed in the schools. What seems clear here is that there was an implicit pattern to individual parental involvement, which was predominantly driven by the school structures and practices without much consideration for the working-class families and their home structures.

Vincent also found that both school ‘communities’ were fragmented and consisted of different interest groups, due to which the staff body did not operate as a coherent group and faced difficulties in planning ‘whole-school’ policies. However, as the parent body was also fragmented “by differences in social class, ethnicity, religion, language and occupational culture” (Vincent 1993:178, 1996a:149), parents as a group therefore did not have a collective voice. However, from a theoretical standpoint it could also be construed that, as teachers have a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990b:66), have similarities of stakes and want to protect those stakes in their *field*, they seemed to have an implicit agreed understanding and consensus in terms of their individual and institutional habitus. This may be so because although, as Vincent argues, teachers had varying pedagogical philosophies, and positions in the institutional hierarchy, “differences between them often remained submerged, subordinate to the demands of professional unity” (Vincent 1993:178). This gave way to “teacher discourse that [attempted] to place parents (of whatever background) in a subordinate position in relation to the professionals” (Vincent 1996a:149).

Through a critical-feminist qualitative methodology and perspective, Diane Reay (1995a, 1998a) conducted an ethnographic study of mothers’ involvement in their children’s education in two socially contrasting (working/middle-class) primary schools, which involved in-depth interviewing of thirty-three mothers and participant

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observation in classrooms. Using Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital, habitus and field, Reay explored issues of social class, race and gender that underpinned the many aspects of work mothers undertake, which involve practical maintenance, and educational and emotional tasks.

Concerning social class, Reay is critical of the literature and studies that present social class as a simplistic dichotomy between working-class discontinuity and middle-class continuity. Reay therefore vehemently argues about and analyses the many hard and deeply entrenched issues that go along with the mothering role, and through their trajectories of interaction and communication with schools. In this regard, Reay found that marital status, women's labour market participation, or lack of participation, powerfully influence the mother-school relationship. Therefore, she makes a case that only by looking more closely at what mothers do that one can understand and appreciate the sort of material and educational resources they deploy and are available to them that underpins their complex social interactions within the home and school spheres, individually and reciprocally along both continuums.

By placing the mothering role at the centre stage, Reay makes a point that it is through mothers that interactions of various nature are enacted, influenced and maintained within the home context with their partners and children, which extends outwards to interactions and communication with teachers and schools about their children's education and related social issues. For Reay, all this places mothers to be the pivot around which and through which the process and practice of cultural transmission to children is communicated, which is reflected most vividly and tangibly embodied in children, in their actions, behaviours and interactions, both in academic and social spheres.

Reay also found that across her sample in both schools, mothers were engaged in educational support of their children, albeit differently. She identifies 'complementing,' 'compensating' and 'modifying' as the various responses that the mothers used to aid their children's curriculum in a number of ways depending on their resources, background and experience. However, Reay demonstrates that as middle-class mothers "weave in and out of all the three roles," working-class mothers were "primarily engaged in complementing school provision" (Reay 1998a:5). For Reay, however, whilst there were clearly differences between middle-class and working-class mothers in terms of their cultural resources, income, educational

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qualifications, educational knowledge and information relating to school system, it did not mean lower levels of mothers' involvement in their children education. However, the fundamental difference of the 'context' and 'resources' had an important role in the way working-class mothers fell short of matching the practices of their middle-class counterparts:

What it did mean was less effective practices as working-class women found it difficult to assume the role of educational expert, were less likely to persuade teachers to act on their complaints and were ill-equipped financially, socially and psychologically to compensate for deficits they perceived in their child's education. ... They also had to deal with an inequitable state schooling system in which standards and expectations were shaped by the class character of school catchment areas. (Reay 1995a:365)

This seems to indicate that whilst working-class parents may have aspirations, notions and practices developed as part of their cultural repertoire to be of help to their children's education, the fundamental difference of class clearly positions them differently and disadvantages them to be as effective as their middle-class counterparts. Accordingly, due to these primary differences and disparities, teacher and "school expectations of parental involvement ... are profoundly influenced by pupils' social class" (Reay 1998a:160). This may appear to be the case in the context of public schools in Pakistan due to the general perception of the public and teachers that the majority of parents that send their children to state schools are poor and illiterate (Khan *et al.* 2005).

In addition to practical maintenance, and the educational work of mothers, Reay also explored an often obscured dimension of mothering that pertains to mothers' emotional work concerning their children and their education, involving emotional labour and interaction both in the home and school contexts. Whilst Reay (1995a:182) makes a valid point in saying that "mothers need to monitor their children's emotional well-being in the schooling context, alongside their educational performance," it seems that the fathering role has been relegated to a side: "it is mothers who are undertaking this work not fathers." There may be a number of mothers supporting their children on their own and as a couple, mothers, compared to fathers, may have the fair/greater share of the emotional labour spent on children. However, the truth of the matter may be that the fathering role plays a crucial role in the whole process and therefore it appears that a generalisation has been made here for showing them

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lacking and not contributing emotional input and energy into the equation of their children's well-being and progress.

Nevertheless, what Reay points out is that emotional work is part-and-parcel of the mothering role, which seems inherently tailored and gravitated towards supporting and helping children in the myriad of issues they face in their home and school contexts regarding their educational, social and personal contexts. However, Reay argues that the mothers' emotional support is not a one-off matter:

Emotional support was a daily part of what mothers did. A crucial component of mothers' work was to ease their child's school passage, to intervene when their child felt unhappy, unconfident, or when they felt they had been unfairly treated. (Reay 1995a:183)

This means that the emotional support of mothers involves hard labour, which mothers bear and absorb given their respective background and individual coping strategies. What seems clear from Reay's findings is that whilst middle-class mothers evidently were well suited and adapted to tackling and addressing issues of emotional nature concerning their children in both home and school fields, it was predominantly the working-class mothers that had to bear the brunt of the stress and anxiety associated with tackling issues of their children. Reay (1995a) uses terms such as 'emotional wear and tear,' 'emotional strain,' 'emotional labour,' 'emotional tension,' 'emotional cost' and 'negative emotional consequences' to portray the underlying toll the mothering role carries by supporting and helping their children. However, in this emotional quagmire, the voices of the working-class mothers seemed loud and clear:

... often working-class women's support was characterised by lack of knowledge of appropriate educational standards, and uncertainty and self doubt about their competence as educators ...[they bring]... a habitus shaped by extremely negative experiences of schooling to the competitive field of contemporary education [which] makes parental involvement a very stressful affair. ...[For the working-class mothers] working with children on educational tasks was accompanied by extremely ambivalent feelings, as well as psychological barriers the middle-class women rarely had to negotiate. ...As a consequence, many of the women often found it extremely difficult to disentangle themselves emotionally from their child's school performance. (Reay 1995a:185-86)

Undoubtedly, what is evident from Reay's discussion is that the mothering role carries enormous weight that may not have parallels considering that with the fathering role. Yet, it may seem unreasonable to overstress the importance and significance of the mothering role without due regard and acknowledgement of the

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role of fathers in support of their children. Therefore, one may argue that in the patriarchal traditions and undertones, dominated by masculinities and related images and traditions of men's symbolic and actual domination, women are subjugated and relegated to roles that are stereotyped as auxiliary and unimportant, both in the West in many subtle ways and in the East more bluntly and in very crude forms. Yet, the truth of the matter seems to be that both mother's and father's role is reciprocatory and each is no less important than the other. Having said this, as one of the interests of my study was also to explore what mothers say, talk about and do in their everyday life about engaging with their children and working towards the various aspects of their education, issues of gender and the mothering role have also been of interest to this study (see **Chapters Five-Eight**).

In a similar vein to that of Reay's, Borg and Mayo (2001) conducted their research in a predominantly working-class area in a state primary school, whilst working as coordinators on a parental involvement project in Malta. They gathered data through semi-structured interviews with a number of stakeholders, including parents and teachers. Drawing inspiration from the writings of Paulo Friere and others in the field of critical education, Borg and Mayo (2001) explored the issues that parents and teachers shared with them after the project was in its second year. Whilst the authors describe the project as successful in many ways in terms of parental involvement and bringing parents and teachers closer together, there were still a number of issues, which seemed grounded in the dynamics of parental social class and related structural imbalances of the school. For instance, the school was perceived as 'sticking to its traditional remit' (Borg & Mayo 2001:252) to teach children in classrooms, thus, there were fewer chances for creative works and parental involvement. These findings may resonate with the perceptions and experiences of parents and teachers in my study.

The authors also identified issues of power dynamics and teacher fear of parental encroachment of their professional role. In addition to some of parental structural limitations that prevented the majority of parents from participation in school activities, "prejudice against the idea of parental involvement [was] the major obstacle in the way of developing a genuine parental involvement programme within the school" (Borg & Mayo 2001:254). From a theoretical standpoint, this seems to indicate that reworking the habitus of stakeholders towards alternative and

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participatory practices and adapting the field dynamics of school accordingly is a process that spans across time and space.

In considering to shift the perception and role of parents from ‘adjuncts’ to ‘subjects,’ Borg and Mayo (2001) propounds an emancipatory model of parental involvement that is rooted in an understanding of parents as capable individuals having creative and critical repertoires. Borg and Mayo conclude that only by considering parents as ‘subjects,’ from the dimension of social collectivity, that the potential for their contribution may be seen as making a difference, which may lead to changing “the face of the school” and reclaiming schools “as sites of struggle for personal and social empowerment” (Borg & Mayo 2001:262).

Following Borg and Mayo’s (2001) theme of considering parents from ‘adjuncts’ to ‘subjects,’ Hanafin and Lynch (2002) explored ‘peripheral voices’ of working-class parents and their views on home-school links, focusing on issues and patterns of social class and educational disadvantage. The authors conducted group interviews with parents of pupils in a primary school that was in a disadvantaged area scheme in the Republic of Ireland. Of the 222 notes that Hanafin and Lynch sent to parents, 35 parents initially showed their interest, from which only 21 participated in the research. However, the authors found that their informal conversations with class teachers suggested that the parents who took part in their research were described by the teachers as ‘interested’ or ‘very interested’ in their children’s schooling. Hanafin and Lynch (2002:38) argue, “If this is the case, then other parents may feel even more alienated and excluded from their children’s schooling than do these parents.”

There may be a number of reasons for the non-participation of the ‘alienated’ and ‘excluded’ parents, including both parental background factors and experiences and that pertaining to school contexts and structures. What seems implicit here is that, those parents who were described as ‘interested’ and ‘very interested’ in their children’s schooling may have been so because their habitus was in a state of “transition from one habitus to another” (Friedmann 2005:319). This transitional phase may have kick started a process of change, adjustment and improvement in parental habitus, which gave way to developing structures and practices for the parents to reduce educational disadvantage in their own and their children’s life. This may be the case in my study, as some of the parents who participate in the research may seem genuinely interested in their children’s education and future, and feel

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motivated to share their perceptions and experiences about their relations with teachers and school (see **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**). However, there may be a number of other potential parent-participants, who despite showing their willingness to volunteer may not participate in the study, which may have been due to numerous reasons, including a feeling of ‘alienation,’ ‘exclusion’ and ‘fear’ from the school and institutionalised bureaucratic structures (see **Chapter Four**). Again, it may not mean that the rest of the parent population who may not participate or are not asked to participate would not be interested in their children’s education. Rather, it may be that in structures and contexts, such as in Pakistan, where it may be unusual for the schools and teachers to have interaction with parents, parents may feel that they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge that they can be involved and engaged in their children’s schooling. They may therefore resist and avoid exploring such uncharted territories.

Hanafin and Lynch (2002) adopted an informal group interview approach to hold meeting with the parents in three separate groups, with each group meeting for three rounds respectively. Hanafin and Lynch’s study focused on three areas, which the parents identified for their discussion: issues within the classroom, issues within the school, and issues regarding home-school links.

Hanafin and Lynch (2002) found that parents saw both their peripheral and proximal involvement in school as unsatisfactory. Parents not only criticised the various aspects of school that pertained to their involvement on the various committees and boards, and related formal meetings and casual visits, they also felt that they did not have power over many matters and therefore felt that “they were required merely to ‘rubber-stamp’ decisions already made by school authorities” (Hanafin & Lynch 2002:46). Moreover, Hanafin and Lynch found that parents felt unwelcome when they visited the school and reported “feelings of anxiety, nervousness and intimidation when meeting individual teachers” (p.46). From all this, the authors conclude that from parental perspectives, the school and school personnel wanted parental involvement, but not beyond their symbolic and auxiliary role which included fund-raising and related peripheral support activities. Refuting the notions of working-class parents having a cultural deficit, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) conclude that throughout their study parents demonstrated that they were informed, interested and concerned

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about their children's education. The failure of parental non-engagement therefore lay with the structures and practices of the school:

Failure to participate in the schooling process cannot be attributed to lack of interest among these parents. Responsibility lies rather with the structures and practices of the school system ... (Hanafin and Lynch 2002:46)

Hanafin and Lynch's (2002) findings reverberate throughout the literature that has a focus on the discourse of 'class' in the relations between parents and schools. Therefore the truth of the matter seems to be that in practice despite much appreciation, legislation and related structural and procedural mechanisms, even in well engaged communities and schools (from time to time, such as in the West) parents and teachers may still be at loggerheads with each other. In communities and societies, such as in Pakistan, there is more likelihood of structural discordance and dissonance in social and cultural practices. Parents and teachers may, therefore, seem "poles apart, not in what they want from [each other]" (Crozier & Davies 2007:311), but in how they can activate and appropriate structures to get what they can achieve mutually, by working with one another (see **Chapters Five-Eight**). In home-school relations, depending on the context and school structures, collaboration and contestation may typify interactions between parents and teachers, which is what Lewis and Foreman (2002) explored in their ethnographic study of two elementary schools in the US.

Whilst Lewis and Foreman describe their study schools having a great deal of parental participation, the schools nevertheless had contrasting social backgrounds, positioned along the middle-class and working-class continuum. In examining why the relationships between parents and schools were so different in the two schools, Lewis and Foreman (2002) focused on the role of social class and school culture in shaping home-school relations. In focusing specifically on the *relational* aspect of 'class' as played out in parent-teacher interactions, Lewis and Foreman (2002:2) make a point that class and status symbols may be open to interpretation, which may be grounded, shaped and better understood in the respective school cultures. This means that in the "complex process of home-school relationship building, the role of social class, particularly with regard to status, power, and authority, is often relational rather than absolute, with neither teachers nor parents, universally powerful or powerless" (Lewis and Foreman 2002:4, referring to Connell *et al.* 1982). Therefore, Lewis and Foreman

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(2002:5) argue, “social class is not merely a background social fact, but is an active part of everyday relations” which is inextricably linked to cultural capital and class habitus that shape everyday interactions in a multitude of ways.

The authors therefore lay a strong theoretical and analytical framework for the social class as a significant component that underpins and enmeshes with school culture to create the myriad ways in which interactions between parents and teachers are structured and influenced differently in socially contrasting schools that may appear to have a great deal of parental participation. To achieve these aims, Lewis and Foreman (2002) spent four months each in the study schools and adopted naturalistic participant observation approach to observe students, teachers and parents in their respective settings, in various classrooms, in the faculty lunchroom, in the main office, and other parts of the schools. In addition, the authors collected local documents and conducted informal interviews with numerous school community members. The racial and ethnic makeup of students and staff at the school located in a predominantly middle-class area consisted mainly of European American population (86% students, 89% school personnel). However, the racial and ethnic makeup of students and staff at the school located in the predominantly working-class area consisted of a mixed population (students: 44% African-American, 28% Latino, 26% others; teachers: 20% African-American, 33% Latino, 47% others).

According to Lewis and Foreman (2002:5) although many interactions between home and school are of a structured and formal nature, they were “more interested in the unstructured and informal—that is, the everyday interactions that are the substance of home-school relations.” The authors therefore adopts a micro-interactional perspective that specifically takes into account the nuances and structures that are impacted upon by the school culture, which in turn is shaped and structured by the interacting individuals who have stakes and purpose in working closely with one another. In some ways, the focus of my research falls along these lines and is therefore more attuned to issues and aspects of parents and teachers in the Pakistani secondary schools that may not be seen as structured along formal and institutional lines, rather based more on individual preferences and practices and instigated on individual needs and requirements. Therefore, alongside social class, the focus of the present research is on a number of issues, including, gender, power, barriers, and various aspects of communications and interactions between parents and teachers

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based on individual and collective orientations that are driven, shaped and structured by the habitus of the agents and various social and institutional fields (see **Chapters Five-Eight**).

In most research literature, the depiction of schools operating in middle-class areas is one that shows a predominantly close working relationship with their middle-class population and that for schools operating in working-class areas to remain poles apart from their working-class and poor parent population. However, Lewis and Foreman's (2002) research diverges from this perspective. The authors demonstrate that too much of parental involvement that hinges on the middle-class notions of parental empowerment and involvement, without proper and necessary procedures and checks and balances in place, leads to contestation between teachers and parents in schools that serve a middle-class population. In this regard, Lewis and Foreman (2002) found that whilst "teachers were not discouraging all forms of parental involvement" (p. 11), they struggled to reassert their "authority over the classroom," and to guard their "precious autonomy along with their sense of professionalism (p. 9)."

In addition, the teachers' "daily experiences with parents volunteering in their classrooms were always filled with ambivalence, if not outright resentment" (Lewis & Foreman 2002:11). Moreover, there was a feeling of distrust amongst teachers that centred on issues, such as, "struggles over resources, feelings of disrespect, competing agendas, and strong feelings about the need to control parent participation" (Lewis & Foreman 2002:12). Despite the fact that the school and parents had the same goals, the underlying assumptions of both teachers and parents underpinned competing agendas and visions, due to which conflict arose about how to reach their goals (Lewis & Foreman 2002). As teachers felt "less secure in their authority and power," and struggled "with parents over control and autonomy," it diverted "their focus away from the best interests of the children in their classrooms" (Lewis & Foreman 2002:14-15).

However, compared to the middle-class school culture, the authors depict a contrasting dimension of the working-class school community, which underpins collaboration and positive school culture between parents and teachers. In this regard, Lewis and Foreman (2002) show that despite the school being located in a relatively underprivileged area and with low social class determinants, the school leadership and teachers created a culture whereby power and authority were shared with parents that

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led to a close working relationship and collaboration between the teachers and parents. This culture was exemplified in a number of ways. For instance, comments like ‘we’re a community’ and ‘joint undertaking’ meant that the school considered parents to be an important “part of the school culture [and wanted them] to be engaged with the educational process” (Lewis & Foreman 2002:17).

Therefore, it was in this spirit that “in many different ways, the ownership of the school, the children, and school activities was shared” (Lewis & Foreman 2002:18). Moreover, the authors found that not only the school philosophy underpinned the idea of respect between parents and teachers, parents and teachers both valued each other’s knowledge and input. The overarching purpose of the school culture therefore centred around community building, “in which parents were seen as partners rather than simply clients or consumers, and in which parents treated teachers as professionals, not as the recipients of their tax money” (Lewis & Foreman 2002:19). The authors’ main conclusion from their research is that “for school personnel and parents to develop strong and meaningful relationships, they must begin from a base of mutual respect and caring” (Lewis & Foreman 2002:22).

Whilst Lewis and Foreman focused on unstructured and informal aspects of interactions between parents and teachers, Weininger and Lareau (2003) researched a structured and formal component of schools: parent-teacher conference. The authors used detailed transcriptions of recorded conferences in two contrasting settings i.e. an affluent middle-class school predominantly consisting of a White parent population and a working-class school located in a poor neighbourhood that consisted of Asian, Hispanic (5%), Black (40%), and White (55%) parent population. With a focus on interaction at the micro-level, Weininger and Lareau (2003:400) analysed two aspects of conferences: “the exchange of information and the authority situation.”

Not surprisingly, the authors found stark disparities between parental interactions owing to their social origins. Regarding exchange of information, Weininger and Lareau (2003:400) discovered that the middle-class parents “demonstrated a greater capacity to absorb educators’ assessments, diagnoses, and recommendations, and to elicit potentially useful information from them, than did their working-class and poor counterparts.” As regards authority dynamics, “middle-class parents were more likely to challenge teachers’ evaluations of their children and to evaluate the teachers themselves; they were also likely to request (and receive) efforts from the teacher

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intended to deal with children's needs or problems on an individualised basis" (Weininger & Lareau 2003:400). On these two counts, middle-class parents were able to secure tangible benefits for their children more effectively compared to their working-class and poor counterparts (Weininger & Lareau 2003).

In explaining further the leverage that middle-class parents have over their interactions with teachers and controlling the structure and flow of conversation in the school settings (such as conferences), Weininger and Lareau (2003) argue that middle-class parents were reactive to various unfolding situations. This not only helped them to steer "the conversation in a particular direction" they were also able to couch their "criticism of the teachers in an innocuous sounding platitude" (Weininger & Lareau 2003:400). In addition to their social position, the competitive and assertive edge that middle-class parents had over teachers contributed to their effectiveness in school settings that cannot be easily instilled (Weininger & Lareau 2003). This implies that in such instances, the school culture may not exhibit an ethos in which parents and teachers see each other as equals. They may therefore not share the ownership of the school; they may operate on a philosophy based on mistrust, disrespect and contestation (Lewis & Foreman 2002). Of particular importance and relevance to the present study is the fact that, in the context of Pakistani secondary schools, given the status and class differences, reinforced by the institutionalised notions of power and authority, many teachers (holding middle-class positions) may assert their authority and power over the working-class and poor parents. This may have implications for their relations with one another (see **Chapters Five and Six**).

Following Weininger and Lareau (2003), Kroeger (2005) set out to explore multiple perspectives of middle-class parents upon school activity, by situating her work within a framework influenced by a reform effort that was geared towards creating and supporting diversity and community within a school. Drawing upon Bakhtin's concept of Heteroglossia, the author aimed to interpret the actions and motivations among parents by sketching their ethnographic portrait in a diverse urban primary school. Kroeger's findings are clearly pitched between the middle-class dominant parents and the working-class 'others,' that normally are depicted as having less power and related structures. Kroeger (2005:2-3) contends her findings show "social checks and balances, highlighting the individualistic, collectivist, and seemingly inter-reliant manner in which middle-class parents operated vis-à-vis school people,

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children, and other parents, who came from the minority with respect to language, social class, and ethnicity.”

Kroeger (2005:27) claims that her analysis shows “the strong place of middle-class parents in an evolving ecology, thus fostering a realm of potential and contention for everyone.” However, the author’s main argument and conclusion seems hidden within a web of embedded arguments, and textual and contextual mazes. She seems to argue that whilst the middle-class parents exhibited cultural dominance and overshadowed various activities at the school, the transitory nature of the school culture (ecology) meant that in addition to their hegemonic stance, several middle-class parents spanned boundaries or switched sides that seemed to help towards creating an ethos of community within the school. More specifically, the findings seem to imply that due to the middle-class parental involvement and influence in school, working-class parents, children and related school people also seemed to derive benefits; there were more opportunities for them to incorporate in their habitus, the structures, practices and skills that middle-class parents had and made use of in their interaction in the school. Concerning my study, teachers and parents may also exhibit and share glimpses of such perceptions about their experiences and interaction with one another (see **Chapters Five-Eight**).

In a similar vein, Jones (2007) chose to present four cases studies that she drew from her three-year ethnographic study of girls and their mothers in a high-poverty predominantly white community. Using critical and feminist theories of social class, Jones aimed to highlight psychosocial tensions within the triad of mother, daughter and teacher-researcher and to argue that middle-class teachers and ethnographers need to adopt a reflexive stance when working with children and parents across the social class divide.

Grounding her work in Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of social class and capital discourse, Jones (2007) adopted a psychosocial lens on class for better understanding the lives and perspectives of girls and mothers. The portrayal and interpretation of the case studies of the girls and mothers led Jones to conclude that the mothers saw schools as “arms of state” which they “abhorred and ridiculed” and “feared” (2007:173). In the lives of mothers, there is therefore an inherent and ongoing tug-of-war, which not only has social and material implications and significance, but it also touches deeply the emotional and psychic beings of the mothers intensely (Jones

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2007). Only by unravelling and looking at the complexities and intricacies of the interplay between the “psychological and social implications of living on the lower rungs of a societal ladder” that one can begin to see and appreciate the dynamics of “being constructed as undesirable other and less-than-ideal mother” (Jones 2007:173).

Therefore, in home-school relations:

Interactions that are saturated with fear (or suspicion, or anger, or resentment) can be detrimental in the educational experiences of children and families and unproductive for teachers and school authorities who work to transform systemic inequities (Jones 2007:173).

These dimensions of interactions may therefore reverberate through the perspectives and experiences of parents and teachers in the context of my study (see **Chapters Five-Eight**). Undoubtedly, Jones’ research has a specific focus on the psychosocial dimensions of the lives of girls and mothers and lays bare the intricacies and implications of what it entails to be living in high-poverty. It is in this spirit that gender issues and the perspectives of mothers and their role and place in the dynamics of home and schools and in their children’s lives is of interest to my research. Their experiences therefore may resonate with Jones’ study, and also because many patriarchal traditions and socio-cultural practices in Pakistan and specifically in the Pashtun culture may not only create spaces of exclusion and seclusion for mothers and women but also be a cause of ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu 2001) (see **Chapters Five-Eight**, especially **Sections 5.2.3, 6.2.4, 7.1.5, 7.3.5, 7.3.6, 8.1.3**). Due to the nature and focus of her study, Jones needed to form strong bonds and construct pathways into the lives of the girls and mothers not only to explore the psychosocial dimensions of their lives, but also for gaining the participants’ trust she needed to override the social class divide, and consequently adopting a reflexive stance. Whilst the nature of my research required that, I adopt an objective stance, nevertheless, to develop a good rapport with the research participants and therefore to gain their trust, I endeavoured to neutralise as far as possible any feelings of the dichotomy of ‘class;’ I also tried to maintain a reflexive stance throughout the research study (see **Chapter Four**). The next section explores secondary school literature that focuses on the interplay between class and parent-teacher relations.

### ***The secondary school context***

As I indicated at the beginning of this section, there has been a dearth of research concerning parent-teacher relations at the secondary school level. However, using

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both ethnographic and sociological methodologies, some researchers have ventured into these uncharted waters to explore its tides and currents from a number of perspectives, including social class discourse (Roberts 1980; Connell *et al.* 1982; Johnson & Ransom 1983; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a; Crozier & Davies 2007, Reay 2001b, 2006; Vincent 2001).

Although not specifically from the secondary school context, Roberts (1980) theoretical perspectives on social class and parents and schools provide insight into the dynamics of class divide between the middle- and working-class. He supports his argument with literature and argues that working-class parents and their culture should not be blamed for their children's school attainments; rather "middle-class interests ... are responsible for the persistence of inequalities in educational opportunity" (Roberts 1980:53).

Talk of inequalities in education makes *Making the Difference* (Connell *et al.* 1982) one of the pioneering empirical research works with a specific focus on secondary schools, which eloquently portrays the complex interplay between home and school and their population along social fault-lines broadly classified into two groups, 'ruling-class' and 'working-class.' Connell *et al.* (1982) conducted their research in twelve Australian schools. In all, the authors conducted 424 interviews with participants from both private and public schools, which included interviews with students (100), parents (196), teachers (118), and principals (10). The central focus of the authors' research is about "social *relations*" as much as about "social *differences*" (Connell *et al.* 1982:9, emphasis in original). By charting the life trajectories of families and their children, Connell *et al.* shed light on differences in their social and contextual backgrounds that are structured and determined in the way working-class and ruling-class differ in their attitudes, behaviours and interactions within their respective home contexts and in schools.

Far from presenting a basic dichotomy between working/middle class continuum, Connell and her colleagues construct and present a sociological landscape that criss-crosses through a number of issues, such as inequality and stratification, authority and power, class-consciousness and class struggles, gender and patriarchy. Underpinning all these issues is the question of 'why educational inequality?' the answer to which is that "the schools are designed to produce it" (Connell *et al.* 1982:189). This establishes the classificatory role of schools and school systems that privileges some

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and disadvantages others because of their social class standing and status. In the context of Pakistan, the classificatory role of public schools may be more prominent because schools may have deeply embedded stratifying and inequality undertones and signifiers—which are a recipe for reproduction of disadvantage among the working/lower classes—primarily because of a socially stratified society and also because of a number of parallel systems of education (Rahman 2004).

Following Connell and her colleagues, Johnson and Ransom (1983) conducted interviews with 109 families of secondary school children that were predominantly from working-class background. Before presenting their findings, the authors chart the historical and contextual background of home/school relations with an emphasis on themes relevant to secondary schools. Thereafter, Johnson and Ransom provide an account of their empirical research that include among others: nature of contact between parents and their secondary school teachers, relations between parents and their children, what the school asks of parents and reassessing family-school relationship.

In discussing the nature of parent-teacher relations and contact, the authors present a descriptive portrait of the functional aspects of teachers' and parents' contact that centres around parents' evenings, parental attendance at these evenings, parents' associations, and related gatherings and informal contacts. Whilst highlighting the positive perceptions teachers had about parental involvement and contact, the authors' discussion of the mechanics of parental contact with the school hardly moves beyond the descriptive and functional level of interaction. However, regarding parents and their teenage children's relations, Johnson and Ransom discuss an array of issues that appear to have an overarching influence on both parents and children's attitudes and behaviours concerning their own selves as well as in relation to schools and teachers. These include for instance, parental responsibility of and influence on their children, transition of children from primary to secondary levels, changes in family relationships and perspectives over time influencing their views, fathers' involvement in secondary schools and parental experience of the value of parent-teacher contact.

In discussing 'what the school asks of parents,' Johnson and Ransom's (1983:83) argument seemed to carry a pinch of parental deficit in the way and manner they were "required" by the school and teachers to support and prepare children to send to school. The authors' underlying discussion seems to revolve around this perspective

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when they focus and discuss parental perspectives on issues that include, children's school attendance, children's homework, giving the school information about the family, helping the school financially, educational decision making in school, and home-based support for their children's education. However, following Johnson and Ransom, we find that some authors (e.g. Crozier 1997; Crozier & Davies 2007) with a specific focus and interest in secondary schools have used a number of theoretical paradigms and conceptual lenses to explore the myriad issues of home-school relations.

In the UK and probably in the mainstream research elsewhere, Gill Crozier has conducted by far the most exhaustive studies on the role of social class (including others such as race, gender, power, and ethnicity) in home/school and parent-teacher relations with a specific focus on secondary schools (Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a; Crozier & Davies 2007).

Against a backdrop of the Government's increased statutory rights for and promotion of the role of parents in education that also underpinned a changing attitude towards parents by teachers and schools, Crozier (1997) explored parental involvement and the possible influences of this upon children's schooling. Against such a background, the author focuses her discussion around four key themes: parents as consumers, parental perception of their role in their children's education, parental understanding of their children's educational needs, and networking and parents' relations with the teachers/school (Crozier 1997).

The underlying contention of Crozier is that class locations have a profound influence on the way middle-class parents "operate as active consumers" and are 'most active' about various aspects of their children's education, both at home and in school (1997:197). By contrast, although working-class parents have an interest and desire for a better future for their children and are 'supportive' of this, they cannot properly materialise the 'vision' for 'their child's future' because they do not possess the required tools to realise their dreams that their middle-class counterparts possess (Crozier 1997:197). Consequently, "A system which advocates a self-help approach is going to disadvantage those who aren't equipped in the same way as others 'to help themselves'" (Crozier 1997:197). The same may be true in the context of Pakistan, due to a complicated and interconnected set of factors, underpinned by the habitus of parents, social and culture practices and related social field dynamics, most parents

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may rarely intervene as ‘consumers’ or operate as active agents in their children’s school life.

In a similar vein, and following the above theme, using ‘surveillance’ as a conceptual framework, Crozier (1998) investigated the notion of ‘partnership’ between parents and teachers. She argues that whilst ‘partnership’ entails “involvement, commitment, and responsibility” in practice it operates as ‘double-edged’ in that as “parents may call teachers to account,” teachers may use the notion of ‘partnership’ to exercise “a form of control upon parents” (Crozier 1998:120). Underpinning relations between parents and teachers therefore are stakes and ‘investments’ that are precious to guard, which signifies that ‘individual vested interests’ and the importance of the role of ‘power’ underpins such relations (Crozier 1998). Drawing on research data gathered from 120 parents and 29 teachers in two secondary schools and utilising mainly teachers’ perspectives, the author shows the contrasting dimensions of the way middle- and working-class parents operate, interact and communicate differently as active/passive ‘consumers’ or ‘partners.’

Crozier found a number of expressions of middle-class parents as ‘active’ consumers, which involved both contestation and collaboration with teachers. For instance, whilst middle-class parents were viewed as ‘interfering,’ having ‘power’ and ‘influence,’ and exerting ‘pressure’ on teachers, though also with positive ramifications, they were also seen in a positive light as working in ‘harmony’ and having ‘shared values’ with teachers and supporting the work of the school, both in school and at home. However, apart from intervening actively over disciplinary matters, working-class parents were seen as having a ‘fairly passive’ role in the academic affairs of their children. Moreover, whilst teachers painted a negative picture of parents, with some regarding them as ‘malaise’ and not aware of their ‘responsibilities,’ Crozier found that the parents they interviewed not only showed interest in and were supportive of their children’s education they also encouraged their children. This indicated that there was a “mismatch between teachers’ and many parents’ perception of ... [each other’s] ... educational roles and educational values” (Crozier 1998:131).

Given the differing roles and the contrasting dimensions of middle-/working-class parents underpinned by the promotion of their increased partnerships with teachers and schools, Crozier concludes and warns that as parents gain more confidence in appropriating their ‘rights,’ harnessing their power will become more important for

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schools. Moreover, there will also be the risk of the ‘powerful parent’ having to exert “too much influence at the expense of the less powerful” (Crozier 1998:135).

Following on from the above, Crozier (1999a) questioned the assumption that parental involvement is a ‘unified concept’ and unquestionably accepted as ‘desirable’ by all parties concerned. The context in which Crozier considered the question of ‘who wants parental involvement?’ was set against the backdrop of introducing mandatory Home-School Agreements that were to be signed by all parents. To consider this, the author interviewed 60 parents each in two secondary schools and in both schools conducted interviews with 29 (14 & 15) teachers, whilst sending a questionnaire survey to 474 secondary students to a third school to ascertain their perspective about parental involvement.

In presenting empirical evidence to support her claims, Crozier concludes that parental involvement is a complex and diverse issue. This involves different stakeholders holding varying perspectives, stakes, claims, aspirations, desires and motives, separated not only by their social class standings but also by their specific positioning. The policy upon which Home-School Agreement is drawn therefore signifies a “narrow unified concept of parental involvement” (1999a:235). Whilst rejecting the rather ‘deficit’ views of the policy concerning the way parents are maligned about their lack of responsibilities towards their children’s education, the author concludes and suggests that parental involvement has a ‘relational’ dimension, that needs to be seen as part of the whole learning strategy, involving students, teachers, and parents alike (Crozier 1999a:235).

In focusing on the views of working-class parents to examine the various aspects of their role in their children’s secondary school, Crozier (1999b) aimed to address the underlying constraints that were pitched against a backdrop of expectation of parents for more involvement in school and in their children’s education. Whilst also drawing on key respondents such as teachers (15) and others concerned, from one case study school that represented predominantly working-class community, Crozier focused her analysis primarily on data derived from interviews with 58 parents.

In making a case for her argument, Crozier (1999b) argues that factors such as social class, gender relations, ethnicity and power dynamics have an important role in constraining (primarily working-class) parents from becoming involved in their

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children's education and schools. In focusing on some of these factors (primarily class as well as power), Crozier's findings reverberate through earlier literature and her previous research work. In a continuation of an earlier piece of research (Crozier 1997), Crozier develops her argument around three key themes: working-class parents' views of education, parental perception of their own and teachers' role in regard to schooling and teachers' perspective that also includes an element on their treatment of parents.

In presenting her findings, Crozier (1999b) argues that, whilst unlike the generally held notion of parental disinterestedness in their children's education, working-class parents may be more inclined to visit school when their child is in trouble. However, she contends that working-class parents not only provide "considerable educational support in a variety of ways for their children," they also "hold a sense of hope for their qualifications" and future life (1999b:317). In addition, the author found that woven together by a common thread of expectation of schooling was the concern that parents had "about their children's happiness and welfare," in which they were also cognisant "of exposing their children to the potential dangers within the community," whilst they went to school (1999b:318). Moreover, besides that, the majority of respondents "had educational hopes and aspirations for their children," and had "an overwhelming sense of trust placed in the professionals to fulfil their role" (Crozier 1999b:319). Such parental aspirations, hopes, expectations and risks associated with children's education may also resonate with the perceptions and experiences of parents (both mothers/fathers and in some ways teachers as well) in the present study (see **Chapters Seven and Eight**).

However, concerning role positioning, Crozier (1999b:320) found that though parents viewed their role as complementary to that of the school's, they did so by adopting a stance of separation from the teachers and school. In addition, whilst the author demonstrates that parents were supportive of their children, socialised with them and provided the necessary material resources such as school uniform, the working-class parents also

... expressed a *deference* to what they perceived to be a *greater knowledge* held by teachers, whom they saw as being therefore in a *better position* than themselves to carry out the *role of educating* their child and making the relevant decisions. [They not only] placed considerable *trust* in teachers to educate their children but also [in assessing] ... their *progress* and *future*

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*direction.* This *trust* is based upon their view that as *professionals* they have been trained, and as such it is supposed they have *superior knowledge* and *'intelligence.'* (Crozier 1999b:320, my emphasis)

It may appear that given the situated differences of the contexts and cultures, the perceptions of the parents described in the above quotation may seem poles apart from the ones of my study in Peshawar. Yet, what may appear of interest to many scholars is the fact that given the nature and focus of my study, parental habitus and the context and structures that underpin their practices may resonate strongly with the quotation above (see **Chapters Seven and Eight**). Moreover, given their experience of interaction with parents, many teachers may also echo and present a reflection of the findings discussed in the above excerpt (see **Chapters Five and Six**).

Against the above backdrop and contrary to the widely held notion of the working-class having a 'deficit,' Crozier (1999b:322) found that irrespective of social class, the majority of parents wanted to know more "about what their child was doing in school," and many parents expressed their desire how "they could in general support their child, or with homework." With this in mind, it may seem problematic, especially in the context of Pakistan and generally elsewhere that, many teachers may not capitalise on this precious and important resource to help support their work and enhance the learning and social and cultural experiences of their students. The underlying given constraints may be seen to have implications for making contact with parents (see **Chapters Five and Six**). Therefore, "the lack of information and guidance by the school compounded [by] their own lack of self-confidence in relation to academic study, together with their actual lack of school knowledge (curriculum content, etc.)" further exacerbates working-class parents' confidence in their own selves and distances them further from the school and the related contrived and hierarchical structures (Crozier 1999b:322).

In presenting the teachers' perspective, Crozier (1999b) argues that whilst many parents may not have been in a position to exercise their 'voice,' because of the circumstantial and situational dynamics of their role and position in school, teachers not only feel 'disempowerment,' they also experience continuous 'criticism' and questioning of their 'actions.' This leads them not to welcome parents with open arms in light of the parents' greater statutory 'power,' which may be perceived as an encroachment on their personal and professional working space. Given this context, in the case of Pakistan, unsurprisingly (working-class/poor) parents may not have such

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‘statutory rights’ and ‘awareness’ regarding how best they can get in touch with their child’s teachers and school. They may be left to grapple with and deliberate on the lack of underlying dimensions of the ‘educational knowledge’ (Crozier 2000) and structures that are a prerequisite to making effective use of the field in question and therefore to call teachers to account (see **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**). However, on the other hand, due to the preoccupation, complexities and constraints of their work (such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of proper training, institutional habitus), underpinned by their own constrained and restrained habitus, with an homogenised notion and a disadvantaged understanding of parental background, teachers may see little possibility in having to contact parents (see **Chapters Five** and **Six**).

However, in interrogating teacher expectation of parental role and behaviour and a mismatch between their established models of this that leads to teacher criticism and accusation of parental lack of support, Crozier (1999b:324-25) found that some teachers had divided the parent group into three categories. This included ‘a minority of supportive parents,’ that as a top brass conjured or evoked images of them being seen as ‘supportive,’ ‘interested in education’ and prone to having ‘critical’ views. The next category of parents, ‘a larger minority’ were those that were likely to attend ‘parents’ evenings,’ saw specific teachers and supported school only in regard to their child’s interests. The final category being the overwhelming ‘majority’ were seen as aloof or the ones that ‘don’t want to know;’ they were seen as ‘indifferent’ and ‘not able to cope with their children themselves,’ or even in some cases, were ‘hostile’ towards the school. These categories of teacher expectations of parental roles and behaviours may also resonate with teacher perceptions in my study. Notwithstanding the contextual differences, teachers may broadly divide parents into two categories, i.e., ones that have some interest in their children’s education and sometime pay a visit (‘a larger minority’) and the ‘majority’ others, that will be argued to have no interest in their children’s education (see **Chapters Five** and **Six**).

In trying to understand the apparent disjuncture between the perceptions and relations of parents and teachers, that were pitched between parental high aspirations for their children and teachers viewing them as ‘disinterested’ and ‘indifferent,’ and therefore being ‘critical’ of their role in school, Crozier adopted a comparative approach to analyse both stakeholders’ contentions. She found that whilst teachers expected parents: “to be more supportive of them; to oversee their children’s home-work ...

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and that they have the necessary equipment to undertake their schoolwork, pens, protractors, etc.” (Crozier 1999b:325), it seemed obvious that they did not consider parents on equal terms and as true partners. This meant that the imagery of parents was one that was conditioned to see them within the bounds of auxiliary roles, both in the home and school context. This was evident in that many teachers failed to describe or acknowledge any role of parents in the “learning process” at school or recognise that they could contribute “something other than that on the teachers’ agenda” (Crozier 1999b:326). These implicit understandings seemed to have been strengthened and conditioned by the teachers’ views that parents had “poor education” and a majority of them held “a different set of values” to that of teachers (Crozier 1999b:326). In the context of my study, it is likely that many teachers may also echo the perspectives and experiences described above (see **Chapters Five and Six**).

In *Parents and Schools*, Gill Crozier (2000) develops and extends her three year empirical research based and drawn on a selected parent, teacher and related population of two secondary schools, located in two contrasting backgrounds to unpick and disentangle “the changing roles and relationships of parents, teachers and administrators and the consequences for children’s education.” In extending and developing her previous published research further, the author charts the contrasting sociological journeys of both middle-class and working-class parents, both mothers and fathers. She does this after foregrounding the policy perspectives and its implications for schools and parents in an environment of ‘marketisation’ and ‘consumerism’ and locating the debate within the contested terrains of roles, ‘responsibilisation,’ ‘normalisation,’ and the interplay of power between teachers and parents.

In contrasting parental interactions and interventions in their children’s education and schools, Crozier disentangles the patterns of parental involvement, demonstrating the ‘visibility’ and ‘overtly interventionist’ approaches and strategies of the middle-class and the apparent ‘passivity’ and ‘invisibility’ of working-class (seen by teachers as parental indifference and lack of support). However, unlike the perceived conjectures, she demonstrates that working-class parents “are supportive and watchful of their children’s progress” (2000:48).

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In mapping layers of influence upon parent involvement, Crozier makes the subtle obvious by using habitus and capital as conceptual tools to develop a portrait that criss-crosses through the communication and educational trajectories of both parents and teachers. In doing so, she not only charts the preconceived notions of parental deference and teacher authority, and unravels the contested terrains of boundaries (both visible and invisible) and marginalisation between teachers and parents, Crozier also addresses the various constraints upon parental involvement, and contrasts the way middle- and working-class parents deploy their social capital differently. However, in addition to giving teachers a space to raise their concerns and issues and in ‘managing the parents’ that under the banner of ‘surveillance’ does not create a conducive environment for participatory and democratic partnership, Crozier argues that under the seemingly functional relationship “is an underlying unease, if not at times an antagonism” (2000:90). However, her overarching conclusion is that in the face of the communication gap and not understanding working-class parents’ points of view and their practices that foregrounds the negative imagery of such parents, the onus of taking the initiative and developing partnerships with working-class parents falls on the shoulders of teachers. In addition to parent and teacher views, Crozier also highlights the views and experiences of students on a number of dimensions of parent-teacher relations that has a major role in structuring and patterning students’ education and lives.

Following in the footsteps of Crozier (2000), Vincent (2001) focused on the interplay between social class and parental agency to explore ‘parental voice’ in relations to secondary schools in two contrasting communities i.e. middle-class and working-class. Based on the levels of their intervention in the school, Vincent (2001) categorised her sample of 76 parents into three groups or cohorts i.e. as high, intermediate and low interveners; positioned along the seemingly active-passive continuum (Crozier 2000).

Drawing on the theoretical and analytical framework of Bourdieu, Vincent (2001:349) mapped the three cohorts according to their ‘social positioning,’ ‘habitus,’ ‘capital’ (social, cultural and material), ‘happenings’ (the issues and contexts), ‘parental agency’ (the way they deliberated and responded to various scenarios), and the nature of responses of the institutions concerned. Whilst the story is hardly new (Crozier 2005b), Vincent’s findings reiterate and strengthen that dividing teachers from parents

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there are “entrenched traditions of professional exclusivity and lay silence” (Crozier & Davies 2001:360).

In challenging the ‘cultural interference model,’ and the stereotyped notion of ‘hard to reach’ parents, Crozier and Davies (2007) conducted a two year qualitative study on Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. The authors considered parents’ views on their relations with school, their role in children’s education, and gathered data on the same from their children, together with the teachers’ perspectives. The authors conducted interviews with parents of children in primary, secondary, tertiary and higher levels of education. Whilst demonstrating with empirical evidence, that most parents were not ‘hard to reach,’ Crozier and Davies (2007) concluded that in essence it is the secondary schools that are actually ‘hard to reach’ for parents. Hence, when parents feel that in schools there is “a lack of sense of respect” and they “are not valued,” schools may therefore conjure and create “spaces of exclusion” and “unwelcome spaces” where few Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents may feel that they “have a voice” (Crozier & Davies 2007:311). Therefore, in the discourse of home-school relations the interplay of ethnicity, gender and race with class is of high significance, to which I now turn.

### **2.2.2 Gender, race and ethnicity**

In the educational research literature, researchers have empirically demonstrated that the discourse of gender, race and ethnicity intersect and interact with social class in a multitude of ways to structure and influence parent-teacher relations (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 1997). Here, of particular interest to my research is the issue of gender that involves girls and women (both teachers and mothers) and their role in the home and school contexts and related social arenas, which are shaped, structured and operated under patriarchal norms and setups, underpinned strongly by ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu 2001). However, ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ may also have relevance to, and reverberate with the respondents’ perspectives in Pakistan’s highly hierarchised and stratified society (Rahman 2004). Therefore, the working- and poor-class may not only be viewed in ‘othering’ roles (Crozier 2003), they may also be ‘othered’ (Crozier 2005c; Maxwell & Aggleton 2010) through the politics of ‘difference’ (Walsh 2007).

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A number of scholars have painstakingly and passionately demonstrated the nuances and structures that have a profound influence on the way gender, race and ethnicity are underplayed to dispossess, disempower and disadvantage a section or ‘class’ of people or parents in their various personal and social contexts (Crozier 1996, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Crozier & Davies 2007; David 1993; David *et al.* 1993; Lareau 1989, 2003; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Mirza 2009; Reay 1995a, 1998a, 1998b, 2004a, 2004c, 2004e, 2004f, 2005b; Reay *et al.* 2007; Vincent 1993, 1996a; Wright & Smith 1998). Whilst, in the preceding section, I have thrown some light on numerous dimensions of gender specific empirical literature involving women both in ‘mothering’ (Crozier 2005a; Reay 1998a) and ‘othering’ roles (Crozier 2003) and have tried to locate the relevant debate in the context of my study, here I extend the discussion further.

The discourse of gender centred around the dynamics of girls and women is an important and significant area of research in its own right as well as concerning parent-teacher relations and therefore has warranted much attention not only in the context of the ‘developed’ countries, but also and most importantly in the case of developing countries, such as Pakistan. Talk of gender naturally and unconsciously brings to mind issues of girls and women—the way social forces orchestrate and perpetuate a system of preordained and hence justified symbolic and ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu 2001)—who even in today’s developed world are shackled variously in both social and professional domains. Nevertheless, the debate around ‘gendering’ and ‘schooling’ (Connell *et al.* 1982; Reay 2004a) has primarily been concerned with unequal opportunities for boys and girls; though “inequalities” continue to persist, with a shift in emphasis on “the way schools reproduce the subordination of women” (Connell *et al.* 1982:173). The interplay between gender and inequalities for women are mediated through the fulcrum of power, which is strongly imbued in the social relations dynamics: the socio-historical construction of masculinity and femininity (Connell *et al.* 1982).

Therefore, power as a multifaceted entity may interact with a number of variables (such as class, capital) at various vantage points and unleash its force through the cracks and crevices of the weaker levees to overwhelm whatever comes in its way, for gaining authority and dominance. This, from a sociological and anthropological perspective may not only lead to ‘symbolic domination’ but also to perpetuate

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‘symbolic violence’ with almost full consent and complicity of the agents (Bourdieu 2001:37, 42). Vincent (1996a) has empirically demonstrated the power of power that underpins the ways women/mothers of various class fractions interact and mediate with the school and institutions and with one another that disadvantages a ‘class’ of mothers or ‘others,’ at the expense of others. Using the analogy of ‘his’ and ‘hers,’ Lareau (1989) argues that in the working-class (as well as to a greater extent in middle-class) families there is a clear division of labour that puts the burden of child-rearing and related most of the children’s school and education responsibilities on mothers. The centrality of social class as gendered therefore becomes evident not only in “the maintenance of educational differences” but also in “the reproduction of social inequality” (Reay 1998a:1) that contributes to rendering mothers/women invisible in their physical, social, emotional, psychological and mental labour they spend to support their children’s well being and education (Reay 1998a).

The differentiated nature of positional stances acculturated into the mental and social schemas of children have a profound influence on the way girls render themselves disadvantaged to bolster the power of boys; girls’ habitus therefore is socially embodied, structured and conditioned around the conception: it’s better being a boy (Reay 2001a:153, 164). Therefore, whilst the public and private discourses may propound for women and mothers a ‘free to choose’ choice, they have to wrestle with a range of constraints for their rights (David *et al.* 1997). Within both structural and moral constraints, over time mothers have to grapple with and experience issues of “bringing up children, from resources to negotiations about relationships and expectations about both the nature of family life, employment and their children’s place within the future” (David *et al.* 1997:397). Unlike fathers, mothers expend an intense emotional energy to engage with their children’s education in a multitude of ways, often at their personal cost (Reay 2004a). For both middle- and working-class mothers the intersection of emotional capital and social class and the mothering role highlight the cost of being ‘close-up,’ whilst men maintaining their privilege status remain ‘at a distance’ (Reay 2004a:71). The emotional capital that mothers expend:

... also uncovers a further feminist conundrum in which both middle-class mothers, in their pursuit of educational advantage for their children at the cost of their emotional wellbeing, and working-class mothers, constrained in ways which mitigate against the acquisition of both emotional and cultural capital, are at risk of disadvantaging their children, albeit in differing ways (Reay 2004a:71).

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Therefore, as a gendered division of labour, within the majority of families, children's schooling is primarily considered as the mother's responsibility (Reay 2005b). However, whilst mothers as educators may be more attuned to 'doing what comes naturally,' across the social class or ethnicity divide evidence suggests that there is very little difference among women in either the importance they attach to education or the mental energy they devote to their children's schooling (Reay 2005b:107). Yet, despite the physical and emotional stress and labour, maternal work in support of their children's education largely goes unacknowledged and their activities regarded as peripheral (Reay 2005b:113).

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that in the Western context, gender specific issues concerning girls, mothers and women have been analysed from a number of perspectives, and in different contexts, from various theoretical and methodological stances. The empirical research has revealed the important role that women play in social and cultural, and personal and public domains, concerning both their children and schools, and more holistically in social collectivistic terms. However, whilst social class plays a key role in 'othering' working- and poor-class women and mothers compared to their middle-class counterparts and schools, researchers have also documented that 'masculine' domination underpinned by a patriarchal psyche still perpetuates, in many subtle and overt manners, a cycle of disadvantage and inequality against the gendered 'othered' (Connell 2000, 2005, 2009).

In the context of Pakistan, both national and international literature reveals stark contrasts, inequalities and disadvantaged positions for both girls and women/mothers in their various personal, social and institutional spaces compared to their male counterparts, which has implications for both the education of girls and mothers' involvement with their children's education and relations with schools. At a regional level, in South Asia, home to one-fifth of the world's female population, gender based discrimination against girls and women are also rampant (UN 2001). A UNICEF's report also states, "...gender discrimination is firmly rooted in social and cultural beliefs" (Bellamy 2003).

Following the established traditions of a greater emphasis and focus on primary education, researchers, commentators and policy makers have mainly been concerned about issues and determinants regarding gender disparities for girls in education, and

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related issues for women and mothers. In looking at who gets primary education in Pakistan, Sathar and Lloyd (1994) looked at inequalities among and within families. Apart from identifying a number of factors (such as poverty, mothers' education, number of siblings) that contribute to inequalities and constraints upon education for all children, the authors found that, compared to boys, girls faced and were prone to considerable inequalities within the same household. For most (poor) parents, access to and availability of schools for their children in the catchment areas (especially in the rural areas) have been the major concerns, which specifically disadvantages girls as they are not sent to school because of a concern for their security and well being (Shami & Hussain 2005a).

In assessing gender and age cohort analysis in school transition in primary and secondary schools in Pakistan, Mahmood (2004) found from a census data on educational attainment that whilst gender gap narrowed in school attendance in urban areas, girls in rural areas were very much disadvantaged because of low school entries/attendance and termination of their schooling before primary education. Regarding school transition, the author found that those few fortunate girl students who are able to complete their primary education, "the chances of [them] staying through the secondary level are much higher, after which dropout accelerates rapidly" (Mahmood 2004:53).

In a policy research report on gender and development on Africa and South Asia, Filmer (1999) looked at the structure of social disparities in education, comparing the intersection of gender and wealth. The author found that in countries (like Pakistan, India) where there was a high degree of female disadvantage in enrolment, "wealth [interacted] with gender to exacerbate gaps in educational enrolment among the poor" (Filmer 1999:4). In Pakistan, the pattern of disadvantage for girls continues not only in the age group of 6 to 11 but also to the ages 12 to 14, reflecting a male-female gap of over twenty percentage points (Filmer 1999). What matters here is that when mothers are educated, there is more likelihood for the daughters to continue their education. This is significant and determines the importance of the role of mothering in their children's education and concerning the various aspects of schooling, which may include visits to school and liaising with teachers.

Researchers have also analysed the costing dimensions of gender differentials in primary education. In this regard, research shows that as greater investment in human

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and physical resources leads to greater provision and number of teachers and schools resulting in higher enrolment of children in school, stark disparities persist over the gender divide: there is “an over supply of schools for boys” compared to “below optimal levels in the context of girls” (Ismail 1996:848). However, whilst lately the Government of Pakistan has shown her commitment for gender aware policy through gender responsive budgeting initiative to query whether policies and their associated resource allocations are likely to reduce or increase gender inequalities, the report acknowledges that at present, “sharp gender disparities persist” (Mukhtar 2006:1).

The large gender gaps in educational outcomes for girls have also been linked to disparities in intra-household allocation of educational expenditure favouring males over females. In this regard, Aslam and Kingdon (2008:2573) found “significant pro-male biases in both the enrolment decision as well as the decision of how much to spend conditional on enrolment.” The authors argue that “investment motive” is the likely explanation for pro-male bias, owing to the consideration that in Pakistan’s patriarchal social fabric sons are a future asset and “old age support” (p. 2588).

In extending the above theme, Aslam (2009) sets out to explore gender bias in differential access and treatment of boys and girls to private (fee charging) and public (free, state) schools. She found that “boys are indeed more likely to be sent to private schools than girls within the household, so that differential school-type choice is an important channel of differential treatment against girls” (Aslam 2009:329). As private schools are more effective than public schools in the provision of mathematics and literacy skills, girls face gender bias both within their household and in terms of access to lower quality schooling (Aslam 2009). These findings seem to have theoretical and analytical relevance to my study. As such, pro-male bias may not only have implications for parents to give more attention and importance to sons and their education and schools related matters, but also the underlying structures of parental habitus and the focus of their capitals (both social and cultural) are more likely to advantage and privilege sons (see **Chapters Five-Eight**). Such dispositions and gendered biased culturally engrossed and improvised schemas will have a strong bearing on every aspect of parents and children’s lives.

In this regard, Winkvist and Akhtar (2000) found that the childbearing attitudes and practices in low-income families put girl child at a huge disadvantage, which also has consequences for mothers:

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Women frequently [express] a strong preference for sons, mostly for economic reasons, reflecting women's subordinate position in society and the low economic value placed on women's work. ... Mothers of daughters and women without children [speak] of harassment in the family as well as in society. (Winkvist and Akhtar 2000:73)

Resultantly, in the South Asian context, whilst also bearing the major burden of family protection and honour, girls and women play a subservient role in family and society; with exacerbating consequences for them not to know about their rights, they are prone to various forms of exploitation and therefore remain lower than that of boys and men (UN 2001).

In their research on and analysis of the interplay between policy and culture upon the differentials dynamics of girls' education and their access to schools in Pakistan, Lloyd *et al.* (2007) focused on the rich and poor continuum, and concluded that:

Despite the dramatic expansion of primary school availability and choice in Pakistan, the percentage of poor rural girls enrolled in school remains low. This finding may be partially explained by the fact that school choice has expanded most (through the establishment of private schools) in richer communities and in communities in which gender disparities in enrollment are narrower—that is, in communities in which girls' enrollment rates were higher to begin with. As a result, many of the poorest communities and the communities with the highest gender disparities still lack a girls' school. (Lloyd *et al.* 2007:116)

There seems a clear pattern here in the way the middle-class and working/poor-class divide further exacerbate class dichotomy and disadvantage the class or fraction of society which is in not “in the loop” (Hewlett & West 1998:153) and has not acquired a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990a).

However, amidst the rather gloomy and disturbing picture presented above, there is a glimmer and potential of hope and promise. In the context of Pakistan, researchers and authors have documented some promising practices for establishing and running schools through community and parental engagement (Bellamy 2003; Farah 1996; GoP 2004; Herz *et al.* 1991; Jamil 2002; Kim *et al.* 1998; Mashallah 2001; Rashid 2001; Sarwar 2006; Shams 2001; Stromquist & Murphy 1996; Zafar & Khan 2001). These have involved private, public and public-private partnership initiatives, to establish and operate schools with the help of community and parental involvement for better learning experiences for both boys and girls, and to reduce/remove gender disparity for girls, especially in the disadvantaged communities. These programmes and practices, as provincially localised and in some ways pocketed initiatives, show

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that even in the most unlikely situations and conservative places, successful schools can be established based on and driven by community and parental involvement that can override gender disparities for girls at astonishing rates.

Alongside gender, race and ethnicity are important issues that cut through the discourses of social class that has been shown to influence parent-teacher relations in numerous ways. The concepts of social justice and equality have been central to the way authors and researchers have looked into the ways people of different colour, background and ethnic origins are ‘othered’ and ‘stereotyped’ (Crozier 2003, 2005c).

Researchers have documented and shown the myriad ways in which the intersection of race, ethnicity and social class structure different pathways and experiences for racial and ethnic minority people with varying backgrounds (both middle- and working-class) in many subtle and overt manner in their personal and social relations with the dominant ‘others.’ This involves both informal and formal exchanges within institutions such as schools (Boethel 2003; Crozier 2005a, 2005b, 2009; Crozier & Davies 2006, 2007; Crozier *et al.* 2008a; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Reay 1998a, 2004e, 2005a, 2007; Reay *et al.* 2007; Reay *et al.* 2008; Wright & Smith 1998).

Most of the above stated studies have been conducted in multicultural contexts in ‘developed societies,’ (involving an array of people from diverse ethno-cultural and racial backgrounds). They propound and practice equality, justice and fairly play, under the banners of participatory democracy and social justice, which in many ways may not be seen as remotely having any relevance within the context of Pakistan. Yet, no credible research is known to have been undertaken in the way the specifics of race and ethnicity intersects with social class to structure dispositions and practices of people interacting in various contexts in Peshawar, specifically in the context of parent-teacher relations. Research and experience suggests that the seemingly singular race and ethnic origin of Pashtuns may be as diverse and complicated as the ones in the multicultural contexts.

As I alluded to in the beginning of this section, racial denominations and ethnic affiliations may not only cut through the social class dynamic through which people may be ‘othered,’ such dispositions may also have implications for the working-class and poor parents and their children. With specific trades, professions and in menial jobs (such as cobblers, masons) and because being ‘poor and illiterate’ (Khan *et al.*

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2005), the parents may be seen and treated in society as of lower social class. Their children in school may have a difficult life. They are subjected to harsh treatment and punishment, discrimination and abuse, both by their peers and teachers (GoP 2009). These could also include, tweaking ear and slapping, chaining and fettering children, “‘*murgha banana*’, a punishment reported in North West Pakistan where the child is made to squat down, buttocks raised ready to be beaten while holding on to their ears with their hands” (Dunne *et al.* 2003:12).

### **2.2.3 Social and cultural capital**

A review of the literature reveals that using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies researchers have empirically demonstrated that social class and social and cultural capital intersect to structure and influence parent-teacher relations in a multitude of ways for different class backgrounds (Hango 2007; Horvat *et al.* 2003; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Lareau & Shumar 1996; Lareau 1987; Pichler & Wallace 2009; Ream & Palardy 2008; Reay 2004b). In this section, I first briefly discuss the literature that has utilised the concepts of social class and social capital before moving on to explore the interplay between social class and cultural capital, with an attempt to relate the discussion to the focus of the present study.

In regard to the interplay of social class with social capital, Lareau and Shumar (1996:24), whilst being critical of the literature for missing the differences, take into account “parents’ and guardians’ educational skills, occupational and economic flexibility, social networks, and positions of power” to explore family-school relationships of parents of middle- and working-class, using ethnographic methods. The authors found that parents of the two backgrounds differed in their encounters with school and teachers, owing to their differences in educational skills and social resources. They suggest that instead of ignoring these differences, parent inclusive policies for minimising social inequality in schooling need to be ensured.

In a similar vein, Horvat *et al.* (2003) focused on parental (social) networks to examine social class differences in the relations between families and schools. Regarding the characteristics of social networks that parents deploy in relation to their children’s schools, Horvat *et al.* (2003) explain the underlying differences in structures of parental networks that middle- and working-class parents use when they are faced with problematic situations in school. Compared to their working- and poor

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counterparts, the authors argue that middle-class parents tended to react collectively, drew on ‘webs of social ties’ to invoke informal contacts with teachers, and deployed their social skills, “expertise, or authority needed to contest the judgments of school officials” (Horvat *et al.* 2003:319). The density and ‘strength of social ties’ and ‘networks’ (Lin 2001) that one can deploy in their encounters with teachers and in school therefore suggest that middle-class parents can make sure that their children’s learning, education and socialisation is smooth and free of problems, and therefore to ensure that they remain ‘ahead of the pack’ (Tischler 1996).

However, it is not only the middle-class parents that may be able to instigate their social capital to their own and their children’s advantage. A longitudinal quantitative study of children’s data suggest that in socioeconomically disadvantaged homes, parental involvement with children can mediate some of the constraints of less financial capital (Hango 2007). In this regard, Hango found that:

Father *interest* in education reduces the impact of economic hardship on education the most, especially at age 11. Both father and mother *interest* in school at age 16 have the *largest direct impact* on education. The frequency of *outings* with mother at age 11 also has a larger direct impact on education than *outings* with father, however, neither compare with the reduction in the effect of economic hardship as a result of father *interest* in school. (2007:1371, my emphasis)

Two aspects can be construed from the above quotation. One pertains to parental instigation or developing structures of social networks by engaging with children and their education matters. This conscious parental engagement may require them develop to dispositions and structures (acquired through engagements with various social fields) to support and help children. In the same process, also the parents may give or transfer to children the necessary social tools and skills that they may be able to use, build on, replicate and adapt in various social contexts. In this way, the parents also give children the understanding into the importance of education and of certain targets to achieve. Secondly, and most importantly of particular interest to the present research is the finding that both mother and father showing interest and engaging with their secondary school children has the ‘largest impact on education.’ Whilst it is widely agreed and empirical evidence supports it that, compared to primary schools, parental interaction with their children and their children’s secondary school is negligible, the evidence presented in the above quotation supports the importance and

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significance of parental involvement at the secondary school level, which has been the focus of some researchers (e.g. Crozier 2000; Reay 2005b).

Following Hango (2007), Ream and Palardy (2008) used survey data to examine whether some kinds of parental social capital advantaged middle-class children educationally compared to their working-class counterparts. The authors conclude that whilst “larger stocks of parental social capital accompany higher rungs on the social class ladder, its educational utility is less clearly associated with class status” (p.238). This reaffirms Hango’s (2007) findings and the above discussion that as some working-class parents may not be economically privileged, they may still be able to create social networks with their children, and encourage and morally or in whatever manner they can support them in education related matters, both at home and at school. For instance, in the context of Pakistan, some working-class/poor parents may not have comparable social capital with that of their middle-class counterparts. However, due to their diverse social and professional experience of working with (middle-class) people of diverse social capitals and by visiting an array of places because of their nature of job (soldiers, airmen), they may use that experience and social capital to their own and their children’s advantage by investing that social capital in their children’s education.

In a similar vein, Pichler and Wallace (2009), in focusing on the interplay between social stratification and social capital across 27 European countries, found the efficacy of social stratification determinants to understand social capital at a country and an individual level. Concurring with Ream and Palardy (2008), Pichler and Wallace’s (2009:319) overarching conclusion is that whilst the upper echelons of society possess higher levels of social capital, in countries where inequality levels are high the differences amongst the classes are high too. As a developing country, in Pakistan social stratification not only creates classes and castes, leading to division between the rich and poor (Barth 1960), this also has implications for the day-to-day survival of the poor and their children’s education.

Concerning cultural capital, researchers have empirically demonstrated that the interplay between social class and cultural capital structures and influences parent-teacher interactions and relations in numerous ways. From a qualitative study of middle- and working-class parent relationships with school, Lareau (1987), whilst acknowledging the role of social capital in the matrix of relations, found that due to

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the unequal distribution of and access to resources, middle-class parents were better equipped to comply and respond to teachers' requests compared to their working-class counterparts. However, what appears evident from her findings is that she does not go beyond the binaries of middle-class and working-class continuum to analyse the implicit structural dynamics of cultural capital that make up, structure and influence the way different parents use their resources differently.

Using race, class and cultural capital as theoretical tools, Lareau and Horvat (1999) conducted a case study of parental involvement in a primary school, focusing on differences between and practices of middle-class and working-class/poor (black and white) parents to explore the underlying class stratification, race inequalities and reproduction issues. The authors found that institutional racism existed in the school as some black middle-class parents benefitted from their class position but they "still [faced] an institutional setting that implicitly (and invisibly) [privileged] white families" (Lareau & Horvat 1999:49).

Following this, Reay (2004b) focused her attention on the interplay between education policies and cultural capital. In doing so, she wanted to move away from the dominant research focus on 'high status cultural participation' to a much 'broader understanding of cultural capital' by "developing a conceptualization that stresses the micro interactional processes through which individuals comply (or fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of schooling" (p. 73).

Against the backdrop of policy initiatives and increased parental involvement in schools of their children, Reay (2004b) used data from various research projects to demonstrate the many ways in which cultural capital reproduced educational advantage for the middle-class parents. She concludes that this, under the policy initiative of retaining middle classes within state schooling, further exacerbated class inequalities for the working-class parents. Reay's underlying argument is based on the incompatibility between the middle-class and working-class children in working and structuring their practices and interaction within shared spaces, which naturally benefitted middle-class children because of their appropriation of cultural capital and thus disadvantaged working-class children.

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### 2.3 Capital, *habitus* and *field* and parent-teacher relations

In this section, my aim is to highlight the dearth of research in the adoption and use of the theoretical tools of capital, habitus and field together in research studies. Whilst a detailed discussion of these theoretical and analytical tools follows in **Chapter Three**, here my focus is to present a concise summary of the way different researchers have used these notions in their studies, individually as well as in conjunction with one another. In so doing, I want to highlight the research gaps in the use of the three notions, together in educational and sociological research specifically and in the rest of social sciences research generally. Here, I agree with and support the views of Bennett *et al.* (2009:14) who argue that “subsequent scholarship has usually focused on one or other of these issues [habitus, capital and field], so failing to do justice to Bourdieu’s overall framework.”

A review of the literature on home-school relations and related research fields reveals that ‘capitals’ have been the ‘front-runners,’ ‘first port of call’ and as a tradition of the majority of researchers in researching various problems of interest. Undoubtedly, whilst such research is by no means less important, the sense one gets is that by focusing on one particular concept, it seems the other notions are pushed to one side, with an assumption of their implicit role in the various social equations and interactions.

#### 2.3.1 Capitals: cultural, social and others

This section will briefly highlight the range and scope of the literature that has used the capitals with a range of variables, both in education and related fields. In reviewing the literature, I found that cultural capital has undoubtedly been one of the most popular conceptual tools of Bourdieu that scholars have used in their research variously.

In their critical assessment of the use of the notion of cultural capital in educational research, Lareau and Weininger (2003:567) trace its import into the English language. The authors argue that whilst studies draw on the dominant interpretation of cultural capital underpinned by ‘highbrow’ aesthetic culture and related competences and knowledge, Bourdieu’s reference to the notion emphasised “the capacity of a social class to “impose” advantageous standards of evaluation on the educational institution.” This is what I want to argue in this thesis.

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Within educational and sociological research, researchers have shown a particular interest in the interplay of cultural capital and student achievement or grade scores in school, with a focus on the underlying determinants of social class and patterns of and differences in the way parents and teachers interact with each other. In this regard, DiMaggio (1982) analysed the impact of status culture participation on high school student grades. Katsillis and Rubinson (1990), in the context of Greece, evaluated the effects of student achievement through cultural capital theory to judge the educational reproduction determinants. Lee and Bowen (2006) researched how parental involvement and cultural capital mediated to influence the achievement gap among primary school children. De Graaf *et al.* (2000) claimed to refine the notion of cultural capital by analysing how parental cultural capital influenced educational attainment of children in the Netherlands.

In a similar vein, within the schooling dimension, other researchers have pursued issues of race, ethnicity and gender to explore how cultural capital interacts to structure parent-teacher relations and their interaction and communication differently. Concerning this, Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (1996), and Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) took race and cultural capital as primary determinants to investigate and determine the persistent inequalities and achievement returns in differences in educational resources and their trends in the US. In a similar vein, in the context of Dutch education system, Driessen (2001) analysed educational achievement scores of ethnic minority children using cultural capital and related variables and found no mediating effect of resources, whilst arguing that in research and practice ethnic groups should not be treated as a homogenous group.

About gender dynamics and cultural capital, Silva (2005) reviewed Bourdieu's key texts and other literature by feminist academics in the area of family, gender and the body. Her main argument centres on a consideration of "contemporary feminist analyses of the family and home life and their significance for a renewed theory of cultural capital" (Silva 2005:83). With their focus on involvement and relations between family-school relationship, Lareau (1987) and Symeou (2007) compared and contrasted class and status symbols of middle-class and working-class parents through the variable of cultural capital and report that whilst most parents are supportive of their children's education, they differ according to the material, structural and familial support they offer to their children. This is where Diane Reay (2004b) voices

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concerns about the education policy implications of retaining middle-class children in the state education system, which she argues further disadvantages working-class children because of the dominant cultural capital appropriation of the middle-class children in their shared spaces.

Spillane *et al.* (2003) in researching instructional leadership, examined how through the process of social construction teachers constructed images of influential others as leaders owing to the quality and quantity of valued forms of capital (such as cultural, social) they possessed. Whilst the authors argue, “the construction of leadership for instruction is often situated in various types of interactions (e.g., subject area) and varies by the leaders’ position,” teachers’ construction of school principals as leaders is largely based on their cultural capital and other teachers as leaders on the basis of their human, social and cultural capital (Spillane *et al.* 2003:1). These findings may also resonate with the experiences of teachers and principals in my study as within the largely hierarchical institutional setup, principals’ and teachers’ possession (or otherwise) of cultural capital (along with other capitals) may have huge implications for instructional quality, learning experiences and school atmosphere (see **Chapters Five and Six**, especially **Section 5.3**).

Concerning social capital, ever since Bourdieu (1973, 1977, 1984, 1986) and Coleman (1987, 1988) and later Putnam (1995, 2000, 2001) articulated the concept, used and propounded it in the field of education in particular and others in general, the research community has witnessed a phenomenal increase in the use and adoption of the concept in an array of topics and research areas. A review of the literature therefore reveals that alongside cultural capital, social capital has been one of the most widely used (sometimes misused) conceptual tools in many research areas, including education and sociology. In this regard, Fulkerson and Thompson (2008) have traced the contested nature of the concept from its evolution and have provided a meta-analysis of its various definitions and trends. In addition, in a collaborative literature review of the notion of social capital developed by the founding fathers (i.e. Bourdieu, Coleman & Putnam), McGonigal *et al.* (2007) established its relevance to the changing educational landscape in Scotland, with a specific focus for social inclusion and changing school contexts and opportunities for growth. In educational research, Dika and Singh (2002) provide a critical synthesis of the applications of social capital.

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In a similar vein, Croll (2004) applied the concept of social capital to explore the differences between families and educational outcomes. Penuel *et al.* (2009) and Symeou (2008) used the concept to analyse professional interactions of teachers in a school and to evaluate how teachers and parents differed in urban and rural areas in their use of their social networks in Cyprus, respectively. Using ‘class’ and social capital as their frame, Horvat *et al.* (2003) explored differences in the relations and interaction of middle/working/poor parents and parent networks with schools; Ream and Palardy (2008) focused on re-examining social class differences in the availability and the educational utility of parental social capital.

However, in addition to the differences in interactional dynamics of parents about their use of social capital with schools, researchers have deployed the concept to discover its implications for various school-related academic and personal aspects of children. Concerning this, in exploring parental involvement as social capital, McNeal Jr. (1999) explored differential effects of parental involvement on children’s science achievement (cognitive), truancy and dropping out (behavioural outcomes). In contending that parental involvement is greatly associated with explaining behaviour but not cognitive outcomes, McNeal Jr. (1999) concurs with Lareau (1989) that middle-class and working-class parents differ in terms of the way they deploy and appropriate their cultural and social capital, thus privileging and advantaging upper class students in schools.

In a similar vein, Dee *et al.* (2006) set out to explore differences in the effects of school size on parent involvement and social capital. The authors found that small schools are more effective in promoting parental involvement in schools as well as engagement with the broader community, with specific benefits for smaller high schools in the rural communities for greater parental involvement activities and promotion of some measures of social capital. Given this background, in the context of Pakistan, Salfi and Saeed (2007) also found significant correlation between school size and school culture (social capital) and their implications for student achievement and argued that small schools displayed positive school culture and fared well compared to medium and large schools. From the perspective of parental involvement and social capital in Pakistan, these and similar findings may have huge implications for better parent-teacher relations and involvement in schools, with positive

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influences for an all round development of students (see **Chapters Five-Eight** for related findings and discussion).

However, for such a social capital to develop in schools between parents and teachers, Helliwell and Putnam (1999) argue that the variables of ‘trust’ and ‘social engagement’ are key aspects, which depend on increase in average education levels. This might be an issue in the context of Pakistan, as given the low literacy rates and education, and lack of sound social and public delivery mechanisms and institutional structures parents and teachers may grapple with the issues of ‘trust’ and ‘interaction.’ With a focus on school choice and its relationship with social capital and parental involvement, Cox and Witko (2008:142) used longitudinal study data to argue that “actively choosing a child’s school does not make parents more likely to participate in school activities,” rather some school-initiated activities tend to increase parental involvement in school.

However, in addition to cultural and social capital as the variants of economic capital, other variants (such as linguistic or emotional capital) have also been used increasingly in research, in conjunction with other related concepts. In her research on mothers’ interactions with teachers, Reay (1999) used the notion of linguistic capital to analyse home-school relationships. Similarly, Peterson and Heywood (2007) adopted a three pronged approach to analyse the contributions of minority families’ linguistic, social and cultural capital concerning their children’s literacy development. In this regard, the authors considered the voices of parents, teachers and principals and found that parents provided reading material and supported their children, whilst the schools and teachers “showed interest in linguistic diversity and changed practices and school structures to accommodate the cultures, languages, customs, and values of immigrant families” (Peterson & Heywood 2007:517). Wong (1998) in exploring multidimensional family influences on children’s educational attainment used an amalgam of capitals (human, financial, social and cultural), and laid claims to expanding the theoretical horizons of the notions of the founding fathers (Coleman & Bourdieu). The author concludes by speculating that whilst each component may independently influence children’s educational attainment, “there may also be an interaction effect between the parents’ social and human capital in the conversion process” (Wong 1998:1). In a similar vein, Parcel and Dufur (2001) investigated student maths and reading achievement by using the notions of family and school

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capital. In their analysis of a longitudinal survey data of youth, the authors found strong family capital effects on children's achievement whereas school capital effects were modest in size and suggested the usefulness of investigating school and family capital as parallel concepts.

### **2.3.2 *Habitus***

This section will briefly look at the range and scope of the literature that has used the notion of habitus in its own right or with other related concepts, specifically concerning the field of education and related fields generally. In reviewing the literature, one can find that not only the notion of habitus has been the subject of persistent debate and critical appraisal (Lau 2004) specifically aimed at the writings of Bourdieu, but it also appears that some authors have used the concept inconsistently and incoherently without proper and strong theoretical groundings (e.g. Dumais 2002, 2006).

However, Roy Nash (1999) provides a powerful rebuttal to silence the critics, who use and direct their criticism without much and proper understanding of Bourdieu's (and others who use the concept) writing on habitus. In so doing, Nash (1999:184) structures a strong and convincing argument that explains in subtle detail the role that habitus plays as "internationalised principles" as well as in embodied form in 'generating practices' and concludes with a bold message that "Without concepts—the tools of thought—we will not make much progress" (p. 185).

In educational research, numerous authors have used the notion of habitus in a numbers of ways. Diane Reay (1995b) used it to analyse interaction between mothers and teachers in primary classrooms. Dumais (2002) employed habitus in combination with cultural capital to throw light on the issues of gender and school success. Following this, Dumais (2006) studied patterns of early childhood cultural capital and parental habitus and teacher perceptions of these and claimed that definition of cultural capital may not be appropriate for the study of young children and found that parental expectation of their children attaining a degree was one aspect of parental habitus that consistently reflected in teachers' positive evaluations.

In her three part paper, Reay (2004b) develops an understanding of habitus by drawing on Bourdieu's writing before moving on to critique educational literature that, she argues, overlays their analyses with the theoretical concepts (such as habitus,

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cultural capital) and lastly draws on research examples to illustrate the use of habitus in educational research. Bland (2004) uses working-class students' voices to examine how despite their socioeconomically disadvantaged life trajectories, the students managed to steer their way through secondary schools into tertiary education, with a change in their habitus.

In his research on the concept of educated person (an aspect of habitus) Nash (2002) explored perceptions of middle-class and working-class secondary students. The author argues that the personal dispositions of students of which "aspiration, academic self-concept and perception of schooling" are important characteristics, "are elements of the stratified self [possessed and used differently by the way students bring and make use of the dynamics of their class and habitus in education], unified by an overarching concept of education" (p. 27). The conception of education sets the desirability to be educated with the essentiality of certain desired success, which Nash (2002:27) argues, "need to be founded on the educational necessary as real knowledge."

Lawler (2004:110) uses the concept of habitus to explore the underlying power, resistance and political struggles of two mothers' protests against the backdrop of a contested housing issue of offenders within their communities. The author uses class and gender as the axes around which representations of femininities and their related identities are drawn not as experienced subjectivities but rather in terms of "identities *conferred* on subjects" (Lawler 2004:110). In doing so, she demonstrates that whilst the working-class mothers were successful to claim authority despite all the odds, but "their actions subsequently became annulled through a reassertion of the doxic understandings of their persons that 'forbade' their actions in the first place" (Lawler 2004:124). In a rather different field than education i.e. organisation studies, Mutch (2003) explored the work of public house managers using the notion of communities of practice and its interplay with the concept of habitus. The author contrasts two broad groups of managers – one a predominantly male camp employed through traditional route, with skilled working-class origins and the other a much more heterogeneous group that also relied heavily on women role. Mutch (2003:396) charts their sociological journeys by positioning or locating the participants' practices within their working environment that is structured and influenced by their respective habituses given the various and contextual historical differences between them.

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### 2.3.3 Field: with *habitus* and capitals

In this section, my focus is to discuss briefly the literature that has made use of the notion of field together with the concepts of habitus and capital. In my literature search and in reviewing the literature on the concept of field, I found that in educational and sociological research some researchers have made use of these concepts, with a diverse research focus but with a specific interest on the topics pertaining to primary and secondary schools. Similarly, other fields of interest where scholars have deployed these notions as conceptual and analytical tools include higher education; class, culture and stratification studies; organisational analysis; politics; personal finance; career decision making; juridical field; social work; sport; and language. Moreover, whilst some writers have attempted to rearticulate and explain the field theory, have traced its implications in sociology and have used it as a conjugant in relation to other conceptual tools, others have adopted a critical stance to analyze the concept from a number of theoretical standpoints.

As indicated above, in relation to sociology of education and educational studies, researchers have deployed and used variously the notion of field as a conceptual and analytical tool along with the concepts of habitus and capital to study a range of issues. These include mothers' involvement in primary schools, representation of class and race in inner city schooling, the interplay between multiethnic working-class and white middle-class dynamics in schooling (Reay 1998b; Reay 2004e; Reay *et al.* 2007), class strategies and educational market (Ball 2003) and issues of disability and inclusion (Blackmore 2007). In addition, other studies that have made extensive use of these notions include school transfer and mathematics learning (Noyes 2004), the interplay of identity, culture and mathematics in school (George 2007), a comparative study of family learning programmes (Rose 2008) and the influence and interplay of regional culture and rurality on educational choices of students (Atkin 2002).

Concerning higher education, Reay *et al.* (2005) used the concepts to investigate the issues of social class, race and gender. Following this, with a focus on the interplay between widening participation and social class, Byrom (2008) explored higher education choice of students through their respective situated class based positions. Thorley (2009) investigated student experiences of further education provision using tools of habitus, capital and field. Reay *et al.* (2009) in a recent sociological research

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explored working-class student voices in elite universities and interrogated the underlying implications.

However, in stratification studies, positioning class and culture as their unit of analysis, scholars have used the conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field to explore the deeply ingrained issues of sociological importance. Concerning this, in *Class, Self, Culture*, Skeggs (2004) explores the interplay between social class and middle-class practices and argues “how class is made and given value through culture, how different classes become attributed with value and how culture is deployed both as a resource and as a form of property” (Reay 2005c:139). In doing so, the author goes “underneath the layers of dissembling that cloak middle-class habitus” (Reay 2005c:142) and addresses the issues that concerns recognising “working-class cultural capital” (Reay 2005c:141) by infusing a discussion of how field plays its part in the entire network of exchanges and value appropriation. In a similar vein, Bennett *et al.* (2009) write about *Culture, class, distinction*, which is the culmination of a research project on *Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion: A Critical Investigation*. The authors follow in the footsteps of the seminal works of Pierre Bourdieu to document empirically a number of culture and class related practices within the British context, by deploying the master concepts of cultural capital, field and habitus (Gibson 2010).

As indicated above, besides afore discussed areas, the popularity and use of the notions of habitus, field and capital has touched a number of corresponding and related fields of research. Briefly, these include organisational studies (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008; Swartz 2008), local politics (Stokke 2002), personal finance (Aldridge 1998), career decision making (Hodkinson 1999; Hodkinson & Sparkes 1997). Bourdieu himself has made extensive use of the concept of field and related others in a paper titled “The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of Juridicial Field” (Bourdieu 1987). In addition, the concepts have been used in range of other diverse research areas including social work (Houston 2002), sociological study of sport (Tomlinson 2004), practices of language (Hanks 2005), and in diversity management research (Tatli 2008).

Whilst some authors have attempted to rearticulate and explain the field theory (Martin 2003), mapped how Bourdieu and his conceptual tools fared in American sociology (Sallaz & Zavisca 2007), others have attempted to wed his tools to variants of capital i.e. emotional capital (Zembylas 2007). Some have successfully stretched

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his project of reflexivity to issues of ‘disembodiment’ and ‘disembedded’ in gender studies (McNay 1999). Still others, with a social and feminist theoretical lineage and frame, besides explicating the “main ways in which ‘reflexivity’ is deployed in current sociological writing distinguishing between reflexive sociology and a sociology of reflexivity,” have applied Bourdieu reflexive sociological approach to study “young women in difficult circumstances, ‘on the margins’ of education and work” (Kenway & McLeod 2004:525). However, whilst there are many critics of Bourdieu and of his sociological project, his work has been evaluated critically for “the tension between its critical intentions and its leanings towards sociological reductionism (Sayer 1999:403). At this critical juncture, I now move on to discuss the dynamics of power relations between parents and teachers.

#### **2.4 Power dynamics and parent-teacher relations**

Power dynamics is at the heart of the relations between parents and teachers; it is not only embedded in the class and status symbols of the stakeholders, but also the relative positions of the agents in the given social and institutional spaces position them to deploy and appropriate power in numerous ways. Although the literature that I review here is from the developed countries of the world, especially the USA, the UK and Australia, the majority of issues that broadly underpin power dynamics between parents and teachers may be generic and therefore may resonate with the experiences of both parents and teachers from developing countries such as Pakistan.

Some recent empirical research has looked into the role of power dynamics between parents and teachers from a number of dimensions. These include, for instance, school culture (Das 2007); parent roles, access to power, and practices of inclusions and exclusions (Abrams & Gibbs 2002); issues of power, trust and partnerships (McGrath 2007); culture and relationships grounded in elements of status and power (Lasky 2000); and parent empowerment and school reforms (Fine 1993). Whilst much of the work on power dynamics between parents and teachers is positioned in class and cultural issues (Lewis & Forman 2002), there is also literature that considers the role of ‘storming parents’ (Ranson *et al.* 2004) and that which addresses issues of powerlessness in professional and parent partnerships (Todd & Higgins 1998).

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### 2.4.1 The role of culture and relationships

Although not specifically taking the perspective of parents in the power dynamics equation in schools, Das (2007) explores the theme of the ‘practice of power,’ in her case study of four schools, which concerns teacher culture and its links with classroom cultures. In attempting to find any patterns in the interactions between the members of teaching staff in their respective schools and between the teachers and students in the classrooms regarding power dynamics, Das (2007) discerns ‘control’ and ‘autonomy’ as distinguishing patterns in her study schools. This appears to suggest that in school cultures and classroom cultures, where teachers and schools exercise power in ways that limit and constrain the self expression of the agents involved, ‘control’ will not only have implications for student learning but will also have consequences for positive school culture. Similarly, in school cultures and structures that are built on mutual trust and understanding as the basis of the ‘practice of power,’ the prevalence of ‘autonomy’ is likely to result in positive learning experiences for the pupils and a better working environment for both teachers and parents (Das 2007).

In her research on the cultural and emotional politics of teacher-parent interactions, Lasky (2000) conducted interviews with fifty-three primary and secondary teachers and analysed their interview responses that were based on negative and positive emotions pertaining to the teachers’ interactions with parents. Lasky (2000:856) found that parent-teacher interactions were “shaped by influences of culture and relationship, which were also inextricably interconnected with elements of status and power.” Whilst strongly grounding her work in the culture of schools and emotions of teachers through/with which teachers primarily operate and interact in the schools and with parents, Lasky examined two aspects of parent-teacher interactions i.e. relationship and power.

Concerning ‘relationship,’ Lasky found that, except in a few cases, much of the interaction with parents of both elementary and secondary teachers was episodic. This in many cases occurred informally on the school premises such as when parents volunteered in classrooms, attended fund raising or sports events or when children had problems such as discipline or attendance issues or of low academic achievement. Lasky provides a useful distinction between the terms ‘interaction’ and ‘relationship.’ She argues that interaction happens in formal and mechanistic communication, which

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is sporadic, episodic and governed by rules. However, relationship is a kind of communication that is qualitatively different, which involves “more sustained contact, equality, fluidity, increased depth of shared meaning, values, goals and affinity” (Lasky 2000:849). This may imply that when parents and teachers have an understanding which is based on the ideology and practice of ‘separate spheres of influence’ (Epstein 1995), they may rarely interact and communicate with one another and their relations may be marred by mutual distrust and contested points of view. However, considering ‘overlapping spheres of influence’ (Epstein 1995) as the basis of their philosophy and practice that represent shared values, commitment, and a sense of purpose, parents and teachers may have minimum friction in their relations and may work collaboratively and mutually towards positive partnership.

However, it seems evident from these findings that in schools and cultures where there is sufficient understanding and awareness of parental background factors and of how to interact closely with different (especially the working-class) parents, there are teachers who still hold stereotypical views about parents and see them as uncaring, irresponsible, not supportive, and not respectful of teachers’ professional judgement (Lasky 2000). Such teachers see parents as ‘hard-to-reach’ which in many ways may not be the case (Crozier & Davies 2007).

Lasky (2000) found three different aspects of power dynamics between teachers and parents in her study. The first pertained to ‘normative’ aspect of the power dynamic, which entailed judging parents according to a range of norms that were grounded in the teachers’ moral purposes and institutional norms. Those parents who appeared to fulfil these criteria elicited positive emotions like pride, happiness and satisfaction in teachers’ responses. However, when parents were a source of conflict and negative emotions, teachers classified them as “difficult,” “not normal,” “uncaring,” and expressed their feelings “to the point of incredulity, exasperation and even disgust” (Lasky 2000:851). What seems clear here is that teachers and parents may hold and practice differently the love and care they have for children. Differences in the points of view of parents and teachers may not mean that parents do not care and support their children, but that they “simply love their child and express their parenting in a different way” (Lasky 2000:852). However, Lasky found that generally teachers expected that parents comply with the institutional norms of appropriate behaviour,

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which was particularly noticeable when issues of social class and status were involved.

The second aspect of power dynamics that Lasky found in her data pertained to surveillance, which she argues is fully embedded and integrated through human relations into the hierarchical forms of institutional settings. Since surveillance depends on individuals, “it operates in a network of relations from top to bottom, from bottom to top, and laterally” (Lasky 2000:853). This means that whilst surveillance as a factor of power dynamic may be a source of tension and friction between teachers and parents, it may also act as a neutralising agent to keep in check excesses and transgressions of the stakeholders. Lasky found that parental surveillance was an important factor through which teachers regulated the behaviour of both parents and their students. However, parents too were reported to judge teachers according to “norm-based criteria of appropriate behaviour” and they relied on surveillance and the authority of principals to hold teachers accountable (Lasky 2000:854).

According to Lasky (2000:854), teacher professionalism represents the third component of power dynamics, which pertains to “the authority and power teachers believe they hold over parents due to their professional status.” The power dynamics of teacher professionalism may have different implications depending on how it is interpreted, enacted and applied in relation to parents and others concerned. Whilst drawing on the works of various authors who document various forms of teacher professionalism that ranges between traditional and indifferent orientations to flexible, practical and postmodern forms, Lasky emphasises that teacher professionalism is not a static or absolute term, rather it changes and is redefined as the circumstances and forces in and around the workspaces change. However, her findings resonate with similar literature that supports that “teachers’ beliefs in ‘teacher-as-expert’ model” creates “a perceived hierarchy of knowledge, value and status that affects teachers’ willingness to collaborate with parents as equals” (Lasky 2000:855), which leads to communication barriers between parents and teachers. However, where there are more flexible or open notions of teacher professionalism, it can facilitate communication and mutual understanding between teachers and parents (Lasky 2000). Therefore, in power relations between parents and teachers, trust, partnerships and quality of interpersonal exchanges are of importance.

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#### **2.4.2 The role of trust and interpersonal exchanges**

In their work on school improvement, Bryk and Schneider (2002) focused on exploring the notion of relational trust (a concept closely related to social capital) in the interpersonal social exchanges in school communities i.e. between teachers/professionals, parents and students. Whilst their analysis was based on exploring the notion of social trust in the mutual exchanges of all the stakeholders involved (i.e. teacher-teacher, teacher-principal, teacher-student and teacher-parent relations and social exchanges), Bryk and Schneider (2002) found asymmetrical power relations that characterised the school communities, with no one enjoying complete dominance. However, concerning teacher-parent relations, the authors found strong asymmetrical power relations, due to the differences in the knowledge and skills (cultural capital) that teachers have to help children learn: “this imbalance places poor parents in a subordinate status vis-à-vis their children’s teachers in terms of selecting appropriate actions to advance student learning” (Bryk and Schneider 2002:27). As a result, such parents show high dependence on school staff concerning their children’s education (Bryk and Schneider 2002), and defer to teacher authority. Since substantial power asymmetries exist between teacher-parent relations, Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue further that the responsibility of initiating actions that reduce parental vulnerability in their mutual exchanges falls on the shoulders of teachers and others concerned in the school. This suggests that there is a need for parental empowerment.

However, even in a well-engaged parent and teacher community, research suggests that there may be subtle ways in which issues of power and trust are at stake. From the perspective of early childhood education, McGrath (2007) explored daily interactions and exchanges between mothers and teachers to examine aspects of parent-teacher partnerships and parental involvement that she argues are absent in the current literature. From her ethnographic case study findings, she found that mothers and teachers were ambivalent partners and their relationships revolved around issues of power and trust that had implications for partnership between parents and teachers.

McGrath (2007) found that trust and power dynamics between mothers and teachers were intricately connected to, and derived from, the way teachers held information about the children. It means that the relative positions of both the teachers and mothers (insofar as their respective spaces, responsibilities, and interests are

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concerned) seem to have important implications for the way interactions and relations between parents and teachers are enacted and shaped. What seems important here is that although the mothers were socially, culturally and economically advantaged, they had to trust the teachers regarding their children's care and wellbeing, which enabled the teachers to have and exercise more power (especially in the classroom) during their interaction with the mothers.

What seems apparent from McGrath's findings is that the power teachers have over parents stems from two sources: 'control' and 'authority.' Teachers have considerable 'control' over what happens in the classrooms because parents entrust their children to them, which also privileges teachers to have access to or be in possession of precious information relating to the children's experiences. This kind of control places teachers in a position of authority, where parents may not only be dependent on the teachers but where this in turn may also strengthen the authority of teachers (McGrath 2007).

According to McGrath (2007), for good partnership between parents and teachers, frequent and open communication is of vital significance. Yet, she found that whilst mothers and teachers were primarily interested in the notion of partnership due the premise that partnership benefits children, they were 'more committed to the idea of partnership than the practice of it' (McGrath 2007). This means that there was little evidence to support the fact that mothers and teachers worked as true partners. The factors that undermined the potential for partnership between parents and teachers and led to their ambivalence about true partnership included "differing expectations, unbalanced power relationships, issues of trust, the adults' discretion about their interactions in front of children, and the mothers' sensitivity about the behaviour of their children" (McGrath 2007:1420). All these issues seem to indicate ambivalent power relations between parents and teachers may also be due to the differences in class and capital of the stakeholders.

### **2.4.3 The role of class and capital**

Abrams and Gibbs (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 mothers from diverse ethno cultural and socioeconomic background to explore issues of parent roles, access to power and practices of inclusion and exclusion at an urban elementary school that was undergoing comprehensive school reform. Positioning their work in social and cultural reproduction, the authors aimed to assess the potential for school

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reform strategies to disrupt traditional patterns of parent marginalization within public schools. Abrams and Gibbs (2002) found that primarily middle-class parents were more involved in school in four roles i.e., as helpers, monitors, advocates and active decision makers. The parents in these roles were not only making use of their cultural capital to play leadership roles, but they also endeavoured to be instruments of change.

In addition, there was also the issue of ‘non-active’ parents. Whilst some middle-class parents consciously made the decision not to become involved in school because of their PTA related commitments in their other children’s schools, for parents from the working-class background time, work constraints and economic barriers posed challenges to their participation in the school. The differences of cultural capital between middle- and working-class parents seemed to suggest how middle-class parents deployed and made use of “language, power and voice” (Abrams & Gibbs 2002:396) to their advantage during their participation in school.

Abrams and Gibbs also found that whilst all mothers who participated in their study were involved in the school through various committees, in addition to the dynamics of social class, because of ethnic and cultural differences the respondents’ perceptions varied significantly. They also discovered that parents of the dominant group held more power and they themselves saw their “style of participation as most efficient and appropriate,” suggesting “the dominant cultural capital can be reproduced among parents by virtue of [similarities in their] attitudes and behaviours” (Abrams & Gibbs 2002:398). For the non-dominant parents, who had cultural and ethnic differences, “power was scripted, encoded, and reproduced in patterns of relations” that was “derived from language and custom, [which was] difficult to subvert or penetrate, and passed down through the mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction” (Abrams & Gibbs 2002:398). Thus, denial of the power that the parents deserved had consequences for their voice and representation in the school.

Abrams and Gibbs (2002) argue that their study school actively sought to involve parents and, in order to create a more inclusive environment, the school extended leadership and decision making power to parents. However, they found that the non-dominant parents from ethnic and cultural groups faced subtle and explicit practices of exclusion in the school. For instance, there was overt exclusion of ethnic minority parents from PTA meetings by the dominant middle-class parents’ impatience with

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their translation needs. Nevertheless, Abrams and Gibbs (2002) conclude that by creating an environment in which traditionally marginalised parents feel included and welcomed, schools can be potential agents of change. Yet, their research suggests that only a fraction of parents got involved in the school, whilst the majority of parents remained on the fringes. However, their study is restrictive in the sense that the authors only interviewed those parents who were already involved in the school.

In a similar vein, Ranson, Martin and Vincent (2004) studied a dimension of power dynamics between parents and teachers that they explored through the expression of 'storming parents,' by employing communicative action as the theoretical template. Their research was set in the backdrop of the public policy debate in the UK, which aimed to foster the need to involve parents in school life. Ranson *et al.* (2004) argue that at the heart of the issue for the parents' 'performative attitude' in their communication was to seek mutual understanding that was in response to events in school. The authors' major findings are that whilst the school enabled 'communicative understanding' on some issues and concerns such as that pertaining to welfare, the school was less yielding to negotiating agreement on issues that formed the core professional practice, for instance that involved the learning and teaching process. This suggests that the positions teachers hold in school carry power (control and authority) of various magnitudes, some of which, that may be at the fringes and appear auxiliary, and not that important, may be given away in tasks such as fundraising etc. However, the power that is at the epicentre of the role and responsibility that teachers hold may not be seen to be easily shared with parents either because of their professional concerns or due to status and authority implications. Like Todd and Higgins (1998), Ranson *et al.* also conclude that in the dynamics of power relations parental cultural capital has the ability to "exercise a space of influence" (Ranson *et al.* 2004:259). However, most parents may have limited agency to do so since "The social space that schools establish for parental involvement is limited and typically shaped by deep codes that reinforce professional authority and parental deference" (Ranson *et al.* 2004:272). This is where the intersection of the dynamics of capital and class becomes important for parents of different class fractions. In the school environment, for teachers and professionals the role of power and powerlessness therefore becomes crucial.

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In this connection, Todd and Higgins (1998) whilst exploring the role that power played between parent-teacher-professional relations focused more on the notion of powerlessness to understand the underlying dynamics of what goes on between school and parents. They drew evidence from two different research projects; one a school improvement project, involving 21 primary and nursery schools and one secondary school, and the other a case study of a child whose SENs were being assessed.

Providing some clarification to the way parents and professionals occupy different positions concerning children, Todd and Higgins (1998) argue that whilst they may not differ in terms of the knowledge they possess about children, due to their relative positioning in the systems where children are involved, the perspectives of parents and professionals may appear very different from each other. This suggests that due to their respective positions, parents and various professionals may have different stakes and accordingly use the power they possess to protect their stakes and enhance their positions.

Drawing on previous literature, Todd and Higgins (1998) clarify that in their dealings with teachers the role of parents is socially constructed and depicted as one that involves less power. They go on to argue that the discourse of powerlessness of parents is expressed in two main ways. One involves a 'one-way' view of parental involvement, which sees the home-school relationship primarily from the school perspective and enacted on their terms. The other incorporates a pathological approach and incorporates a perspective that depicts 'deficit' on the part of the parents (Todd & Higgins 1998:229).

In the school improvement project, Todd and Higgins (1998) found both the 'deficit' and 'one-way' view of parental involvement that centred around parental powerlessness. They found that 'deficit' was explicit in the cycle of educational deprivation that underpinned both adults (parents) and children. The main reason for this seemed to be that the parents came from an economically deprived area: "there were almost certainly many discontinuities in the cultural capital of teachers and parents" (Todd & Higgins 1998:230). This suggests that power is bound closely to one's resources and capital, which leads one to the ways and means of asserting one's authority in a given relationship. Concerning the 'one-way' (teacher to parent or school to home) view of parental involvement, Todd and Higgins found that teachers implicitly communicated an understanding of a partnership in which parents were

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seen as engaging in auxiliary tasks such as fund raising and not in curriculum delivery and learning related tasks. However, they argue further that whilst parents actively participated and showed their enthusiasm by participation in non-academic works, their experience was in “contrast with the positive but tentative experiences of supporting children’s learning,” suggesting that the parents supported the “teachers’ hegemony” and implicitly colluded with the teachers in their use of power (Todd & Higgins 1998:231). What seems apparent here is that whilst parents were not “devoid of power” in the way they were involved in the schools, parental power received no recognition due to their lack of appropriate cultural capital (Todd & Higgins 1998:232). This suggests that the critical factor in the exercise of power by the stakeholders is not only the positions they hold which sanction/bar power, but also the amount of capital they possess, which determines the manner in which they may be able to exert and exercise their power.

In regards to the SENs case study that centred around the assessment process of a child, Todd and Higgins (1998) interviewed a number of individuals, from the child’s mother to their educational psychologist. Their analysis revealed that all participants experienced power and powerlessness in different ways. They found that whilst the mother of the child felt powerless, her role as an educational professional meant that, due to her cultural capital, she was able to insist that a label was included in her child’s assessment statement. However, what appeared evident in this case is that those who had the authority and responsibility for decision-making possessed and were seen as possessing more power. Todd and Higgins’ (1998) study may resonate with the present study in that the cultural capital, positioning and related symbols of authority and control may have undertones to the way teachers and parents perceive themselves along the continuum of power, which in many ways may not be skewed in favour of parents.

Using Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital as a conceptual framework for analysis and social class as a marker, Annette Lareau (1996) assessed parental involvement practices of working-class, lower-class and middle-class parents in schools. Lareau is critical of the various literature and studies that negate or overlook the importance and diversity of differences of families and their childrearing practices and presume family-school partnership as one that underpins ‘equal power’ (Lareau 1996:62). More specifically, the literature fails “to come to grips with observable differences in

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parents' and guardians' educational skills, occupational and economic flexibility, social networks, and positions of power that they bring to home-school encounters” (Lareau & Shumar 1996:24). Lareau’s (1996) point is that social class, as an important (but not the only) determinant of the dynamics of parent-teacher relations, plays a key role in how parents of various classes may differ in their child-rearing practices and interactions at home, and in-turn the way they interact and relate with teachers and schools. Lareau’s findings strongly resonate with the research and writings of a number of scholars in the field of sociology of education. They have explored parent-teacher relations and its dynamics from a number of dimensions/angles, including social class, race, gender etc. (e.g. Bryk and Schneider 2002; Crozier 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Reay 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1996a, 1996b).

In her research study, Lareau (1996) found that parents and teachers were not equal in status and power. Rather teachers were perceived by the working-class and lower-class parents to have power to suspend or exclude their children from school. However, in their various activities at school, most teachers themselves experienced “powerlessness, not power,” due to various school regulations and parental interference in their teaching (Lareau 1996:61). This suggests that the perceptions of power and powerlessness may be subjective as well as situational in that once engaged in discharging power and defending one’s position of power, people may not know how much influence, authority and control they may exercise over others, such as parents. This is where the notion of trust, rapport and mutual understanding becomes important in parent-teacher interaction.

Following Vincent (1993, 1996a), Diane Reay (1995a, 1998a) explored mothers’ involvement in their children’s education in two socially contrasting schools. Using Bourdieu’s notions of cultural capital and *habitus*, Reay’s research focused on issues of social class, race, gender, personal history and geography of mothers of middle-class and working-class background. Her findings clearly resonate with other studies that focus on social class differences and patterns of parental engagement of middle-class and working-class parents (see Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 1997, 1999b, 2000; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay *et al.* 2007; Vincent 1996a, 1996b). For Reay (1998a:117) power relations therefore permeated all interaction between mothers and teachers, where imbalances in power dynamics for mothers were highlighted through

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“themes of infantilism,” “fobbing off” and the ways in which mothers (especially the working-class) were held accountable for their children. She reports that whilst some working-class mothers who had some informal contact with teachers because of their engagement in school felt enabled and encouraged to approach teachers for their concerns, school was still a site where power was skewed firmly in favour of teachers.

What appears evident here is that differences of cultural capital and *habitus* underpin and mediate differential power relations between (working-class) mothers and teachers:

The working-class women brought to their interaction with teachers a habitus often shaped by educational failure. Reinforcing their negative educational experiences was their own and their parents’ lack of experience in dealing assertively with professionals. As a consequence, working-class women were much more hesitant, more questioning of their own stance, and far more likely to qualify and at times contradict themselves in interaction with school staff. (Reay 1998a:122)

These findings corroborate with research findings from the literature: the overarching conclusions seems to be that working-class parents show deference to teachers and teachers hold the power to define the terms of interaction; in most cases middle-class parents have the power to define the terms of interaction with teachers (Reay 1998a). However, power dynamics may also have implications for school reform and parent empowerment efforts.

#### **2.4.4 The interplay between school reforms and parent empowerment**

In this regard, Michelle Fine (1993) set out to describe three major parental involvement projects in three US cities that had the political backing directed towards school reforms for strengthening parental engagement inside schools, to address concerns of education and achieve collaboration between parents and teachers and various stakeholders. In the hope of initiating a broad-based conversation about urban public school reform, Fine contends that, “questions of *power, authority and control* must be addressed head-on within debates about parental involvement in schools” (Fine 1993:684, italic in original). She argues that in schools where issues of equality and power imbalances between parents are not addressed and “hierarchical bureaucracies are not radically transformed, parents end up looking individually “needy,” “naïve,” or “hysterical” and appear to be working in opposition to teachers”

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(Fine 1993:685). When such a mindset is in place in schools and is practiced by teachers, one can imagine its consequences for parental voices and power (Fine 1993).

What seems clear from Fine's case projects is that, despite a great deal of parental involvement in many aspects of the schools, huge disparities existed between the ideological power that was granted to parents compared to the material power that they should have possessed. Therefore, it has been emphasised that flushing out the power of power in relations between parents and teachers in schools is of utmost importance:

... the classroom, and the school and school system generally, are not comprehensible unless you flush out the power relationships that inform and control the behaviour of everyone in these settings. Ignore these relationships, leave unexamined their rationale, and the existing "system" will defeat efforts at reform. This will happen not because there is a grand conspiracy or because of mulish stubbornness in resisting change or because educators are uniquely unimaginative or uncreative (which they are not) but rather because recognizing and trying to change power relationships, especially in complicated, traditional institutions, is among the most complex tasks human beings can undertake. The first step, recognition of the problem is the most difficult, especially in regard to schools, because we all have been socialised most effectively to accept the power relationships characteristic of our schools as right, natural, and proper outcomes ... (Sarason 2003:115).

When such is the situation in cultures and communities where there is a great deal of parental involvement and engagement with schools, that undoubtedly are driven by conscious and continuous efforts towards school reforms, then one can imagine the state of affairs of power relationships between parents and teachers and the implications of these in cultures and societies that are developing and entangled in a plethora of problems. For rich and real parental involvement in schools, Fine (1993:707) suggests that "the dynamics of power" needs to be addressed, support for "the range and consequences of cultural capital" be put in place, and schools need to operate with a deep vision of "community-based democracies of difference."

In this regard, Vincent (1996a:6) argues that for addressing differential power relations between parents and teachers, in education 'empowerment' entails a 'simplistic view of social justice,' which involves teachers and related professionals giving some of their power to parents. However, giving away some of one's power to others may not be easy, as a whole range of structures and practices (both in individual and collective terms) may be required for creating an environment of trust and relationship that is centred around benefitting one another, thus supporting

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children's learning. Drawing on Gore and Foucault, Vincent (1996a) suggests that for empowering parents it is important to address the complexities of power relations, at least in three ways.

Firstly, there is the suggestion and emphasis on 'agency' through which teachers may empower others. However, this has considerable limitations due to the context in which teachers and other professionals work. This means that whilst some teachers may want to support parents by advocating for them and speaking on their behalf, the *field* dynamics of the schools, underpinned by the norms and values of their respective environments and cultures, may constrain their actions. Secondly, the notion of "empowerment views power as a quantifiable property" (Vincent 1996a:7). This means that power is seen as lost or reduced when it is transferred to a group having less power. However, given that society remains in a state of flux, individuals are constantly involved in a multitude of situations employing and experiencing power, which suggests, "Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application" (Foucault 1980:98; cited by Vincent 1996a:7). Thirdly, for "understanding power as exercised, rather than possessed requires us to be attentive to the specific context in which 'empowerment' is said to be taking place, rather than advocating generalised initiatives" (Vincent 1996a:7, citing Gore 1990). What appears evident from these three points is that the interplay between context and individuals—who operate in and structure the context and vice versa—structures and conditions the way power is enacted in mutual interactions between individuals, which has implications for the ways in which parental 'empowerment' may be viewed and practiced in different contexts.

In summary, the preceding discussion has thrown some light on the role of power dynamics between parents and teachers and home and school, and on the way it structures and influences relations and interactions between the different stakeholders. The picture that emerges suggests that whilst a number of parallel and competing factors seem to have a dominant role in the way power is conceptualised and enacted between parents and teachers, the major indicators of their differential power relations point to social class, (cultural and social) capital and status symbols. However, what also seems apparent from the above reviewed literature is that with the exception of Diane Reay (1995a, 1998a), the notion of *field* as a theoretical and analytical

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component has not been used to analyse the dynamics of power in relation to parent-teacher relations. The present study therefore aims to contribute towards these ends.

It is clear that middle-class parents may have considerable influence and power over the way they structure their relations with teachers due to their educational knowledge, cultural capital, social capital and related power differentials. However, for the working-class parents, due to gaps in their educational knowledge, cultural capital and related social and status differentials, interaction and communication with teachers and schools may have huge power implications. In the context of Pakistan, power relations between parents and teachers have not been known to have been explored. The present research therefore aims to fill the research gap and knowledge about the ways socio-cultural forces structure and influence the way power is conceptualised and enacted in the school context between parents and teachers. However, as power is capital, which involves stakes, authority and control, being contentious, it may also be one of the sources of barriers to parent-teacher interaction and relations.

### **2.5 Barriers to parent-teacher relations**

In addition to the role that power plays between structuring parent-teacher relations, it is important to understand how and in what manner relations between parents and teachers are affected. This section, therefore, explores and discusses the literature on barriers to parent-teacher interaction and relations. As has been true for the previous sections, whilst most of the literature that I review here is from the developed countries of the world, especially the USA and the UK, the majority of issues that act as barriers to parent-teacher relations may be generic. These issues therefore may resonate with the experiences of both parents and teachers from developing countries such as Pakistan.

Although there has been considerable emphasis on partnership between parents and teachers and between home and school, successful partnerships require identification and resolution of barriers and obstacles that might be in the way of effective parent-teacher relations. There could be numerous barriers to parent-teacher relations and home-school cooperation that have been analysed through a number of lenses (see Adler 2004; Bastiani 1993; Bauch 1993; Bermúdez 1993; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999b, 2000; Davies 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Flynn 2007; Gonzales-

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DeHass & Willems 2003; Gestwicki 2003; Hornby 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Khan 1996; Lawson 2003; Lazar & Slostad 1999; Leitch & Tangri 1988; Moles 1993; Moon & Ivins 2004; Morris & Taylor 1998; Reay 1998a; Russell & Granville 2005; Turney & Kao 2009; US Dept. of Education 1997; Williams *et al.* 2002). For parents, the barriers may have origins in their personal lives, in their home and related contextual background to the one's that may be posed by teachers and the structural and *field* dynamics of the schools. For the teachers and schools, many structural, functional, attitudinal and cultural barriers may hinder them, from and create barriers to, their successful relations with parents. I look at each of these in turn now.

### **2.5.1 Barriers for parents: pragmatic or functional barriers**

A large body of empirical research and literature has documented a number of factors that may create obstacles to parental interaction and engagement with teachers and schools. Barriers faced by parents and families may range from economic and pragmatic or functional barriers to psychological and cultural barriers, which in many ways may overlap (e.g. Bauch 1993; Crozier 2000; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Moles 1993; Russell & Granville 2005). Concerning working-class and poor parents, there is extensive empirical literature that illustrates how poverty, low income and limited educational attainment of parents constrains and creates hurdles for their involvement in school (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 1997, 1998, 1999b, 2000; Lareau 1989, 2003; Reay 1998a; Vincent 2001).

A review of the literature reveals numerous barriers that parents perceive are in their way of successful and effective communication with teachers and involvement in the school. Of these, the two major functional difficulties that parents often cite are 'work commitments' and 'time constraints.' In this regard, Bauch (1993:133) found that 'conflict with working hours' (63.4%) was the most common barrier that parents reported prevented them from involvement in their children's school. This was followed by 'delegation belief' (25.5%), 'lack of transportation' (22.5%), 'child care' (22.1%), and attitude/language differences (20.0%). Moles (1993:32) also notes that working parents not only find it hard to find time "to attend school conferences and meetings," they also face childcare problems and transportation difficulties. Similarly, Finders and Lewis (1994:51) report that 'time' and 'work' constraints pose obstacles to parents of a working-class background.

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Some of the barriers that working-class and poor parents face may resonate with the experiences of middle-class parents and researchers report similar findings for ethnic minority parents for whom English is a second language. In their survey of twenty Spanish parents, Cassity and Harris (2000:60) found that ‘lack of time’ and ‘lack of transportation’ were the major perceived inhibitors to parental involvement in school. These obstacles were followed by other language-related barriers, which also included ‘lack of childcare’ provision in school.

Likewise, in their study on parental involvement in education, Williams *et al.* (2002) found that ‘work commitments’ (54%) and ‘lack of time’ (14%) were the main problems that parents perceived as barriers to their involvement. This was followed by ‘childcare difficulties’ (13%), with 14% of parents also reporting ‘no specific barriers.’ Following Williams *et al.*, Moon and Ivins (2004) also conclude that ‘work commitments’ (33%) was the main barrier for parents for getting more involved in their child’s school, which was followed by ‘childcare difficulties’ (11%) and ‘lack of time’ (7%).

In a similar vein, Russell and Granville (2005:44) explored parents’ views on improving parental involvement in children’s education. They found two groups of barriers (individual and external) that seemed to limit parental ability for getting more involved in various aspects of their children’s education. The ‘individual’ obstacles pertained to specific life circumstances of parents, which included poverty, work patterns and social exclusion, and personal assumptions about parental roles. The ‘external’ barriers were those that were beyond parental control and mainly existed or operated from/at the school. Russell and Granville (2005) provide a useful tabular representation and synthesis of the various barriers that parents perceive they face concerning their involvement in their children’s education, which is shown in the table below.

**Table 2.1 Barriers to parental involvement**

Area	Type of Barrier	Details
Challenges to involvement at home	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially working and/or single parents</li> <li>• More than one child</li> <li>• Children need time to relax after school.</li> </ul>
	Children's attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance in preference of leisure activities.</li> </ul>
	Parental knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents lack knowledge about subject curriculum and teaching methodology</li> <li>• Parents lack provision of guidance on how to help and support learning at home.</li> </ul>
Challenges to active involvement outside the home	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially working and/or single parents</li> <li>• Preference to spend quality time with children</li> <li>• Weekly commitment considered too much.</li> </ul>
	Child care arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially working and/or single parents</li> </ul>
	Fear of negative consequences for child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make young child too dependent</li> <li>• Embarrassment for an older child could lead to teasing or even bullying.</li> </ul>
	Parental attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Not my job."</li> <li>• "My partner deals with school."</li> </ul>
	Safety implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents lack special training</li> <li>• Implications of responsibility for other people's children</li> <li>• Put off by Disclosure Scotland checks.</li> </ul>
	Barriers perceived to be created by school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents feel they are not convinced or informed of what they can do</li> <li>• Lack of opportunities offered by school</li> <li>• Infrequency of social events</li> <li>• Lack of opportunity for low levels of commitment</li> <li>• Teachers not always as welcoming as they could be</li> <li>• Physical barriers such as locked gates, entry phones, poorly signed main entrance.</li> </ul>
	Resistance of parents to formal groupings such as PTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents feel they do not fit in</li> <li>• Perceived to be dominated by the same people</li> <li>• Intimidated by public speaking</li> <li>• Feel that their views are likely to be ignored</li> <li>• Perceived to be formal and boring.</li> </ul>

Source: adapted from Russell and Granville (2005:44)

In a relatively recent study in the US, Turney and Kao (2009) explored barriers to parental involvement of immigrant parents. The authors used quantitative data and methods and statistical techniques to examine race and immigrant differences in parental involvement at school. They found that "Minority immigrant parents, compared with native-born parents, reported more barriers to participation and were subsequently less likely to be involved at school" (Turney & Kao 2009:257). Their results further support the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research discussed above. Amongst other obstacles for parents, the means obtained for barriers to involvement in the order of priority included 'cannot get off from work' (0.513), 'inconvenient meeting time' (0.366) and 'no child care' (0.242) (Turney & Kao 2009:262). However, in trying to assess whether the different barriers captured the

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same construct, the authors found that the barriers were not strongly correlated and therefore they focused their analyses on individual barriers separately. This might mean that since a number of background factors (such as parental social class, cultural and social capital, and *habitus* and most importantly *field* dynamics of home, school and community) operate to limit or influence parental capacities and abilities for involvement, the different barriers parents face may therefore have origins in different factors.

### **2.5.2 Barriers for parents: psychological and cultural barriers**

An analysis of both empirical and theoretical literature reveals that parents face various psychological and cultural barriers, which may create barriers to their successful and effective relations with teachers (Bermúdez 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Georgiou 1996; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Lontos 1991; Moles 1993; Morris & Taylor 1998; Reay 1998a; Russell & Granville 2005). However, it is important to note that many researchers have found considerable differences in the nature of barriers that middle-class and working-class parents face. It is well documented that middle-class parents usually possess the right cultural and psychological repositories required for accessing and negotiating school structures and practices. Generally, they do not face many barriers in their interaction with teachers and the nature of obstacles they face in school may be very subtle (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989, 2003; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a). However, for the working-class and poor parents an array of psychological and cultural factors may create perceived and actual barriers to their interaction and communication with teachers and school.

In regard to psychological barriers, in a literature-based study of ‘involving the families of at-risk youth in the educational process’ in the US, Lontos (1991:20) has documented some barriers for parental involvement that appear to have psychological and emotional underpinnings. For parents, these barriers include feelings of inadequacy, failure, and poor self-worth; negative attitudes and bad experiences with schools; and suspicion and anger that schools are not treating them equally (Lontos 1991:20). The underlying reasons for such feelings and experiences may not only be due to parental class and social and cultural capital dynamics, but also their ‘limited skills and knowledge’ of the school culture and practices may impede parents effective interaction with teachers (Moles 1993:31).

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Similarly, Moles (1993) and Finders and Lewis (1994) report that the psychological obstacles that parents face to their involvement include misperceptions and misunderstanding, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation and distrust, and lack of confidence in school settings because of unpleasant school experiences. Hoover-Dempsey and Walker (2002) have listed similar barriers that act as psychological barriers for parental involvement. The majority of these psychological barriers therefore appear to resonate with and reflect the perceptions and experiences of parents identified by Russell and Granville (2005) in Table 2.1 above. Diane Reay's (1998a:32) argument seems pertinent here as notwithstanding the importance and significance of material resources, the various psychological barriers that parents face may be rooted in the differences of the amount and quality of cultural capital different parents possess. In the context of the present study, the psychological barriers may be more severe and daunting for parents in Pakistan, as the majority of parents that send their children to public schools are poor and illiterate (Khan *et al.* 2005).

Concerning cultural barriers, linguistic and cultural differences between parents and their children's school create barriers to parental participation and interaction with teachers (DeBaryshe & Gorecki 2005; Lontos 1991; Finders & Lewis 1994; Funkhouser *et al.* 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Moles 1993). In this regard, Lontos (1991) reports that due to linguistic and cultural differences Hispanic parents may not only lack an understanding of the education system, they may also have a tradition of not questioning teachers and schools, thus creating barriers for their involvement in schools.

Similarly, in a literature review-based study of schools and disadvantaged parents in the US, Moles (1993) presents an analysis of the various dimensions of the cultural and linguistic differences of parents of different origins and races that hinders their participation and involvement in school. Parents not only feel devalued due to their linguistic differences, but also due to their differing views on approaches to teaching and value patterns they may defer to teacher authority, and would not question their work, especially when their own education is limited and "they do not understand what is being taught at the schools" (Moles 1993:35). Similarly, for Hispanic, Asian and parents from other countries, schools represent "an alien and impersonal environment," which may not be sensitised properly to languages and cultures of

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minorities, which leads parents to “feel uncomfortable and fearful in the school,” reserved in their discussions with teachers, unchallenging to teacher authority and reluctant to discuss their problems (Moles 1993:35). Following Moles, Bermúdez (1993), Finders and Lewis (1994), Hoover-Dempsey and Walker (2002) agree that linguistic differences and mismatches, conflicts and limited understanding of values and practices of both parents and school lead to barriers for parents.

These barriers may not only be evident between parents and teachers in multicultural and pluralistic societies and communities, but they may also be dominantly visible within traditional cultures, such as within the Pashtun culture in Pakistan. The intra-cultural differences and variations between home and school based on the dynamics of class and capital underpinned by the situated nature of the differences of their respective *fields* may appear to pose considerable barriers to parents who may not be able to emulate the culture of schools. Exploring the nature and dynamics of barriers to parents is one of the key aspects of the focus of my study, which will contribute towards the existing body of knowledge in the area of home-school relations.

In summary, it seems apparent that, despite some minor differences in the way different studies report the kinds of barriers parents face in their involvement in school, most studies’ findings corroborate: most parents (apart from differences of working- and middle-class parents) generally seem to face the same types of barriers that hinder and restrict their communication with teachers and schools. However, it is interesting to note that whilst most parents are appreciative and supportive of their children’s education and are keen to be involved in whatever manner they can, they are not as involved as they claim they are (Chavkin & Williams 1989; Crozier 1997, 1999b, 2000; Crozier & Davies 2007; Desforges 2003; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a). This suggests that in addition to the parents’ respective preoccupations, constraints and barriers, schools as institutionalised bodies and teachers as professionals may appear to face various obstacles in communication with parents or restrict and inhibit parental involvement in their children’s school, which is the focus of the discussion in the sections below.

### **2.5.3 Barriers for teachers and schools: pragmatic or functional barriers**

Due to their professional roles, responsibilities and the nature and context of their work and school environment, teachers may face and report an array of barriers

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concerning their interaction and communication with parents and families. There is empirical research and theoretical literature that has documented a number of barriers that might influence and affect teacher-parent and school-family communication and interaction. These barriers may range from pragmatic or functional to psychological and cultural barriers, which in many ways may be intertwined (Bermúdez 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Hornby 2000; Leitch & Tangri 1988; Lontos 1991; Moles 1993; Morris & Taylor 1998; Russell & Granville 2005; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997). However, it should be noted that the contexts and cultures within which schools operate would have a strong bearing on the nature of barriers that teachers perceive and experience regarding their interaction with parents. In other words, the interplay between the *field* of school and the *habitus* of the various agents involved therein would reciprocally determine and influence the barriers that teachers face and report regarding their interaction with parents.

A review of the literature reveals a number of perceived and actual barriers that may have a functional bearing on teachers in successfully and effectively communicating with parents and involving them in school. These barriers may range from the ones teachers report regarding parents and families to ones that concerns teachers, their work constraints and the limitations of school structures (e.g. Bermúdez 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Hornby 2000; Leitch & Tangri 1988; Lontos 1991; Moles 1993; Russell & Granville 2005; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997).

According to Leitch and Tangri (1988), the major functional barriers that teachers report about parental involvement are parents' large families, inability of parents to be of help with schoolwork, and absence of activities in school to encourage parents to come. Lontos (1991) reports that, due to schools' passive role and unwelcoming environment, parents feel they have been left out and the activities schools organise do not take into account parents' work and related obligations.

Moles (1993) identifies 'limited skills and knowledge' and 'restricted opportunities for interaction' that create obstacles for teachers to involve parents. Collaboration and working with parents involves a range of skills and knowledge that teachers need to know and be aware of before they can help parents; however, teachers get little help in this regard, not only in schools but also in teaching training programmes (Bermúdez 1993; Moles 1993; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997).

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There is also the issue of time and resource constraints that restricts teachers' ability to communicate and collaborate with parents (Hornby 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Moles 1993; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997). Moles (1993) reports that when teachers' time is severely limited by the demands of classroom teaching and related school responsibilities, and when school policies do not encourage meeting parents during and beyond staff working hours, teachers will not only have restricted opportunities for interaction, they will be constrained not to involve parents in the school. Both principals and teachers complain about the lack of time that constrains parental involvement; the lack of access to resources (such as private telephones) also acts as a barrier to parent involvement in the school (U.S. Dept. of Education 1997).

Hornby (2000:5) agrees with these views and argues that when "teachers are already stretched because of poor working conditions or lack of resources, or because a disproportionate amount of their time is spent on paperwork, it is difficult to convince them that they need to contribute more time if they are to set up effective schemes of parental involvement." These feelings and experiences might resonate with the public school teachers and school environments in Pakistan, as evidence (Khan *et al.* 2005; Warwick & Reimers 1995) and experience suggests that public schools are not only poorly resourced and maintained, they are also overcrowded (especially in urban areas) and famously seen as synonymous for the working- and poor-class parents. Yet, whilst parents may be uninvolved in school due to their cultural, social, educational or class differences, they still might have strong views about what obstacles may be posed by teachers and schools.

In this regard, in their research on parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education, Russell and Granville (2005) report what barriers parents think are created by the school (see **Table 2.1**). The authors note that parents reported that failure to convince or inform parents of what they can do, lack of opportunities, infrequency of social events, lack of opportunities for low level of commitments, and physical barriers hindered their participation in schools (Russell & Granville 2005:47-49). The functional barriers should not be seen in isolation from the psychological and cultural barriers as they may overlap, interlink and reciprocate each other in practice.

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#### 2.5.4 Barriers for teachers and schools: psychological and cultural barriers

A number of researchers and authors have thrown light on how various psychological and cultural factors influence teachers and schools in a multitude of ways that hinder and limit their communication and interaction with different parents (e.g. Bermúdez 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Hornby 2000; Leitch & Tangri 1988; Lontos 1991; Moles 1993; Morris & Taylor 1998; Russell & Granville 2005; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997). However, it is unclear whether researchers have used the notions of capital, *habitus* and *field* to explore and analyse various barriers that restrict teachers to engage with parents. The present research therefore is important and has an interest to explore the interplay between the psychological and cultural barriers, and the notions of *habitus* and *field*, and to understand their reciprocal influence and effect on practices in schools and their consequences for parents.

Concerning psychological barriers, Leitch and Tangri (1988) report that the main barriers that teachers often mention regarding parental involvement include parents' impractical beliefs of the school's role, parental attitude that school is not important enough to take time from work, parental jealousy of teachers' status, teachers' apathy and their unresponsiveness to parents, and teachers' resentment and suspicion of involved parents. Following Leitch and Tangri (1988), in her literature review, Lontos (1991) reports a number of psychological barriers for schools and teachers. These include teachers' commitment to parental involvement, confusion of teachers about their role, teachers' concerns about turf and territory (i.e. parents undermining teacher authority and being disruptive), low teacher expectations that all students can learn, focus of schools on communication on the 'negative' with low income parents, and dwelling on the hard-to-reach concept, which underpins parental apathy (Lontos 1991:21-24).

Similarly, the above barriers also find expression in the writing of other authors who note that misperceptions and misunderstanding, negative expectations, negative stereotypes (e.g. parental apathy), intimidation, fear and distrust of unfamiliar individuals (Bermúdez 1993; Moles 1993), and viewing nonparticipant parents as having a deficit (Finders & Lewis 1994) pose obstacles to parental involvement in schools. In addition, Hornby (2000:5-8) also argues that many teachers who see parents as problems, adversaries, vulnerable, less able, needing treatment, casuals, and

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to be kept at a 'professional distance' create barriers for parental participation in schools.

Differences in culture and cultural understanding between teachers and parents may also create barriers for teachers and schools to involve parents and to see them differently (Bermúdez 1993; Desforges 2003; Finders & Lewis 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Walker 2002; Hornby 2000; Lontos 1991; Moles 1993; Morris & Taylor 1998; U.S. Dept. of Education 1997).

In the US, Lontos (1991) argues that teachers may have doubts about their abilities to work with at-risk parents. Many teachers therefore may question whether certain parents (such as working-class parents, non-native parents, immigrant parents) are willing and have the ability to be involved in their children's education. In addition, teachers may also hold a belief that parents do not care and will not keep commitments. In this regard, Lontos (1991:22) notes, "Many teachers tend to ignore poor and minority parents, assuming that less-educated parents don't want to become involved in their children's education."

In a similar vein, the lack of an understanding of the home language (Bermúdez 1993), and related cultural differences that reflect "differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definitions of appropriate roles" can also lead to cultural barriers between teachers and parents (Moles 1993:33). This means that school-family differences based on education levels, language and cultural styles sometimes make it more difficult for school staff to form effective partnerships with parents (U.S. Dept. of Education 1997).

In summary, it seems clear that a number of factors may be in the way of successful teacher-parent interaction and cooperation. The factors that teachers report concern parents and families on the one hand to teachers' work constraints and limitations of the school structures on the other hand. Furthermore, evidence suggests that time and resource constraints may limit teachers' ability to support any measures for parent involvement in the school. However, there is also evidence that confirms that teachers' limited skills and knowledge and restricted opportunities for interaction with parents do not provide sufficient opportunities for teachers to collaborate and develop partnerships with parents. This is where psychological and cultural factors come into play, which seems to pull teachers further apart from parents. Due to psychological underpinnings, teachers may have opinions about parents as being unhelpful, or

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having a deficit. Teachers may also hold negative stereotypes, misperceptions and misunderstanding about parents, which may be grounded in intimidation, fear and distrust. For schools and teachers, differences in culture and cultural understanding of parents may also create barriers for parental involvement, which may also be underpinned by linguistic differences between parents. Of interest to the present study are not just the functional barriers that teachers may perceive and report they experience in their day-to-day interactions in school (with or without parents). The various psychological barriers that reciprocally influence and underpin the intra-cultural differences of school and teachers with parents may be more important to cast light on how the interplay between the dynamics of *habitus* and *field* structures and constrains the practices of teachers within schools regarding parents.

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have provided an exhaustive discussion of the literature, to locate the existing debates and various issues of particular interest to this research. Whilst the literature I have reviewed predominantly is from the West, throughout the chapter I have argued that most literature may have a generic relevance with the context of Pakistani education system as considering the institutional mechanisms of home and school there are some practices and structures that are universal in character. It is in this sense that the issues of social class, capital, habitus and field, power dynamics and barriers have been explored to lay claim to how these might influence parent-teacher relations in the context of Pakistan specifically, and elsewhere generally. With this in mind, in the next chapter, I discuss and develop the theoretical tools to support my argument and research.

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## Chapter Three — Theoretical Framework: Exploring the role of Capital, *Habitus* and *Field* in Human Practices and Interactions

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of the study. I use capital, habitus and field as theoretical tools to help me understand the underlying dynamics of the practices and interactions of parents and teachers in the contexts of home and school. I first discuss social capital and cultural capital as broader theoretical lenses to interpret how parents and teachers use the socially and culturally embedded identities and structures to interact in the way they do. I refer to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* to illustrate the underlying logic that structures people's perceptions, practices and interactions in their own contexts as well as with one another. I draw on Bourdieu's concept of *field* to demonstrate its significance and relevance in the fields of home and school. Given their socio-cultural background, I explain the logic and practice of home and school as fields and illustrate how parents and teachers might appropriate their respective capital and habitus to interact and communicate within their diverse field settings individually and reciprocally.

### 3.1 Exploring the role of capital in human practices

Capital and its appropriation play an important role in people's lives. Whilst the term is often associated with monetary exchanges and economic transactions (Moore 2008:101), it encompasses literally every sphere of life. From the very subtle, cognitively hardwired calculations and manipulations, to the most obvious, actions, practices and physical and material appropriation, capital is deeply ingrained in people's social worlds. Therefore, to understand the structure and functioning of the social world it is imperative that capital is studied and analysed in all its forms, and not solely in its economic form (Bourdieu 1986:242). The significance of capital then becomes evident as it is not only conceptualised as a valued resource, which is the object of struggle, but also in its various guises it functions as a "social relation of *power*" (Swartz 1997:43, citing Bourdieu 1989).

The role that 'capital' plays in human interaction and practices transcends all objective/subjective boundaries and is deeply embedded in people's cognition and social understanding, implicitly or otherwise. The way parents and teachers talk, behave and respond to various situations of their lives is greatly influenced and determined by the types of capital they possess and appropriate in their given

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situations. Capital, therefore, “can be embodied in a wide variety of forms” (Swartz 1997:74) with economic on the one end to symbolic on the other (Bourdieu 1986). My interest here lies in using its social and cultural dimensions to interpret the role that these capitals play in the interaction and relations of predominantly working-class parents<sup>13</sup> and lower-middle/middle class teachers<sup>14</sup> in the context of public secondary schools.

### **3.1.1 Social capital: relationships and connections**

The central idea of social capital involves understanding the way people use and maintain their relationships and associations with other people within a group or a community, which position them to accrue profits or credits from their connections, individually and collectively (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995, 2000). As such, the concept is at the heart of the relationship between parents and teachers. Depending on the number of people one knows and the strength of their relationship, people appropriate their social capital for their day-to-day social transactions, and reciprocate in the way they deem appropriate in given situations. “[I]t follows that the more people you know, and the more you share a common outlook with them, the richer you are in social capital” (Field 2008:1). In other words, one’s success and ability to profit in a given situation depends on the number of people one knows and on the effectiveness and use of one’s social connectedness. This has implications for working-class parents who generally may not be socially well-connected (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989, 1992; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1996a). When we talk about social connections as a resource or capital, the issue of social class and class dynamics comes into play. Thus, middle-class parents are more likely to communicate and interact well with the teachers of their children compared to working-class parents. Working-class parents’ lack of the right amount of social capital results in their impaired interaction and relations with teachers

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<sup>13</sup> In the context of Pakistan, class boundaries may overlap and may have different interpretations in different contexts, so the term working-class parents may have a broad meaning. For instance, a businessperson or landowner with sufficient economic capital may see themselves as working-class, although they may have resources that may put them in other/higher class fractions.

<sup>14</sup> The perception of class and identity may have different interpretations for teachers here. This may be so because many of the teachers I spoke to referred to themselves as middle-class, whilst implying that they were working-class. However, when it came to parents, most of the teachers referred to them as working-class/poor parents.

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(Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989, 1992; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1996a).

There has been much debate and controversy among scholars about the concept of social capital, its use and meaning (Fulkerson & Thompson 2008:537; Halpern 1999; Portes 2000:1). Its origins are traced to Durkheim for his “emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self-destruction” and to Marx for his “distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself” (Portes 1998:2). However, Pierre Bourdieu, James S. Coleman, and Robert Putnam are often credited as the founding theorists of social capital (Field 2008; Foley & Edwards 1999; Halpern 1999; Portes 2000; Smith 2007). For both Bourdieu and Coleman the original theoretical development of the concept “centred on individuals or small groups as the units of analysis,” with some significant variations, both focused on the “benefits accruing to individuals or families by virtue of their ties with others” (Portes 2000:2). For Putnam, however, social capital assumes an attribute of the community itself, a ‘stock’ “possessed by communities and even nations” which leads to individual and collective benefits (Portes 1998:3).

In the contemporary sociological discourse, Pierre Bourdieu has produced the most theoretically refined and systematic analysis of the concept of social capital (Portes 1998:3). For Bourdieu “social world as accumulated history” and “capital as accumulated labour” means moving beyond simple economic theory and studying “the universe of exchanges” in all its forms represented in the “immanent structure of the social world” (Bourdieu 1986:241-42). Bourdieu’s key insight is that forms of capital are fungible (Portes 2000:2), which can be reduced to economic capital under certain conditions (Bourdieu 1986:243). Bourdieu defines social capital as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu 1986:248-49)

It is clear from the above definition that social relationships position people to have mutual access to the resources of their acquaintances and that their stock depends on the amount and quality of connections one has with other people within a given group (Portes 1998:3-4). However, as the possession of and access to resources is uneven in

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society, the concept of social capital is closely linked to social class and social stratification issues (Pichler & Wallace 2009). Therefore, in Bourdieu's sociology differential access to capital shapes the economic and social worlds of the agents (Foley & Edwards 1999:143), which leads to the production and reproduction of inequalities and hierarchies in society (Field 2008:18). Bourdieu noted that relationship between people "may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them" (Bourdieu 1986:249). The important point to understand is that like other symbolic capitals, social capital requires an investment of time and effort on the part of the agent(s):

... the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term... (Bourdieu 1986:24)

Thus, for working-class parents, the network of connections they have may be thoroughly grounded in their respective investment strategies and social relationships, different from the middle-class parents and other social arenas. They may feel out-of-step and hesitant to interact in uncharted territories such as a school setting. This would require social competencies of a different nature embedded in the social and cultural environment enacted in the school. For instance, the work and community interaction patterns of a parent who is a cobbler, bookbinder, or street vendor is likely to be influenced and shaped by the material and symbolic exchanges taking place and determining the structure of their respective social settings. Such parents may possess the right amount of social capital for effective interaction and integration in their respective social circles. However, when it comes to interaction with teachers and school, its logic and practice may demand a different set of resources, one that is not only based on one's social connectedness in the school climate but also in other forms of related capital. The absence of the right amount and quality of social capital may therefore disadvantage such parents, and impair their interaction and communication with teachers and school. It may then depend on the teachers and on the overall institutional habitus within the school to determine in what manner and form, if any, they communicate or interact with parents. In addition to Bourdieu, Coleman's (1988) use of social capital is also of much relevance to my study.

Coleman also considers social capital as a resource, which inheres "in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" (Coleman 1988:S98). Couched in the

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theory of rational action, Coleman defines social capital by its function, which he argues consists of a variety of entities with two elements in common: “they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors ... within the structure” (Coleman 1988:S98). It implies that social capital is the aggregate of a diverse set of entities within a social structure, where each entity is part-and-parcel of and represents an aspect of the overall social structure, and plays a facilitative role in contextualising one’s actions. This means that, given people’s class and status, and the kind and amount of capital (human, cultural and economic) they possess, one’s socially interactive experiences might have individual, collective as well as contextual dimensions. Thus, for instance, the experiences and interactions of working-class parents are likely to be informed and influenced by their respective social capital, underpinning and structuring their personal and social lives.

Coleman (1988) differentiates between physical capital, human capital and social capital. He explains that physical capital is tangible and is embodied in tools, machines and other equipment of daily use. Human capital, he argues, refers to changes in people so that their expertise, skills and capabilities allow them do things in new and novel ways. Coleman considers social capital as less tangible, “[coming] about through changes in the relations among persons [who] facilitate action” (Coleman 1988:S100). This signifies the dynamic nature of social capital acquired through interpersonal relations with others and which could be used in a specific social situation. In the context of communication between parents and teachers, the nature and quality of interaction would depend on the amount and quality of social capital possessed and appropriated by the various agents in their respective contexts. Hence, parents and teachers from the working-class and middle class backgrounds may appropriate and experience their social transactions differently.

Coleman (1988) identifies three elements, which according to him represent social capital by their function. He discusses these under obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures; information channels; and norms and effective sanctions.

In explaining ‘obligation, expectations and trustworthiness of structures,’ as one form of social capital, Coleman argues that people within a given social structure hold ‘credit slips’ by doing something for others and by trusting them. Such people expect and are confident of calling on their credit slips when they need them. On the other

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hand, people who have received a favour are expected to reciprocate by paying off the outstanding credit slips as an ‘obligation’ on their part, as and when they are called upon. For Coleman in social structures where people are self-sufficient, they are unlikely to depend on each other and thus, will hold fewer ‘credit slips.’ In contrast, in social structures (such as in Pakistan) where self-sufficiency of material wealth is scarce and cultural codes are more powerful and institutionalised, reliance on credit slips would be higher and people having sufficient stock of the various forms of capital are more likely to have more credit slips compared to those with less stock. This, when translated into the social relation dynamics between teachers and working-class/poor parents, may position teachers to have socially and culturally bestowed ‘credit slips’ and ‘power’ for their teaching or profession and the parents in turn may see themselves as subjugated to or having deference for teachers.

Coleman maintains that expectation and obligation of the credit slips on the part of the actors within a given structure is based on the trustworthiness of the social environment in which the favours are done. For instance, in cultures (such as in Pakistan) where there is a strong allegiance to cultural practices and higher reliance on credit slips, people may inherently feel obliged to conform to the norms and reciprocate in ways deemed appropriate for given situations or social transactions. Hence, having some acquaintance with a teacher in an urban or rural background may mean entrusting the teacher with the responsibilities of taking care of one’s child in the school. This in turn may be reciprocated to in numerous forms either socially or materially, depending on the nature of relations between a parent and teacher (see **Chapters Five-Eight**). This leads us to another and related element of social capital that Coleman argues pertains to the acquisition of information.

Coleman (1988) identifies ‘information channels’ as another form of social capital that exists in social relations between people. He contends that acquisition of information is an important aspect of people’s action, but acquiring it is a costly business, which rests upon the level of attention one pays to accessing certain information. For Coleman social relations provide one way of accessing information that people maintain for other purposes. To support this, he cites fashion, news, and research fields in which people get to know through their acquaintances about some new developments or other information that they may not have time or interest to access on their own. This means that people need to be aware of the current trends

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and practices in their respective walks of life and to keep in touch with their friends and family and colleagues in order to have access to information which they may be able to use when needed.

I would argue here that different layers of information channels exist in the various strata of society. At the upper level, people with a high amount and quality of the various capital may be adept in using ‘information channels’ as a form of social capital for various purposes, such as for political ends or enhancing their social repertoire. At the lower end of the social spectrum, for the majority of people, ‘information channels’ as an aspect of social relations that facilitate action may have a different understanding. For instance, for people with little or no education seeking out information or finding directions (by not being able to read signboards or understand directions etc.) in their daily life may be an important component of their social relations. Likewise, because of gaps in many of the ‘capitals’ and due to their limited social connectedness and literacy skills and knowledge, for working-class or poor parents communication with teachers and using ‘information channels’ in the context of education of their children may pose numerous problems (see **Chapters Seven and Eight**).

The third aspect of social capital that Coleman (1988) identifies is ‘norms and effective sanctions.’ He contends that when norms are effective in society, they can inhibit crime, act as a reward for high school achievement and enable the elderly to walk freely at night without the fear for their safety. Coleman believes that norms, with the concept of collectivity at their core—reinforced by social support, status, honours and rewards—besides other higher order benefits, lead people to work for the overall public good. A norm is “a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2008:online). The significance of norms and sanctions as forms of social capital is of importance in the context of parents and teachers and their mutual relations concerning children. For parents and teachers their understanding of the norms and sanctions may be based on the collective social understanding of the expected behaviours or actions that are understood to govern the various aspects of children’s lives at home, in school and in the community.

The point here is that whilst Coleman sees norms and sanctions as elements of social capital, from a Bourdieuan perspective it is the agents’ habitus (which underpin

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norms and sanctions as deeply embedded subjective and objective structures) enacted in actions in their respective social fields through which these forms of social capital are instituted or practiced. In other words, there may be some significant variations in different social structures in the way parents and teachers see the applicability and permissibility of the norms and sanctions about children. Moreover, the fact that in a given social structure people have a collective understanding and agreement of the applicability of these forms of social capital indicate the significance and importance of the historically reciprocal role played between the intersections of the habitus of the agents within their respective social field(s). This is an important and significant aspect of the focus of my study and connects well with the concepts of ‘closure’ and ‘intergenerational closure’ (Coleman 1988).

In order to provide analytical dimension to the notion of social capital, Coleman (1988) uses the concept of ‘closure,’ which facilitates norms and sanctions and trustworthiness as property of social structures. Coleman contends that when people lack a collective social network (i.e. operate without a closure), the actions of a particular agent may go unabated, unless people join forces through their social network to form a closure to provide a collective sanction. For instance, a child’s actions within a community context may go unheeded (i.e. network without closure) if an adult does not know the father of the child. The arrangement may be different when the adult concerned knows the father of the child (i.e. provide a closure) and contacts him about the child’s action, suggesting implementation of norms or sanctions. However, applying sanctions as closure by chastising, disciplining or punishing a child may have consequences for teachers or other adults in the community if the parent of the child thinks this is not right.

Coleman also introduces another related concept, which he calls ‘intergenerational closure.’ He demonstrates the working of intergenerational closure in the relations between parents, their children and the relations or connections they have outside the family i.e. with friends and acquaintances. Coleman argues that in a social network without an intergenerational closure, whilst pupils in a school may have high degree of closure among themselves (i.e. have expectations towards each other and a mutual understanding of behavioural norms), parents may not be linked socially to monitor and guide the behaviour of their children to enforce effective sanctions. For Coleman, parents with strong social ties represent intergenerational closure which act as a

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resource for them to discuss the various aspects of children and “to come to some consensus about standards and about sanctions ... not only in matters related to school but in other matters as well” (Coleman 1988:S107). In the context of my study, parents, and to some extent teachers, may exhibit intergenerational closure due to their close social and cultural ties. The practice of intergenerational closure may not only be due to longstanding social ties, but also because of a general understanding or consensus of the behaviours expected of children, and the role expected of adults. In this sense, one may say that social capital has a collective role towards social practice, which is what Putnam refers to when he talks about the concept of social capital.

For Putnam social capital involves civic engagement and collective benefits:

“Social capital” refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. (Putnam 1995:67)

Putnam takes social capital as a structural concept, with its community influence as dominant but not devoid of individual benefits. The features of social capital for social organisation identified here are in congruence with the elements identified by Bourdieu and Coleman in their writings. However, Putnam’s analysis of social capital centres round social institutions and public life from a broader perspective of communities and nations:

The central idea of social capital ... is that networks and the associated norms of reciprocity have value. They have value for the people who are in them, and they have, at least in some instances, demonstrable externalities, so that there are both public and private faces of social capital. (Putnam 2001:41)

For Putnam (1995) norms and networks of civic engagement have a powerful influence on the quality of public life and on the performance of social institutions. He argues that this has been evidenced successfully in civically engaged communities in various fields ranging from education, urban poverty, unemployment and health, to even the control of crime and drug abuse. For Putnam (1995:67) social trust and networks of social interaction enhance reciprocity and facilitate coordination, collaboration and communication, which may enhance the “participants’ “taste” for collective benefits.” However, it is only through “longstanding traditions of civic engagement” that a sense of collective benefits can be seen in social organisations (Putnam 1995:66). In the context of Pakistan, whilst some ethnic groups may have strong social bonds that facilitate individual and collective benefits, generally weak

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social organisations and lack of effective civic engagement traditions may present an individualised and fragmented form of social interaction.

For Putnam the function of the PTA as a form of civic engagement in America provides the important role that parental involvement plays as social capital in the educational process. This collective approach towards an appreciation of the education of children (though not without tension, conflicts and other problems) and the issues they confront at various stages of their life provides the parents and teachers with a collective front and a concerted platform on which to understand each other and work for the common good of children. This might not happen for less developed and less civically engaged communities because it entails time, effort and resources (material or symbolic) to invest in the form of social capital and work for the common or collective good i.e. running a successful PTA benefiting children, their parents and schools.

Michael Woolcock has contributed to the theoretical and empirical development of the concept of social capital, largely from an economic development perspective. Woolcock (2001:13) defines social capital as “the norms and networks that facilitate collective action.” He distinguishes between “bonding,” “bridging” and “linking” social capital (2001:13). For Woolcock the *bonding* social capital is what we see in the relations between family members, near friends and neighbours. The *bridging* social capital as a horizontal metaphor is held between distant friends, colleagues and associates who share the same demographic features. The *linking* social capital as a vertical metaphor is the “capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community” (Woolcock 2001:13). In other words, *linking* refers to “relations between different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups” (Cote 2001:30). The *linking* social capital is what enables people from one class (especially the working and poor class) to move up the social ladder (Woolcock 2001).

The bonding, bridging and linking social capital are important aspects of social practice and closely related to my work. In exploring the interaction patterns of predominantly working-class parents with teachers in public secondary schools, the concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital will be helpful in highlighting the intricacies of relations. More specifically, when parents discuss the various ways in which they communicate with their children at home and with teachers in school

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may essentially be exhibiting the bonding and bridging social capital. Moreover, the linking social capital is what many working-class parents may want to use when they interact with people from higher classes, to improve their lifestyle and raise their social status. However, all this will require them to use their knowledge and skills, which underpins their cultural capital. This is what I now explore and discuss.

### **3.1.2 Cultural capital: linguistic codes, knowledge and skills**

Bourdieu's (1986) interest in the notion of cultural capital first started as a theoretical hypothesis for his research to find out the reasons for unequal scholastic achievement of children who came from different social classes. He therefore wanted to explain how the cultural capital brought by students from various classes and class fractions were put to use for academic success. In doing so, he wanted to break with the commonsense view and presuppositions, which saw academic success or failure due to natural aptitude, and in human capital theories. He criticised economic theory for failing to move beyond economism, which fails to relate the fact that scholastic achievement of students is due to cultural capital as an investment by family.

The notion of cultural capital is one of the signature concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual, theoretical and analytical toolkit (Kenway & McLeod 2004:525; Lareau & Weininger 2003:567). The importance of cultural capital can be established from the fact that researchers in diverse fields have placed "culture and cultural processes at the center of analyses of various aspects of stratification" (Lareau & Weininger 2003:567). In education, the concept of cultural capital has been at the core of the analyses of an array of issues and aspects. These include, for instance, student achievement, educational reproduction, educational attainment, educational policies, social class, educational stratification, and race (e.g. Crozier 1997; Crozier *et al.* 2008a, 2008b; De Graaf *et al.* 2000; DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr 1985; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996; Katsillis & Rubinson 1990; Lareau 1987; Reay 2004b; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999; Weininger & Lareau 2003). Research on racial inequality in schooling and differences in cultural capital has established the significance of cultural capital for the less privileged groups in the society for upward social mobility (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996:33). This supports Bourdieu's argument that families from different social classes transmit different types and quantities of cultural capital and habitus to their children (Dumais 2006:102).

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In a similar vein, in their critical assessment of the literature on cultural capital in educational research, Lareau and Weininger (2003:568) argue that conceptualising cultural capital as “highbrow” status symbols has unnecessarily narrowed the terrain for cultural capital research. For Lareau and Weininger

... the critical aspect of cultural capital is that it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. (Lareau & Weininger 2003:587)

In this sense

... it might be useful to recognize that all social groups have cultural capital and that some forms of this capital are valued more highly by the dominant institutions at particular historical moments. ... [M]embers of the working class have cultural capital as well, but it is only rarely recognized by dominant social institutions. (Lareau 1987:83)

I find myself in agreement with both Lareau (1987) and Lareau and Weininger (2003) in that the game of reproduction in society is open to all with the difference that some people already possess (early on through their socialisation) sufficient stock of the various forms of capital to begin with and thus are advantaged or privileged at the outset. The working-class or poor parents, in contrast, due to their disadvantaged and less privileged positions in the society, tend to make the most of whatever stock of cultural capital they possess. They do so primarily to maintain their position and, if possible, to enhance their social class position and to produce and reproduce the stock of their cultural capital, which may take generations to be seen as ‘valued.’ However, unlike Lareau (1987), some researchers suggest that ‘lower status parents’ do not possess cultural capital which they can pass on to their children (Dumais 2006:102). Bourdieu makes a subtle differentiation between this:

In view of the fact that the apprehension and possession of cultural goods as symbolic goods ... are possible only for those who hold the code making it possible to decipher them or, in other words, that the appropriation of symbolic goods presupposes the possession of the instruments of appropriation, it is sufficient to give free play to the laws of cultural transmission for cultural capital to be added to cultural capital and for the structure of the distribution of cultural capital between social classes to be thereby reproduced. (Bourdieu 1973:73)

Bourdieu defines cultural capital as:

... the structure of the distribution of instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed. (Bourdieu 1973:73)

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Following Bourdieu, Lamont and Lareau suggest a definition of cultural capital that is grounded in highbrow culture and stratification:

... institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion. (Lamont & Lareau 1988:156)

Cultural capital is therefore at the centre of the role that schools play “in both changing and in reproducing social and cultural inequalities from one generation to the next” (Harker 1990:86). For Bourdieu, it is the culture of the dominant group (i.e. the elite or the ruling class, who control the social, political and economic capital), which is embodied in the schools that “works as a reproduction strategy” leading to class reproduction (Harker 1990:87). Bourdieu’s argument is that educational institutions are structured in a way that judge student competencies on the possession of cultural capital of the dominant group, and therefore treat all students in the same way as “if they had equal access to it” (Harker 1990:87).

This is important since by disregarding one’s individual competencies and focusing instead on family and personal background, many students may not be seen as able and capable individuals but considered as deficient in the knowledge and skills required of them, subjecting them to stereotypes of varying nature, particularly from the teachers and others in school. This may in turn lead teachers to see parents of such students as having a ‘deficit,’ not valuing ‘education’ (Crozier & Davies 2006; Davies 1993:208), and stereotyped as ‘indifferent’ (Chavkin 1993:5; Crozier & Davies 2007:295) and ‘hard to reach’ (Crozier & Davies 2007) etc. and the students as ‘lazy,’ ‘dull,’ ‘mentally weak’ and ‘incompetent.’ Such an approach towards such students and their parents may be embodied individually and collectively in the school culture in such a way that it may be seen as an established norm or more accurately as a part of one’s habitus. Bourdieu describes this more succinctly:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (Bourdieu 1973:80)

Bourdieu (1986:243) identifies cultural capital in three forms: the *embodied* state which exists in the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; the *objectified* state which exists in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries,

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machines etc.); and the *institutionalised* state which exists in the form of academic credentials or qualifications. The institutional recognition of a person's educational qualification helps its conversion into economic capital by valuing the level of achievement one holds.

Bourdieu explains that cultural capital in its *embodied state* takes time to accumulate as it cannot be got readymade but requires a considerable amount of time and energy by a person to acquire what he calls 'culture, cultivation, Bildung.' Bourdieu argues that the embodied capital [which he also calls habitus (Bourdieu 1993:86)] is better transferred to children in those families where sufficient stock of embodied capital is available and is invested at appropriate times to give children the head start they need in meeting the demands in the scholastic market. This means that for children where families are endowed with strong cultural capital, "the accumulation period covers the whole period of socialisation" (Bourdieu 1986:246). This is where Bourdieu argues stratification of classes occurs.

Bourdieu (1986) clarifies that the *objectified form* of cultural capital—such as paintings, writings, machines, tools etc.—have material significance and therefore transmissible to anyone, their underlying embodied capital is not directly transferable. It follows that the possession of objectified cultural capital may mean nothing unless one possesses the required embodied cultural capital. Bourdieu illustrates this by an example that the use of a machine (objectified capital) can only be made if the person using it possesses the required embodied cultural capital, which of course relies on the required knowledge of operating that machine.

For Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital in its *institutionalised* state is exemplified in the form of educational credentials or qualifications. These have an objectified form in that these are officially instituted, which is a testament to the requirements of a certain level of competence that is culturally, socially and legally acceptable. Bourdieu is critical of the structural impediments of institutionalised segregation of students by not catering to the individual differences of each student. This, Bourdieu argues, qualifies certain students with a guarantee of competence in certain areas of cultural capital, and denying others of this recognition. Furthermore, Bourdieu explains that as educational qualifications have value, their holders are compared and exchanged for one another. As educational qualifications have economic value, its holder has the

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bargaining power to exchange that cultural capital in the labour market on the negotiated terms and conditions with the holders of economic capital.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources, which include "verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials" (Swartz 1997:75). The way these resources shape our interactions, provide a better understanding of the mechanisms through which "social-background effects are translated into unequal school performance and subsequent career choices" (Swartz 1997:287). With its use in education, Bourdieu sees cultural capital as "breaking with the received wisdom that attributes academic success or failure to natural attitudes, such as intelligence or giftedness" (Swartz 1997:75). For him, success in school is better understood by the quantity and type of "cultural capital inherited from the family milieu than by the measures of individual talent or achievement" (Swartz 1997:76).

Swartz (1997:289) argues that cultural capital provides "a useful conceptualisation for analysing stratification processes in advanced countries" and contends that the concept "is less useful for analysing groups with few power resources." My contention is that 'stratification processes' underlying the concept makes it equally useful for the study of groups with fewer cultural resources. This is so because the quest for access to resources is a natural urge and above all socially instituted in multidimensional ways, determining the patterns of practices of the agents according to their relative position in the social space. Moreover, whilst people with less 'power resources' may be constrained by their personal and situational constraints, the fact that they are actively engaged in maintaining and enhancing their positions indicate the significance and appropriation of a certain amount of the various capitals. For instance, a poor parent with less stock of the various resources of cultural capital, may feel handicapped in those situations requiring different levels of cultural capital. Nevertheless they may be able to incorporate from that experience (according to their capacity) some of the resources, which they may be able to deploy or appropriate in future similar situations. This is where the role of habitus becomes important, which I now discuss.

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### 3.2 Exploring the role of habitus in human practices

The use of *habitus* as a theoretical and analytical tool is a central plank of my study. It is a useful concept to help me interpret and understand the socially and culturally embedded interaction patterns of and between the various agents in the home and school arena of my study. However, it is important first to lay some foundation for what constitutes the *habitus* and how well the theory might explain the research questions I set out to explore.

The notion of habitus is not a unique, original or a new concept; its use and presence has been traced back over the centuries (Grenfell & James 1998:15). Some writers and thinkers who have used something similar to the concept of habitus in their writings include Aristotle, Ockham, Thomas Aquinas, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Elias, as well as Durkheim and Weber (DiMaggio 1979; Grenfell & James 1998:15; Maton 2008:56). Bourdieu himself refers to the presence and use of the notion of habitus countless times in history by writers as different as Hegel, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim and Mass; their use of the term was in a more or less methodical manner (Bourdieu 1990a:12).

According to Jenkins (2002:74) *habitus* is a Latin word which means “a habitual or typical condition, state or appearance, particularly of the body.” For Mahar *et al.* (1990:10) habitus is “a set of dispositions, created and reformulated through the conjuncture of objective structures and personal history.” Bourdieu defines *habitus* as:

... systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu 1977:72)

‘Dispositions’ are at the heart of the concept of habitus, which Bourdieu argues involve learning, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or unplanned, in the numerous fields where agents participate. The important point is that it is the people’s interactive involvement or the urge and need for action in the social world that the habitus lends its way to the system of generative schemes, which being positioned in the agents acts in consonance with the objective structures of the field. Hence, “one of the crucial features of habitus is that it is embodied, it is not composed solely of

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mental attitudes and perceptions” (Reay 2004d:432). It is due to these qualities or aspects of the habitus of the parents and teachers that I was interested in, which demanded a qualitative stance for my research. By sharing their perceptions and experiences (as their life narratives) about the topic, it is actually the participants’ habitus with comes to the fore as a discernible or empirical aspect of people’s experiences. The habitus in this sense is not only a theoretical tool, but is also a method for describing and analysing the understandings and practices (Gates 2000:84) of parents and teachers played out in the various fields, where culture plays a dominant role in constituting the habitus.

In a similar vein, Harker (1984:118) suggests that the concept of habitus “may be seen as close to the concept of culture, but in a personalised sense - i.e. habitus is the way a culture is embodied in the individual.” This may set apart the role of habitus as a process as well as its ‘couching’ ability of accommodating and replicating cultural practices one experiences in a given culture. Bidet describes it more succinctly as:

... [T]he culture (of an epoch, class or any group) as it is internalised by the individual in the form of durable dispositions that are at the basis of his/her behaviour. (Bidet 1979, cited by Harker 1984:120)

Culture undoubtedly plays a central role in the formation of the habitus, as it is embodied in its varying forms such as the way people speak, communicate and practice their customs, traditions, etc. However, it is the practical and reciprocal engagement of the individuals in their environment or field, which provides opportunities for internalising dispositions and generating a capacity for action. Therefore, in this sense the habitus is a mediating concept, which is what Brubaker (1985) refers to in defining the term:

The habitus is defined abstractly as the system of internalized dispositions that mediates between social structures and practical activity, being shaped by the former and regulating the latter. (Brubaker 1985:758)

According to May and Powell (2008:129) the word ‘habitus’ implies something akin to the Greek word *hexis*, which relates to deportment, manner and style, etc. It is viewed as history objectified or embodied in people, which becomes evident in and through social transactions in the way we talk, move, get on with other people and make sense of the environment. Bodies may then be analysed from the interactions that take place between taste, social location and the formation of habitus (May & Powell 2008:129). In other words, “the habitus is embodied social structure” (Gates

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2000:84) and “being embodied and tacit, the habitus acts as our second nature, permeating our tastes, acceptable social practices, dress, demeanour and forms of interactions” (Gates 2000:93). More importantly, “it is a notion that transcends the dichotomy and distinction between structure and agency” (Gates 2000:84).

The *habitus* can be seen as a ‘stock’ or an ‘investment’ or as a potential resource, i.e. people internalise dispositions from their environment in which they live and interact and convert these to practices as and when required. The social or field influence is therefore a powerful one in forming the habitus. Individuals acquire dispositions in social positions within a field, which involve personal or subjective adjustment to that situation (Mahar *et al.* 1990:10). Therefore, agents or people who operate through an interactive harmony within their environment use their dispositions as transposable entities in new practices within their specific structures or fields. In other words, in Bourdieu’s theory of practice, “human action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between individuals’ thought and activity and the objective world” (Grenfell & James 1998:14).

As dispositions and generative classificatory schemes are the essence of the habitus, Jenkins (2002) construes from Bourdieu’s work a threefold meaning of the *habitus*, as embodied in agents or human beings. Firstly, in its seemingly invisible state, the habitus resides or exists in the heads of the actors. For instance, it may be the state of anticipatory interaction experience between a parent and a teacher, when they have not interacted or spoken to one another and are thinking what the other counterpart might have to say or talk. This may also be a step towards positioning oneself along the power dynamics continuum. In their respective social space and in social hierarchy, teachers and parents may be adept in anticipating the thought processes and associated response mechanics with which to approach the situation. Second, “the habitus only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other and with the rest of their environment: ways of talking, ways of moving, ways of making things, or whatever” (Jenkins 2002:75). Thus, here, the habitus is turned into something tangible, which is evident through the behaviour of individuals and identifies what and who they are and how they go about doing different things. For example, in the school environment, a teacher may be in a better position to differentiate between a parent and some other people by not only their outwardly appearance but also more clearly when they interact more closely and talk

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and exchange points of view. Thirdly, Jenkins (2002:75) identifies “practical taxonomies” which “at the heart of the generative schemes of the habitus, are rooted in the body.” ‘Practical taxonomies’ according to Bourdieu is a structure of homology and opposition, incorporated into the habitus as a natural given or objective system of classification (Lane 2000:120). For instance, hot/cold, up/down, male/female are rooted in sensory experiences and are all primarily sensible from the viewpoint of a person who has embodied a particular habitus (Jenkins 2002).

The important thing to remember here is that habitus on its own is an empty concept; “[it] is often little more than theoretical icing on an empirical cake” (Maton 2008:63). It is in the field that habitus is appropriated by agents in conjunction with various forms of capital to produce meaningful practices. Therefore, the practices thus produced determine the reasons of the agents’ everyday interactive exchanges within a given social system. Bourdieu uses a simple equation to try to explain (social) practice:

$$[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice} \quad (\text{Bourdieu 1984:101})$$

Maton interprets the above equation as:

...practice results from relations between one’s dispositions (habitus) and one’s position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field) (Maton 2008:51).

The habitus is a unique concept in that it acts as a ‘sponge’ to help agents internalise the various externalities of the social world in the form of dispositions and its generative dimensions act as a ‘launching pad’ for action or participation in the social world. There has been much debate about what actually the word ‘disposition’ entails (Jenkins 2002:76). Bourdieu justifies its use which, according to him, encapsulates three distinct meanings “(a) ‘the result of an organising action,’ a set of outcomes which [Bourdieu] describes as approximating to ‘structure,’ (b) a ‘way of being’ or a ‘habitual state’; and (c) a ‘tendency,’ ‘propensity’ or ‘inclination’” (Jenkins 2002:76).

Bourdieu (1977:72) refers to habitus as ‘structured structures’ and ‘structuring structures’ in the definition and explanation of the concept; the former implies something permanent and durable, which has links to the past, whereas the latter suggests the dynamic quality of the habitus, as constantly adapting to the changes in the environment. Lau (2004) in his critical interpretation of Bourdieu’s work of the

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habitus and the practical logic of practice argues that the habitus comprises of two sides:

One side (as ‘structured structure’) concerns formation. Acquisition may sometimes involve reflection, but mostly involves non-reflective sense, which may become conscious. For instance, in dining out with their children, a lower-class couple avoids certain restaurants. The children practically sense that they are ‘not for us’. Nevertheless, they may one day ask to go to one of these restaurants and be told that ‘it’s too expensive’. Throughout, nothing can be regarded as corporeal. The other side (as ‘structuring structure’) concerns practices generated by dispositions, which are mostly non-reflective, but can also surface to awareness. Thus, agents are sometimes, able to account for their practices, for instance, when induced to reflect upon them. (Lau 2004:377)

Similarly, Maton (2008:51) delineates the ‘structure’ aspect of habitus further. He argues that the habitus is “structured” in that it has its origins in an individual’s past and present, such as family upbringing, background and educational experiences. The habitus is “structuring” in that it helps to shape one’s present and future actions and practices. The habitus is a “structure” in that it is a thoroughly organised system rather than haphazard or unpatterned. This “structure” of habitus comprises a system of dispositions that generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (Maton 2008:51).

Moreover, the important point here is that the habitus is a potential, a capacity, or a propensity, which is a part or aspect of an individual. It does not represent the individual as a whole, but their unique personal and natural abilities and their past and present experiences in their specific environments or cultures, which mould or orientate them to think and act in manners that are in complete harmony to the system they belong. This means that:

The habitus is inculcated as much by experience as by teaching, while its power is seen to derive from the lack of thought which informs its manifestations. Quite simply, competent performances are produced on a routine basis, in the process of which objective meaning is reproduced. (May & Powell 2008:129)

The generative principles which underpin our performances and structures of practices provide a clue to the structured and structuring nature of the habitus, which is embodied in the agents in the form of objective and internalised dispositions and as an ability or propensity of strategic action (Bourdieu 1990b:52; Maton 2008:56; Potter 2000:237). The role that the habitus plays therefore is an important one, which forms bonds and connections at various levels or dimensions in the social scheme of things. It is thus “the link not only between past, present and future, but also between

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the social and the individual, the objective and subjective, and structure and agency” (Maton 2008:53). It is this linking aspect of the habitus that Bourdieu often refers to in explaining the concept, which he also describes as ‘a genetic mode of thought’ and as capital:

The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought ... Moreover, by habitus the Scholastics also meant something like a property, a *capital*. And indeed, the habitus is a capital, but one which, because it is embodied, appears as innate. (Bourdieu 1993:86)

The use of the habitus as capital or more specifically as an aspect of cultural capital, in its embodied state (Bourdieu 1986:243), points to its overlapping and harmonious connection with culture. It is here that the habitus and cultural capital appear as one, since parents and teachers in everyday practices do not need to think about the structural dynamics of their own structures, and the practices they generate signify their unity with the social and cultural environment of which they are an important part. They are constantly engaged in a continuous process of meaning making, within their specific environments, be it the school, home or other social arenas. This disposes them to speak their mind, provided they do not feel threatened or at risk of losing some of their capital(s).

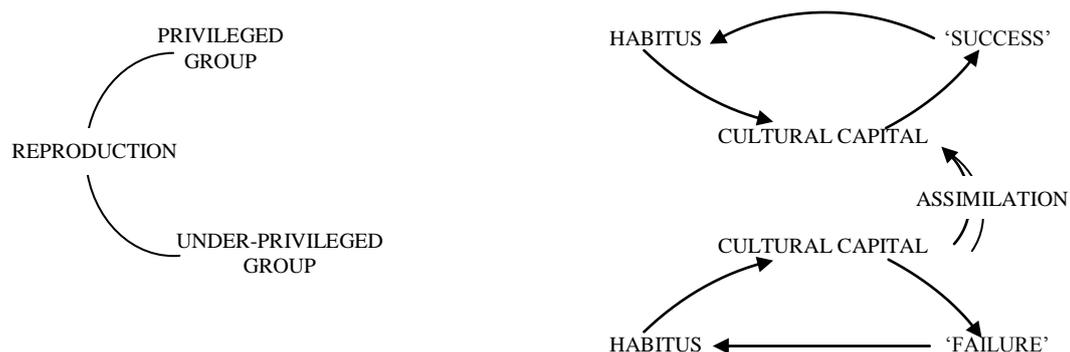
Bourdieu’s use of the habitus as a ‘genetic mode of thought’ (Bourdieu 1993:86) or ‘genetic structuralism’ (Bourdieu 1990a:14) is an attempt to overcome the objective-subjective or structure and agency duality. It is an attempt to:

understand how ‘objective,’ supra-individual social reality (cultural and institutional social structure) and the internalised ‘subjective’ mental worlds of individuals as cultural beings and social actors are inextricably bound up together, each being a contributor to – and, indeed, an aspect of – each other. (Jenkins 2002:19-20)

The subjective-objective dynamism in social practices positions or disposes actors to the process of reproduction (of their habitus), which happens according to the actors’ situated positions in the social framework of things. This is where class and cultural capital plays a significant role in social stratification, which is clearly adopted in the process of schooling and education:

Individuals are possessed, constituted by structural generative schemes that organise our social practices. Yet, practice is a cognitive, social operation reproducing the structures from which it came. However, the process here is one of *reproduction* rather than *replication*. Reproduction allows for some variation and diversity, some break from staticity, yet, at the same time, it imposes some boundaries and limitations on what we can do and conceive. It is there that the habitus becomes significant since it is the generative force behind this diversity and limitation working at the interface of cognition and social action. Schools, schooling and education, both formal, in institutions and informal, in the home and locality, are particularly significant and generating. The habitus is important for social reproduction because it confers upon some children an advantageous positioning in society. Those pupils whose habitus best fits the legitimate *modus operandi* of the institutions – that of the dominant social group – draw favours which dispose them to acquire greater exchangeable cultural capital. ... (Gates 2000:92-93)

Practices and interactions are central to the processes and patterns of relations I am exploring of/between the various stakeholders in the home and school arenas. It is here that the issues of class and social stratification may become more visible since the ‘social image’ of the public education system may be seen as for the ‘deprived,’ ‘the working-class,’ or ‘poor people,’ and for ‘those’ people who cannot afford to send their children to private fee charging schools. There may therefore be an attitude or stereotype in many teachers’ minds towards the parents, the pupils and their home backgrounds as ‘disadvantaged’ and lacking in ‘abilities’ (cultural capital), as a currency of “success” (Harker 1984:118). There may therefore be a strong desire in the parents to move up the social ladder, to have comfort, peace, success and capital. The process of social reproduction is better explained in the following figure:



**Figure 3.1 The cycle of reproduction**

Source: Harker (1984:118)

For a person to succeed from a working-class background or a non-dominant group to a higher social stratum, the accumulation and use of the appropriate cultural capital is required, with consequences for changes in the habitus (Harker 1984:118). Harker

argues that these changes in the habitus are called *embourgeoisement* from a social class perspective and *assimilation* when we refer to cultural or ethnic groups. Bourdieu's main thrust of research on education in exploring those processes in which the school system propagates or perpetuates inequalities, may be seen as constituting of five levels (Harker 1984:118):

Level	Process of inequalities in education	In the context of my study
1	For non-dominant group children there tends to be a low success rate in all kinds of school tests and external examination. Expectations in the groups to which such children belong are adjusted accordingly and become part of the habitus.	For instance, in my study, most of the children studying in public schools at any level may be seen to have poor backgrounds, implying they are disadvantaged from social and cultural perspectives, which stereotype them as 'lacking.' With this in mind, the likelihood of many of them is that they leave school even before completing their primary (around 50%) and secondary education (27%) (GoP 2003d).
2	Where (against the odds) some success is attained, non-dominant group children and their families tend to make the wrong option choices. That is choices are made that lead to educational (and occupation) dead ends.	In their world, where struggle and survival are the key aspects of life, working-class parents may aim for 'quick-fixes.' This means that most parents might view obtaining a secondary school certificate from a utilitarian perspective, for seeking a menial job, as a passport for earning.
3	The further up the system the greater the tendency for the schools to recognise only those who recognise them-what Bourdieu calls the <i>learned ignorance</i> of the schools and selection agents. That is, the schools reward with 'success' only those students who acknowledge the criteria of that success and the authority of the school and its teachers to dispense it. With the schools embodying only one 'currency' of cultural capital, this has a very powerful assimilationist outcome.	This level is important, since public schools in most cases might portray a culture or environment of class-consciousness, with consequences for the students' habitus, thereby influencing their personalities and academic life.
4	The denigration of the academic-the preference for style over content. In the French school system, Bourdieu argues, the teachers and examiners look for 'style', which is a product of the habitus of the cultivated classes, and can never be fully mastered by those without the appropriate background.	As a part of the former British colony, the British legacy or influence has had an enormous influence upon the habitus of people in Pakistan. This may be evident in the school and social system in abundance, i.e. one's competence and social influence as measured by how well a person can communicate in English, rather than how knowledgeable and capable a person might be.
5	Credential inflation. With the spread of higher qualifications (which gives the illusion of increasing opportunities), employers turn to other criteria for selection purposes. These criteria, Bourdieu argues are determined by habitus, including such things as style, presentation, language and so on. The possession of the appropriate habitus then constitutes a form of symbolic capital which acts as a multiplier of the productivity of educational capital (qualifications).	Those very few, who manage to assimilate somehow to get some of the cultural capital and habitus required for participation in higher strata, may not be able to compete with those who are already well connected in the 'social game' and who have full mastery of the rules and strategies. This may position the ones who are well connected to secure places or jobs of their own choosing, whilst others might only be thinking about understanding the 'game' itself.

Source: Adapted from Harker (1984:118-119)

However, the actualisation of habitus, capital and the process of reproduction cannot be meaningful and complete if we ignore the concept of field, which makes everything meaningful, commonsensical and worth investing one's time and energies. This is what I now turn to.

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### 3.3 Conceptualising the notion of *field*

The concept of *field* in my study provides the broader canvas on which practices and interactions take place between parents and teachers and other stakeholders within the social scheme of things. It is a canvas filled with colours and contrasts, signifying dimensions of life, which are rooted in power and struggle, class and culture and between agents and their corresponding objective and physical realities and materials. In this section, I explore the concept of field. I also address the question of how the *field* as a theoretical and analytical tool helps to answer the research questions I set out to explore in this study.

#### 3.3.1 The notion of *field*

Simply put, “a field can be any structure of social relations” (King 2005:223). For Bourdieu, a field is a social arena “within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins 2002:84). The concept of field is one of the important tools of Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit, which he developed gradually as an analytical method in the 1970s and ’80s, after developing the concepts of cultural capital, habitus, strategies, and practices in the 1960s (Swartz 1997:118). Many different fields can be identified such as, academic, artistic, religious, scientific, intellectual, literary, educational (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), including home and school and the overall social space as fields.

The notion of field is not a static concept; rather it is dynamic and multidimensional in character. It is the site for production and reproduction of strategies, actions and practices of the agents in the existing physical and social space within a given field. The field is therefore not only the site for the agents to structure, change and adapt their habituses to maximise their profits, but as a result, it remains itself in a constant flux and therefore reproduces and restructures with the passage of time. This is probably why Bourdieu describes the concept of field as *le champ* and not *les prés* to show that fields are sites of struggle and competition such as in the game of football, or in the field of science fiction, or the field of forces in physics (Thomson 2008:68).

Bourdieu sees structure, agency and practices as dynamic entities and stresses the relational capacity or quality of the field throughout his work. He argues that to “think in terms of field is to *think relationally*” (Bourdieu 1989:39). In the social space or field, habitus, capital and practices therefore overlap and interlink in multidimensional

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ways. Given their specific contexts, i.e., their habituses, etc., the concern of parents and teachers might be to pursue those aspects or practices, which matter the most to them or where they feel that the stakes are high. For instance, whilst most working-class parents might be cognisant of the importance of their children's education, they may be constrained in numerous ways by/within their various fields of engagement. As a result, their major concern might be to earn a livelihood for the family, as survival may be the most important stake for them. Similarly, whilst most teachers in a typical public school might be aware about the educational benefits of interaction with parents, they may be constrained by numerous factors such as the influence of the school culture or their other work engagement patterns as a possible justification or a constraint for not contacting parents. The concept of field therefore becomes an important tool to help interpret the various scenarios in which people interact.

Following Bourdieu and others, I believe that the overall social space within a specific context is to be seen and analysed as a constellation or conglomeration of layers of fields, which are interdependent, interrelated and multidimensional. Therefore, to understand their habitus(es), in their respective field(s) and the social and cultural aspects that underpin the various dimensions of their lives, exploring and discussing the practices and interactions of parents and teachers formed the main aims of my research. My emphasis therefore was on exploring the 'positions' and 'position-takings' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:105) of the agents as reflexive and dynamic members of their respective fields. The 'positions' of agents not only determine or enact objective relations between the various other positions in a given field, but most importantly the amount of power (or capital) residing in these positions determine or situate agents to have access to profits (according to their capacity) within the field. Bourdieu explains this in defining the notion of field:

In analytical terms, a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:97)

For Bourdieu power relations, struggles, strategies and stakes are central to the structure and functioning of field, within which agents and institutions are engaged to

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maximise their profit or capital to maintain their status-quo, which contributes to symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1993:73). As a result, this has consequences for those who do not possess the right amount of capital and are not positioned appropriately in the 'field' to be able to compete equally and effectively with others in the social game and to break the cycle of perpetuated state of inequalities. For the working-class and poor parents that might be the case, as their 'positions' and the associated power and capital they possess may not always be sufficient to help them to think, plan and work beyond the basic necessities of life. They might not possess the right amount of capital (both material and symbolic) to invest in their children's education both at home and at school; although they may have an understanding of what investment it entails to assimilate in the upper class structures of the society. However, to make some sense of how interactions and relations unfold or are experienced by the parents and teachers in public secondary schools, as a researcher it is important to go beneath the surface of the common, superficial or taken-for-granted understanding of the events of life. This is where the notion of field assumes an important place in my research. Due to its relational logic, it encourages "the researcher to seek out underlying and invisible relations that shape action" (Swartz 1997:119) and practices of the agents and stakeholders in the home and school arenas, individually and reciprocally and within the overall social space.

In order to understand the dynamics of home and school as fields and the logic of practice of the agents who occupy these fields within the overall social space, I take on board Bourdieu's (1989) suggestion of analysing the field in three distinct stages or operations. Firstly, Bourdieu suggests that one must evaluate or examine the position of the field in question in relation to the 'field of power' (Bourdieu 1989:40). As the dominant and preeminent field of any society, the field of power is therefore regarded as the basis of the hierarchical power relations that structure all other fields (Jenkins 2002:86). So in the context of the 'field of power,' the field dynamics of the public school education system in Pakistan might be seen as structured along the lower rungs of the social, political and power hierarchies that impede the actors in having any influence towards the 'field of power' in the overall social structure.

Secondly, Bourdieu proposes that an analysis of the field in question must involve mapping out or charting the "objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions" (Bourdieu 1989:40) who compete to maintain

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authority or to appropriate capital in its various forms (Jenkins 2002:86). The implication of this stage for my research is that I locate the relative position of home and school and map out the objective structure of relations between them. This might mean locating the respective places of school and home from the perspectives of parents and teachers and their views on how they relate to or interact with each other through the various means that may be available to them.

Thirdly, to understand the mechanics of the field, Bourdieu stresses the need for analysing the habitus of agents (Bourdieu 1989:40). This is so because it is through their engagement within the field that agents internalise or acquire a system of dispositions, which is based on the social and economic realities or situations that help to structure or determine their trajectories or strategies which leads to producing meaningful practices (Bourdieu 1989). In this sense, field is to be seen as a structured system of social relations that has macro and micro dimensions where agents, groups and institutions are all linked in some ways to one another, thereby determining and reproducing social activity in its various forms (Grenfell & James 1998:16). Therefore, home and school as fields within a field(s) provide a good reference point in which the “positions (of individuals, between individuals, between individual and institutions, and between institutions and institutions) can be mapped or located, and the generating principles behind their relations ascertained” (Grenfell & James 1998:16). I will now explore home and school as fields to help develop and provide an understanding of the contexts in which they are located in my study.

### **3.3.2 Home and school as *fields***

Home and school are structures or fields in their own right, in the theoretical sense of the word as well as given their physical existence in a given social setting, where they have their own logic of practice, which is embedded in history, culture, politics, etc. They stand in dialectical relationship to each other and to other fields within the social space. For any given field, it is the agents and their strategies and practices that help to structure a field, who in turn are conditioned by it, either individually or collectively albeit in different ways. This makes the field as a site of logic, meaning and commonsense, a place worth spending one’s time, to play the game and to accrue the stakes. Bourdieu often invokes the analogy of the ‘game’ and the ‘feel for the game’ when explaining the various aspects or dimensions of the notion of field (Bourdieu 1990a:64, 1990b:66; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:98). The agents or

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players (in my case parents, teachers and other stakeholders) are adept in the rules and strategies of the game (given their specific circumstances) and are conditioned or automated in such a way that they mostly play by the rules of their respective fields and act accordingly where they feel that the stakes are high or at risk. Here I introduce my understanding of the logic of practice of home and school from the context of my study, where religion, culture and social values play an important role in the structure and functioning of the fields and of the agents who inhabit these fields.

The home as a unitary structure is the pivot around which all activities of a typical working-class family in rural or urban areas of Peshawar are structured. A typical family might look like this: predominantly patriarchal, a couple might have on average 5-8 children, with the father as the sole breadwinner (possibly his son(s) working part-time after school especially in urban areas) and the mother having the responsibilities for the upkeep of the home. For many families, especially in the rural context, living in an extended or joint family system may be a common practice. This will have implications on the way the home functions and the culture and politics that underpin it would influence the life of everyone involved, including many aspects of the future of children, especially their education, marriage etc. The father being the dominant figure in the home would appear to dictate all or most of the decisions made in the home. The mother may also have a say in the home matters and in aspects of their children's lives. However, given the influence of the patriarchal family and social system, deeply engrained in the habitus of the agents, predominantly the mother's role and influence might be seen within the home. However, in most cases, the father will have the final authority in almost all decisions of everyday matters and in all aspects of life.

The interplay between the 'positions' the various agents occupy in the home is important since the 'field of power' emanates from the patriarchal position of the father which trickles down hierarchically from the wife to children and between them. It is here at home and in the broader social context that social, cultural and religious norms or values overlap, intermingle and are practiced in a way as to be seen as predominantly representing the religious identity. It may therefore be not surprising that researchers interpret and portray the social and cultural dimensions and practices of the agents as representing religious ideology, without properly understanding the teachings of the religion itself (e.g. Durrani 2007; Durrani 2008). Whilst religion

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(seen as a complete code of life) undoubtedly has an important role in the people's lives in Pakistan especially in the NWFP, it may be the socially and culturally situated subjectivities of the people through which much of what the religion propagates is filtered, which may collectively be seen as an embodied religious identity and representation. The issue of gender disparities for girls in education and their related issues of personal and social life therefore require careful examination and comparison of the social and cultural practices with an informed understanding of the religious (Islamic) doctrines.

My focus in this study is not on exploring religious practices vis-à-vis socio-cultural practices of the agents within their various contexts. However, as socio-cultural contexts and practices play an important role in determining how parents and teachers might interact with each other and within their own contexts, I am careful in my analysis of these concepts to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. The home as a field therefore entails a broader understanding of its underlying socio-cultural dynamics to help me interpret the 'objective structure of relations' (Bourdieu 1989:40) that exist between the agents in it, which has implications for how parents and their children might situate and relate themselves with the 'field' of school.

The logic and practice that the school embodies as a field though structured along formal and pre-established rules and regulations within an administrative mechanism, might mostly mirror and enact the social and cultural life prevailing outside its four walls and more specifically of the population, it caters for. In other words, class, class dynamics and other associated social and cultural traits of the stakeholders involved and participating in the 'field' of school, would largely determine the nature and quality of the field 'atmosphere' prevailing in a given school. In Pakistan, given its highly stratified society, numerous streams of education run parallel to each other, with elite schools at the one end of the spectrum catering for the few and the privileged class of the society to the government schools at the other end of the continuum catering for the masses. Most students, therefore, "attending government schools come from families with modest incomes" (Warwick & Reimers 1995:14). This is probably why the notion of public education is generally associated with a specific class, i.e. the poor, the working-class and the disadvantaged communities.

Given this context, public secondary school as a 'field' invokes specific structural mechanisms and practices that besides 'the field of power' might be seen as

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intricately woven in the habitus of the agents. The dominant patriarchal system might also dictate the use of ‘power’ to situate and determine hierarchically the status and position of the agents within their respective field ‘positions.’ The positions that principals and teachers occupy might be seen as the top of the pyramid of ‘power,’ whilst the students and their parents at the receiving end (i.e. perceived and experienced as having less ‘power’) located at the bottom of the pyramid of ‘power.’ In other words, the school administration considered as ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘educated’ can be seen to wield and exercise ‘power’ in a way that is socially and culturally sanctioned by the agents or more specifically by the parents. In this way, the practice that the school embodies as a ‘field’ may be seen to operate from a top-down hierarchy. Evidence also suggests that in Pakistan’s public school education ‘national culture’ and ‘high power distance culture’ position head-teachers in autocratic and paternalistic roles, with the subordinates exhibiting a strong sense of dependence on their superiors (Simkins *et al.* 2003:288). Whilst the nature of the school environment might depend on the individual head-teacher’s life trajectory mediated within their particular school systems (Simkins *et al.* 2003), the respective ‘positions’ of the individual teachers within the overall school structure and in relation to one another might provide a complex matrix of power relations. These complex ‘field’ dynamics within the school, driven and shaped by the teachers’ individual habitus and the collective institutional habitus will have implications for the quality of school life, the learning experiences of students and the ways in which parents are ‘taken in’ by the school.

### **3.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical concepts that I aim to use as conceptual and analytical tools to help me understand and interpret the myriad of parent and teacher relations and practices within their respective contexts of home and school and with one another reciprocally. However, relations and practices of parents and teachers are not inert entities; rather in practice, they are dynamic and multidimensional in character. At the crux of these are not only the issues of class and culture, power and structures, but also the dynamics of reproduction and stratification, stakes and the struggle for appropriation of stakes makes the ‘social game’ worth investing ones time and resources. Therefore, the notion of social and cultural capital as broader sociological concepts will aid in how their interplay with and through the

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habitus, agents negotiate structures and appropriate practices within their various respective field(s) settings that each require a different set of logic and practice underpinned by their respective set of strategies.

With this in mind, in the next chapter, to operationalise the theoretical tools, I will discuss the methodology and methods to concretise the research questions I set out to explore in the study.

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## Chapter Four — Research Methodology and Methods

In the previous chapter, I discussed the theoretical framework of the study that underpins the use of capital, habitus and field as conceptual and analytical tools for understanding parent-teacher relations in public secondary schools. In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology and methods that I adopted to explore the main research questions: ‘How do parents and teachers interact and communicate in public secondary schools in Peshawar, Pakistan? How do their relations become structured and influenced in the respective environments of home and school?’ With the research questions in mind, I first discuss the philosophical assumptions and research paradigm that guided this study before considering qualitative case study methodology as the research enquiry. A discussion of the plan and conduct of the fieldwork then follows in which I consider in detail the various data gathering tools and procedures used for the research, which then leads into the discussion of the procedures and processes of data analysis. Towards the end of the chapter, I explore the issues of validity and reliability in the light of my research. Finally, I consider ethical concerns pertaining to the research participants and the overall research practice.

### 4.1 Philosophical assumptions and research paradigm

The philosophical question of how we might know about ‘reality’ has led to (among others) two competing views or paradigms in the social sciences, broadly pitched between the positivist or objectivist and constructivist/subjectivist/naturalist/interpretivist traditions (Bloor & Wood 2006:122; Creswell 2007:15; Crotty 1998:5; Lincoln & Guba 1985:37; Merriam 2009:8). Researchers belonging to the former camp see reality as fixed, objective and as “out there” which is “observable, stable and measurable” (Merriam 2009:8). Positivism therefore, “both proclaims the suitability of scientific method to all forms of knowledge and gives an account of what that method entails” (Bryman 1988:14). Positivists contend that the social sciences can be studied using the methods of natural sciences and only that knowledge which can withstand the test of ‘objectivity’ can be regarded as authentic. Positivism demands that a researcher detaches himself/herself from the field of investigation and apply the scientific methods of investigating a phenomenon, which may yield objective data (Bryman 1988). Resultantly, positivists are more likely to

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use quantitative methods for their research, using surveys, statistical techniques and related research tools; the interpretations of results/findings are based on numbers.

For the researchers in the latter camp, ‘reality’ holds multiple meanings and interpretations, and thus is fluid, dynamic and positioned strongly in individual subjective experiences. For naturalist or interpretivist researchers, “reality is socially constructed,” which means, “there is no single, observable reality” rather “there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (Merriam 2009:8). For the naturalists, therefore, “individuals’ behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference: understanding of individuals’ interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside” (Cohen *et al.* 2007:19). Interpretivist or constructivist researchers use qualitative methods for their research, using observation, interviews, written documents (Patton 2002:4); the interpretations of results/findings are based on words and description.

As the present research aimed to explore and understand how parents and teachers interact and communicate in secondary schools, adopting a qualitative research strategy therefore was vital to understand the participants’ views and experiences, and their “interpretations of the world around them” (Cohen *et al.* 2007:19). Furthermore, for guiding and shaping research in qualitative research it is important that researchers are clear about the paradigmatic stance or worldview they bring to and make use of in research (Creswell 2007). A paradigm is “a way of thinking and making sense of the complexities of the real world” (Patton 2002:9). It is a “set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday [practices] or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry” (Guba 1990:17). Whilst there are a number of paradigms that one can choose for their research, this research uses social constructivism as the research paradigm. My approach towards social constructivism is better captured in the following quotation:

In this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views ... The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. (Creswell 2007:21-22)

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There is therefore an inherent interplay between the agency and structure, between the habitus and field of the agents and their circumstances, which resultantly culminates in the complexity of their practices. To look for the ‘complexity of views’ of parents and teachers, and to understand the ‘subjective meanings of their experiences,’ a qualitative case study methodology was employed for the research, which I discuss in the section that follows.

#### **4.2 Qualitative case study methodology**

This study employs a qualitative case study approach for understanding the relations between parents and teachers and for examining how these relations are structured and influenced in the home and school arenas. The case study approach provided the best fit for the research design of the study. It was so because my main research questions were based on “how” questions, I had “little control over events [as the behaviours of parents and teachers could not/were not to be manipulated],” and the focus of my study was on a “contemporary phenomenon” within a “real-life context” (Yin 2003:1).

Whilst there can be various types of case studies, three types are mainly identified, which are the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the collective case study (Creswell 2007:74; Merriam 2009:48; Stake 2005:445). In an intrinsic case study, a researcher is particularly interested in a specific case because of some specific interest to understand better the particular case (such as a particular child, clinic, and curriculum). In an instrumental case study, the focus of the research is on “a need for general understanding” “by studying a particular case” (Stake 1995:3). In other words, when “a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (Stake 2005:445) researchers use instrumental case studies. A collective case study (or multiple case study) is an extension of an instrumental case study i.e. “the one issue or concern is again selected, but the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (Creswell 2007:74). Since my interest was to explore the “phenomenon” of parent-teacher relations in four public secondary schools located in different contexts with different ‘population and general condition,’ my study can therefore be called as an *instrumental, collective case study* (Stake 2005:445).

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However, whilst “a case study is a research approach in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth” (Blatter 2008:68), most authors emphasise the study of case(s) within a bounded system:

Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context). (Creswell 2007:73)

A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. (Merriam 2009:40)

... A case study ... is a specific, unique, bounded system... (Stake 2005:445)

What I construe from the term ‘bounded system’ is an emphasis on delimiting the boundaries of the study being undertaken, which in my study are the context and settings of secondary schools, within which the various agents operate, interact and communicate with one another or within their own spheres. However, I also acknowledge that the “boundaries between phenomenon and context” (Yin 2003:13) are fluid as the relations between parents and teachers are not only examined in terms of the physical and interactional aspects but also the conceptual and more historical basis of relations between them need a more elaborate approach that transcends such boundaries. This is where the theoretical framework comes into play which underpinned by the notions of capital, habitus and field provides theoretical scaffolding and helps decode the meaning of what it entails for parents and teachers to interact and communicate with one another. In this sense, my methodology is mainly explanatory, whilst also utilising the facets of exploratory and descriptive case studies (Yin 2003:1).

For the explanatory dimension to the case study, the use of multiple methods therefore goes hand in hand with this approach, as Creswell explains:

... The investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes. (Creswell 2007:73)

It is helpful to note that qualitative case studies also have some special features. Merriam (2009:43-44) delineates some of these that she characterises as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. By *particularistic*, she implies that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, programme, or phenomenon. The specificity of focus in a case study research makes it a good design for practical

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problems, such as exploring the relations between parents and teachers in public schools. Since case studies focus on in-depth understanding of the cases, the *descriptive* end product provides a rich, thick description of the phenomenon being studied. In its descriptive vein, case studies have also been called as holistic, lifelike, grounded and exploratory. It is therefore through the parents' and teachers' *description* of the contextualisation of their perceptions and experiences that my study aims to provide a 'rich' and 'thick description.' In its *heuristic* sense, case studies elucidate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, case studies can "bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (p.44). The heuristic feature of case studies leads to naturalistic generalisation:

A case study provides vicarious instances and episodes that merge with existing icons of experience. ... Sometimes an existing generalisation is reinforced; sometimes modified as a result of the case study, sometimes exploded into incomprehensibility. ... Qualitative case study is valued for its ability to capture complex action, vignettes and narratives that feed into the naturalistic generalizations of readers and writers. (Stake 2007, cited by Merriam 2009:44)

A further discussion of the generalisation of the study is presented in **Section 4.7**. Again drawing on Stake (1981), Merriam argues that the knowledge gained from the case study research is different from other research findings in four significant ways. Case study knowledge is

- More concrete—case study knowledge resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory than abstract.
- More contextual—our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies. This knowledge is distinguishable from the abstract, formal knowledge derived from other research designs.
- More developed by reader interpretation—readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalizations when new data for the case are added to old data.
- Based more on reference populations determined by the reader—in generalizing ... readers have some population in mind. Thus, unlike traditional research, the reader participates in extending generalization to reference populations. (Merriam 2009:44-45, citing Stake 1981)

In a similar vein, Blatter (2008:69) argues, "case studies have a strong comparative advantage with respect to the "depth" of the analysis, where depth can be understood as empirical completeness and natural wholeness or as conceptual richness and

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theoretical consistency.” However, case study researchers need to address certain challenges and limitations that its design poses and levelled against it from different quarters. The most frequently mentioned criticism of case study approach is the credibility of generalizations of its findings (Denscombe 2007:45; Merriam 2009:51). However, as qualitative researchers are more inclined to depth and producing ‘thick description,’ “it is the reader not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (Merriam 2009:51). Like other qualitative genres, “case studies are often perceived as producing ‘soft’ data,” “lacking the degree of rigour expected of social science research” and “ill suited to analyses and evaluations” (Denscombe 2007:45-46). Since “the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (Merriam 2009:52), to counter these criticisms the “researcher needs to be aware of” and pay “careful attention to detail and rigour” (Denscombe 2007:46) in producing their report. There is also the challenge of identifying and deciding which “bounded system to study” (Creswell 2007:75). However, it is up to the researcher to decide about the boundaries of the case “in an absolute and clear-cut fashion” (Denscombe 2007:46). I address some of these concerns and related issues of validity and reliability in **Section 4.7**. I now move on to the next section that discusses the research methods that I adopted for the study.

### **4.3 From methodology to methods: the choice of research methods**

Most authors of research methods text seem to have a general consensus that there is no single strategy or design for conducting social research, and many emphasise that the decision about design and methods for research should emanate from the notion of “fitness for purpose” (Briggs & Coleman 2007:8; Cohen *et al.* 2000:73, 2007; Howitt & Cramer 2008:277). Given that the purpose of my research was to explore parent-teacher relations through a qualitative case study approach underpinned by the theoretical framework of the study, such strategies were required that could help me explore effectively the in-depth meanings and structures of the participants’ attitudes and practices.

In this regard, for researchers, the literature suggests a range of methods that could fulfil the ‘fitness for purpose’ criterion, with observation on the one end to the use of documents and photographs on the other end. For instance, Punch (2005:168) suggests four main strategies for data gathering, which include “the interview, observation, participant observation and documents.” Similarly, the data gathering

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methods suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) include participant observation, field notes, interviews (in-depth, unstructured and group), and the use of documents and films. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) include observation, interviewing, visual recording, field notes, documents and photography in the researcher's repertoire. Cohen *et al.*'s (2007) suggested strategies for data collection involve the use of questionnaires, interviews, accounts, observation, tests, personal constructs, and role-playing.

Whilst every method had an appeal in itself for inclusion in the data gathering process, I had to consider the 'fitness for purpose' criterion before selecting a method. Moreover, the context of the research required a judicious approach in selecting such strategies that were perceived to provide the best fit with the research context and fieldwork, and therefore to generate 'thick description' through the research process. Therefore, the methods that I used in my research consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field notes, documents and photographs. However, whilst field notes, documents and photographs were mainly used for triangulation of the data and for illumination and elaboration purposes, the main data were generated through interviews and focus groups with parents and teachers.

Having considered the methods, the fieldwork was proposed to be conducted in four public secondary schools, two each (one boys and one girls) from urban and rural areas of Peshawar. The selection of schools was based on a purposive sampling approach (Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 2002). The decision to select schools from different contexts and to keep due regard for the gender perspective was primarily aimed at capturing the "core experiences and central, shared dimensions" (Patton 2002:235) of the people and their settings. The aim was therefore to recruit a diverse set of participants from the study sample, to have *maximum (heterogeneous) variation sampling* (Patton 2002:234). To achieve this, as an 'insider' I used my knowledge and experience of working with people and context, and of the culture in making decisions to recruit participants from a diverse set of potential participants. I explain in more detail the conduct and plan of the fieldwork in the section that follows.

#### **4.4 Plan and conduct of the fieldwork: 'starting research and gaining access'**

The research presentation here had not been a neat and tidy business that was based on a linear model with "a beginning, a middle, and an end" point, rather the research

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process was discrete and considerably “more complex” (Burgess 1984:31). In many ways, since social research is a social process, the research and methodology needed to be continually defined and redefined in the light of the demands of the field (Burgess 1984), and later as new insights and connections were built and strengthened in the analysis and writing up stages.

As discussed above, by adopting purposive sampling strategies, the fieldwork was conducted in four public secondary schools. Due to the social, cultural and religious reasons, most public education provision is segregated in Pakistan, with female teachers teaching girls and male teachers teaching boys. Therefore, to avoid gender bias and to maintain a comparative approach, I aimed to explore both male and female perspectives, of both parents and teachers. Thus, in the boys’ schools, the research participants included male teachers and fathers, whereas in the girls’ schools, the research participants were to include female teachers and mothers. However, whilst the thesis incorporates the perspectives of parents, teachers, and principals, I interviewed students (both boys and girls) and held FGDs with them in both urban and rural schools. However, due to constraints of the length of the thesis, I could not use the pupils’ data. Nevertheless, I intend to use and develop the children’s data at a later stage.

Since the study employed a qualitative methodology and used qualitative methods, I therefore aimed to purposively select participants from varying backgrounds to produce a “thick description” (Geertz 2000; Lincoln & Guba 1985) of the context under investigation. However, I knew that since my interest was also in exploring the perspectives of female teachers and mothers, access to the research sites and selection of participants was believed to be difficult, contentious and politically grounded in the social and cultural mindset and practices of the concerned people in the study area. Whilst I did anticipate access to mothers, and interviewing them personally, as a culturally sensitive issue-for which my contingency plan was to recruit a female interviewer-I did not expect that access to the girls’ schools was to be such a contentious and politically grounded issue. This was so because most of the female teachers in the schools had graduated from the Institute where I teach and some of the female teachers had been my students as well. This meant that with most female teachers there was this professional liaison, which meant that we could interact and discuss issues of mutual interest pertaining to education, pupils, schools and parents.

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However, as I will explain later, access to the girls' schools was not from the schools' side. Rather, the issue was cultural, individualistic, and departmental. In most cases, it was the men who seemed to block my access to the girls' schools.

However, unlike the difficulties of access to girls' schools, access to any of boys' school was not considered a problem by anyone in the field whether it was the principals, teachers or Education Department officials. Having said this, for the UBS, I was already given oral consent (noted in my proposal to the ethics committee for fieldwork permission) for the research.

I conducted the fieldwork for three months, between the months of September and November 2006. Prior to embarking on this, I had chalked out a tentative schedule for the conduct of fieldwork for both the urban and rural schools. I had reserved four to five days for each school to 'blend in,' develop rapport, provide orientation to potential participants, and to schedule the interviews and FGDs with teachers and parents. The introductory phase of the fieldwork in each school consisted of:

- **Access:** Formal and informal access to the schools and establishing points of contact with teachers and other concerned people.
- **Research orientation:** This involved orientation sessions with potential participants about the nature, purpose and scope of the research undertaken and this also included an explanation of their rights and ethical issues.
- **Selection of participants:** This initially involved developing a list of potential participants (teachers and parents) by working closely with a senior teacher or principal in the school. This was followed by contacting and recruiting those participants who showed their willingness and who appeared to have different backgrounds.
- **Consent:** Oral as well as written consent was obtained from the research participants that included teachers, parents, and principals.

In the schools, principals were the initial point of contact, and as gatekeepers and heads of the schools, they had power, control and foresight of most of the activities and practices. Therefore, it was through the principals that the research access was agreed and further research steps and activities made possible. In all the schools, the head would detail a senior teacher to help facilitate and oversee the research. After providing orientation about my research, my aim was to use the facilitators' 'insider's' knowledge of school for developing rapport with teachers and parents and recruiting research participants from varying backgrounds. The contact with the senior teachers was not only beneficial in that the heads would normally be busy in

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their administrative and managerial tasks and duties but also whenever needed they would provide help, support and guidance, such as in issues around scheduling, recruiting or rearranging interviews and discussions. In the following section, I describe in more detail the research sites and the various factors and issues I encountered whilst gaining access and furthering the fieldwork.

#### **4.4.1 Selection of research sites**

Marshall and Rossman (1999:68) argue that choosing a setting or selecting a research site is the “first and most global decision ... [which] is fundamental to the design of the study and serves as a guide for the researcher. This early, significant decision shapes all subsequent ones and should be described and justified clearly.” Similarly, Mertens (1998:177) suggests that the researcher should “provide a description of the setting, research site, and the conditions operating at the time the data were gathered and report exactly how the participants were selected along with their characteristics.” As I was researching my own ‘people’ and therefore had the experience of “particular roles and social settings” (Burgess 1984:32), I endeavoured to make appropriate decisions for the selection of research sites.

I had to keep certain criteria in view before selecting the research sites. For this, I followed Marshall and Rossman’s suggestion, who argue that a realistic site is where:

- entry is possible;
- there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present;
- the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and
- data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.  
(Marshall & Rossman 1999:69)

Following this criteria, I explain in detail the research sites and settings, and related issues that I encountered during the various phases of the fieldwork in the respective schools.

#### ***Urban boys’ school***

As indicated in the beginning of this section, I had already obtained an oral consent for conducting research in the school. This school seemed to fulfil almost all the criteria for a research site suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1999). As one of my

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former colleagues had been teaching in the school, entry to the school did not pose any problem. Furthermore, I was on good terms with the principal and therefore he had been very welcoming. Not only this, the location of the school was very central, which attracted different people from varying backgrounds and places. There was therefore the potential of producing ‘thick description’ (Geertz 2000) about the research topic. The total number of students according to the principal of the school was around 1000. The school had five grades, starting from class 6<sup>th</sup> up to class 10<sup>th</sup>, with most classes having two or three sections, with the number of students in some classes ranging between 100 and 150. The total number of teachers in the school was 24, which also included two PETs.

In the first five days, my intention and plan was to ‘blend in’ in the school culture, to develop rapport and acquaint with the teachers so that the research aims and purposes were clear from the start. The initial orientation was as a key element of the fieldwork as it helped remove many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about the research process. Since the dominant and the only known process of research for the potential research participants was based on quantitative research traditions, using questionnaires and surveys, it was both informative and attractive for participants to come to know about ‘informal’ ways (i.e. the interviews, focus group discussions) of sharing their perception and experience about the study. The concept of focus group discussion is more akin to the concept of *hujra* in the Pashtun culture, which “provides a focal point for social life” (Heston 2003:290) for males especially, where they gather and discuss formal and informal issues and matters.

The orientation week was useful on other counts as well. I also experienced that some of the teachers had preconceived notions of research participants as those who could provide ‘permissible’ and ‘desirable’ responses for the research activity. Researchers have also reported similar feelings whilst doing their fieldwork in the context of Pakistan (e.g. Shamim 1993). I successfully countered these notions by explaining to teachers the aims and purposes of my research and the range of participants I wanted to include in my study. The aim here was to provide information to teachers to help them develop an understanding of and appreciation for the ‘actual practices’ that were in practice or were shared between the different stakeholders. Furthermore, as it was through the experience of the concerned teacher(s) that the selection of parents from varying and diverse background was to be made, providing teachers with the

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appropriate ‘skills’ to generate a list of potential participants was considered a key in the purposive sampling strategy.

### *Urban girls’ school*

Well before the fieldwork, it was mandatory to seek permission of the ‘gatekeeper(s)’ to conduct research in the proposed study area. In this regard, I had sent a letter (on June 13, 2006, approved by my supervisor), to the Director of Schools and Literacy Department in Peshawar for seeking permission to conduct my research in some selected boys and girls schools. The letter (**Appendix A**) provided detailed information about the context and purposes of the research. This letter also established my affiliation with the University of Nottingham as a student studying for a PhD degree in Education and as a lecturer on leave from the Institute of Education and Research, University of Peshawar.

Upon selecting an urban girls’ school and paying a courtesy visit, the senior female teacher I had a short meeting with told me that unless I produced a formal permission letter for my research, it was unlikely that I could conduct my study and that no one was likely to take it seriously. I had started my fieldwork with the impression that my letter for permission to conduct fieldwork would have been processed and all I expected to do was to identify the schools I was interested in to start doing my research study. To the contrary, by tracing out my letter with a senior officer in the Directorate of Schools and Literacy, Peshawar, I was amazed to hear that my letter had been ‘filed’ and no action was taken because ‘they did not know about the accuracy/validity of the contents of the letter.’ As I had clearly provided background information about myself, this news was very disappointing and shocking for me.

I then attempted to find out the reasons for the lack of action on my application. The concerned officer then informed me of another issue, related to access to girls’ schools. The officer explained that research in a girls’ school by a male researcher is fraught with difficulties. He explained that it is an issue, which is grounded in society, culture, and politics and highlighted the sensitivities involved around it. As an ‘insider,’ knowing about the norms, values and one’s limits as a male member of the society interacting with females, I explained my position as a researcher. I explained that as far as the norms and limits of access are concerned, I would fully comply with the required regulations to the extent that where access is strictly not allowed (such as

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in case of interviewing mothers) I will be engaging a female interviewer for the interviews and focus group discussions. However, the officer in question did not seem to agree with this idea and instead insisted that orders to this effect could not be issued. He then stressed that it was impossible to do research in girls schools. As I had explained my point of view to him earlier and I wanted to avoid any confrontation with anyone in the research process, I requested the officer to give me in writing the reasons due to which research could not be conducted in girls' schools, so that I could justify my position to my supervisor and examiners. Instead, he then agreed to forward my application to the Executive District Officer (EDO) so that he could look into the matter and grant me permission for research in the schools (girls including) of my choice.

The EDO of Peshawar was the concerned official to whom my letter for permission for the fieldwork should have been forwarded in the first instance, but instead it ended up being 'filed' in the cabinets with no action being taken. I had to spend many days visiting many people in the office of the EDO to get the permission issue sorted. When I first contacted the EDO, he referred me to another officer, who in turn had sent me back to the Directorate of Education Secondary, to process my application for the concerned official in the Directorate with whom I had the initial contact. This process of contacting and visiting different people and officers kept on going alongside my fieldwork in the boys' school for some time. It took me twenty days to get an official letter issued, for conducting my fieldwork in secondary schools (both boys and girls) in the Peshawar region.

The decision to select a girls' school in an urban area was difficult and grounded in many issues. I was looking for typicality of the research site, which could represent and provide me with what I was interested in to explore. To save time and resources, I also aimed to select a school, which could be easily accessible. Furthermore, I also wanted to have some room for contingency plans, such as in case of participants not showing up or me being told to come for interviews/focus group some other time. In such situations, my plans were to contact other participants in other schools to avoid a wastage of time. The girls' school I selected whilst centrally located in Peshawar was also a highly overcrowded school. The total number of students in the school was around 1200, with some teachers reporting class sizes of around 150 students. Like

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other schools, there were five grades in the school i.e. from class 6<sup>th</sup> up to class 10<sup>th</sup>. The total number of teachers in the school was 24, out of which two were PETs.

Prior to beginning the fieldwork, I paid a courtesy visit to the school to have an informal meeting with the concerned principal. Since it was a busy time of the year because of the students' promotion and admission to various classes, I only managed to hold a short meeting with one of the senior teachers in the school. The following field note might give some understanding into the complexity and dynamics of visiting a girls' school that entailed issues of power and cultural sensitivities:

Since access to the inside of the school premises is restricted, especially for male members of society, I knocked at the main gate before to be met with a gatekeeper/orderly who asked me, "What is your problem?" I gave him my business card and told him to give this to the principal in the hope that I would soon be invited in, as my previous attempts to see her had failed. ... After a while, the gatekeeper came out, and said that the principal is busy in a meeting with the teachers and asked me come back on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October i.e. Monday. Whilst I had already given my (official) permission letter for research to the school, I could not do anything, and felt powerless and then decided to go to the rural boys' school. (Field notes 20/09/2006)

### ***Rural boys' school***

As the formal permission letter for conducting fieldwork in schools was yet to be issued and sorted, I had already selected a rural boys' school and had arranged informal access to it. This school also seemed to fulfil the necessary criteria for site selection identified by Marshall and Rossman (1999). Moreover, I selected this school because of two other and related reasons. Firstly, I preferred this school because there were no stark differences between the physical conditions and features of the school with others and most importantly between the typicality of the people concerned. Secondly, having selected a school quite afar would have entailed time and resource constraints and thus I would not have any contingency plans.

The principal in charge of the school had just been posted to the school for around two months, so it meant that the school staff and the principal were in the process of getting to know one another. I later came to know from the principal and some teachers that, since the school was not in the jurisdiction of the Peshawar Municipal Corporation, teachers and principals were not happy to be transferred there, as it meant a decrease in their salaries and associated benefits and privileges. This was more so in the case of principals, most of whom had rarely stayed in the school for long. For instance, the school was without a principal intermittently for around two

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years in the last three years and five months. The school had five grades from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>. The total number of students in the school was 468, with the total teaching staff of 20, which also included two PETs.

### ***Rural girls' school***

Whilst the permission letter was being sorted, I needed to identify and select a rural girls' school, along with the one's that I had already selected, so that a letter could be issued to the principals explaining the nature of my research and asking them to facilitate my research in their schools. In this regard, although I had much knowledge of the rural context and familiarity with the social and cultural issues, I did not have much information about the location of rural girls' schools and the specific conditions prevailing around the schools. Moreover, unlike the schools mentioned above, I did not have any 'lead', which may have helped me in purposively selecting a school. I therefore requested the concerned official in the EDO's office for a list of girls' schools in the rural areas of Peshawar. Out of that list, I opted for one school that I thought fitted the purposes of my research, which had an added benefit that it was accessible both through public and private transport. Finally, to much of my joy and relief, the permission letter was typed and produced, jointly addressed to the principals of four schools asking them to allow and cooperate with me in my study and research.

Once the letter was completed, I telephoned the principal of the RGS before commencing the fieldwork in that school, to provide her with some information about my research and its purposes and at the same time to develop rapport. Upon contacting the principal, she suggested that I also contact her husband who being a teacher was also the president of a teachers' union. She also emphasised that her husband was very active in 'social services.' I felt very encouraged and motivated that the principal's husband being very 'active' would provide help to facilitate my research and would be helpful in building rapport with parents in the village.

However, upon contacting the principal's husband, I came to know that he was politically driven and instead did not want me to conduct research in his "wife's" school. He gave me an impression that the people of the locality were against the intermixing of men in the girls' school and that I would have problems in doing my research there. Furthermore, although he did not have any personal and official role in

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the official procedures of the EDO's office, his statement to his wife that "even if he (the researcher) had been given permission for his research in the school, she should deny me access to school" was sufficient for me to avoid any confrontation and hence I withdrew.

I therefore contacted the concerned officials in the EDO's office and requested for allowing me access to another girls' school. On hearing about the incident, the official became infuriated and said that I should still go and conduct my research there, but I replied that I did not want any problems and confrontation, which would influence my data and research. After some deliberation with the official over the suitability of a school out of a list of a number of schools, I chose one school that seemed to fulfil the criteria identified by Marshall and Rossman (1999). The official then telephoned the principal of the school and sought her consent before writing another permission letter requesting the principal to extend help and facilitate my research in her school.

This school had the problem of a shortage of teaching staff. With 11 teachers in school (some of whom had been temporarily seconded from nearby schools), they had the responsibility of teaching 800 students. As usual, there were five grades, from class 6<sup>th</sup> to class 10<sup>th</sup>, with at least two sections of each class. My first impression of the school was that it was well run and initially I did not appear to face any problems about data collection. However, it was later in the fieldwork that I came to know that due to social and cultural constraints, access to mothers was not possible.

#### **4.4.2 Access to research sites**

As discussed above, access to the schools was not a straightforward matter; I faced a number of problems during this process. It was a process that involved both informal and formal negotiations to obtain admittance to the research settings (Bloor & Wood 2006:5). I had to make requests to the concerned custodians of authority for being a part of their system for some time for the purposes of my study. Making formal requests for admittance to research sites is the agreed and most prevalent way of securing access. However, writers argue that there is also a potential of using other means for gaining access to research sites, which could flag ethical issues for the research process. The two means of gaining access to research sites have been identified as overt and covert approaches (Bogdan & Biklen 1992; Maykut & Morehouse 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that in covert approaches, the

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researcher collects data without informing the participants in the research setting, whereas in overt approaches, the participants are equally aware of the purposes of the research being conducted. Their suggestion to researchers and especially to novice researchers is to use overt procedures for gaining access to and conducting research in their particular research settings. I agree with Bogdan and Biklen (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) that qualitative researchers using deceptive covert practices are unethical and unbecoming of qualitative research genre.

Qualitative researchers have a unique status in negotiating entry, because unlike the traditional research strategies that are based on surveys and experiments, qualitative researchers can operate in an unobtrusive manner thus giving them a *low profile* in the research environment (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:82). In my fieldwork, whilst there were issues in negotiating entry to the research sites, especially to the girls' schools, despite my best efforts I was not able to keep a 'low profile' in the research settings in the girls' schools. This was because the girls' schools were segregated, which meant that there were visible and invisible boundaries that were not supposed to be crossed, especially for male members of society or a researcher like me. In such situations, the most I could do was to operate in a least obtrusive manner.

As discussed in the above section, whilst it took me twenty days to get the letter of permission that officially allowed me access to the research sites I had selected, throughout my research, access to the schools (especially the girls' schools) was an ongoing continuous process in the fieldwork. I negotiated and renegotiated it at various stages of the research in different settings and with different individuals and demands of locations in the schools (Bogdan & Biklen 1992; Burgess 1984; Marshall & Rossman 1995, 1999). For instance, in the RGS, whilst my plans were to interview mothers and teachers as well as hold focus group discussions, I was unable to have any access to the mothers due to the cultural sensitivities prevailing in that area. Similarly, the principal also politely turned down my request for a focus group with the teachers.

At the start of the research and during the course of fieldwork, it is suggested that qualitative researchers need to take into consideration the following:

- They need to be honest in answering questions and follow a path of normality.

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- They need to be unobtrusive and interfere minimally with the work and routines of research settings.
  - They need to provide detailed information about how the data would be processed and dealt with. Furthermore, what would happen to the research findings needs to be communicated to the research participants.
  - They need to provide details of why those specific settings and people are sought for the study in question.
  - They need to tell the participants what benefits would the institution and the particular research participants get when involved in the research activity. (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:83-84)

Given the above suggestions, throughout my fieldwork I had been providing the required relevant details to all the research participants (which explained their rights, although most of them were not properly aware of the need of it). It had been my practice that I would not only give the participants the consent form but would also explain to them their rights orally when I felt that the participants were not literate enough to read.

As I also discussed in the above section, access to the boys' schools in both the urban and rural contexts did not seem to pose any problem. Before initiating fieldwork in these schools, I would first pay a courtesy visit or would make a telephonic contact to negotiate access and provide the 'gatekeepers' with the relevant information about the nature of research to be conducted in their school. I would also explain in detail all the ethical issues involved to make them aware that no attempt was to be made to conduct any 'covert' research practices. This initial contact was usually quite useful and led to the development of a working rapport with the concerned principals and their staff—mostly teachers but with some other support workers as well. The rapport thus developed was used to recruit a diverse set of participants (teachers and parents) with an aim for generating a 'thick description' (Geertz 2000) through their lived experiences.

Before embarking on my fieldwork, in my research ethics approval application I had made it clear that access to a girls' school was a contentious issue. As has been mentioned in the sections above, I faced a number of problems concerning access to girls' schools. The issue started with seeking formal departmental approval from the concerned heads of the various departments. In the first instance, I had to 'trace out' the letter of permission for conducting research, which I had sent to the Director of

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School and Literacy in Peshawar in June 2006. After tracing out the application, I came to know that no action was taken on my request and it was ‘filed’ because the ‘authenticity’ of the letter could not be ensured. Further, I also came to know that as a male researcher, researching and working within girls’ school was a cause of concern for many of the political establishments, parents and the community concerned. After having explained the purposes of my research, I made it clear to the concerned official that being a member of this society, I am fully aware of the norms and traditions of the people. I further explained that I had already contemplated difficulties in having deeper access to girls’ school and interviewing mothers in their homes or in school. This being the most difficult and contentious issue, I suggested that it may be resolved by recruiting a female volunteer interviewer for the purpose. However, every request I made was countered with another argument.

When I felt that the discussion did not seem to go anywhere and the official seemed to be adamant in his stance, I requested that reasons of not allowing access to girls’ schools be provided to me in writing so that I may provide justification to my supervisor and examiners for not being able to conduct research in girls’ schools. Surprisingly, the concerned official then agreed to forward my application to the EDO for some favourable action (see **Appendix A**).

Gaining access to the girls’ schools through the principals was not an easy process. I found that besides the physical barriers in the form of gates and other waiting rooms to which a visitor/researcher was escorted to by the ‘real gatekeepers,’ there were also invisible barriers, which needed to be considered and given importance, else problems could have arisen. Having said this, whether it was the boys or the girls schools, I endeavoured to follow the norms of the schools. I always considered ethical issues of the participants as more important in my fieldwork pertaining to interviews, focus group discussion, or the other methods, which were used in the research.

## **4.5 Data gathering tools and procedures**

### **4.5.1 Semi-structured interview**

In qualitative research, the interview is regarded as the most commonly used method, which is one of the most common and powerful means of acquainting ourselves with our fellow humans. Whilst there are many variants of the interview, the most common types are: structured, semi-structured and unstructured or loosely structured (Bryman

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2004; Darlington & Scott 2002; Denscombe 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen 2006; Kvale 1996; Mason 2002). I sought to use semi-structured interviews in my research.

My aims for the present research were to understand how parents and teachers interacted and communicated with one another in school and in their respective environment of home and school. The semi-structured interview was therefore believed to be the appropriate choice as one of the methods for the study because of the flexibility in its structure. This approach paved the way for “a conversation with a purpose” (Marshall & Rossman 1999:108, citing Kahn & Cannell 1957) in an informal way. To help the participants express their points of view freely and effectively, I would ask the participants to talk in the language they were most comfortable with. Depending on their response, the interviews were then done in either Pashtu or Urdu.

According to Kvale (1996), a qualitative research interview aims to derive the qualitative descriptions of the life world of the participants, with which they make sense of, or give meaning to, their life experiences. The semi-structured interview that I chose as one of the strategies for data gathering consisted of a set of themes to be covered and questions to be dealt with during the interview process. I favoured this method because semi-structured interviews have a certain form and structure, and yet they have flexibility and openness for the unexpected leads in the answers, which proved to be interesting and important towards the research topic. The interactive approach allowed me to follow some of the interesting dimensions indicated by the interviewees.

Kvale argues that

The research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue. (Kvale 1996:125)

In a similar vein, Denscombe (2003) contends that interviews are more than just a conversation, as they involve a set of assumptions and understandings about the situation not normally associated with a casual conversation. Therefore, following Kvale and Denscombe, as the interviewees were always aware of the theme for conversation, I encouraged the respondents to speak openly to help them construct what they had been experiencing regarding the topic under discussion. By creating a

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positive atmosphere of trust and confidence, most of the respondents freely expressed their opinions and often elaborated some issues when asked to clarify certain things.

The interviewee can perceive the interviewer as a person who wields considerable power and influence in the interviewing situation. This may be because the interviewer 'digs in' into the life experiences of the interviewee, which may be seen as a weakness by the interviewee on his/her part. To counter such feelings and appreciate the nature of interviewing, the interviewer needs to be adept in the art of interviewing. Kvale has highlighted this aspect as:

The interviewer has an empathic access to the world of the interviewee; the interviewee's lived meanings may be immediately accessible in the situation, communicated not only by words, but by tone of voice, expressions, and gestures in the natural flow of a conversation. The research interviewer uses his-or herself as a research instrument, drawing upon an implicit bodily and emotional mode of knowing that allows a privileged access to the subject's lived world. (Kvale 1996:125)

For an interview to be effective and meaningful, the interviewer must be attentive and a good listener. This is why Kvale (1996:14) sees an interview as an *inter view*—where knowledge is constructed by meaningful interaction between two responsive and interactive individuals. Besides giving preference to the opinions and views expressed by the respondents, I experienced that the interviews were relatively easy to arrange and control (Denscombe 2003).

I therefore had a clear list of issues to be discussed and questions to be asked from the respondents (Bryman 2004; Denscombe 2003). But at the same time, I was ready to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics were discussed (Bryman 2004; Denscombe 2003). This further facilitated a strong element of discovery and its structured focus allowed for an analysis in terms of commonalities (Gillham 2005:72).

As a researcher is the instrument of data collection, certain skills are of core significance to the interview process. In the interviews, I therefore remained attentive to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the respondents (Denscombe 2003). Furthermore, whenever needed, I tried to effectively handle and tolerate silences; provided prompts and probes in the conversational exchanges; and above all used checks by providing a summary of what had been spoken by the respondents, to avoid being judgmental in my stance (Denscombe 2003:177-178). This practice of checking with the interviewees and providing a summary of their accounts not only provided clarity but

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also at times led to other important themes which otherwise would not have been known. I also considered this as a way of verifying and validating the data and their interpretation of it (Cohen *et al.* 2000:87).

### ***Interview sampling***

In each of the four schools, I sought to interview five teachers and five parents respectively. Since the school principals as heads had a major role and responsibility in the affairs of the school, concerning students and teachers, I also wanted to interview them to explore their perspective and experience on relations with parents and related issues.

I used a purposive sampling strategy for the selection of research participants for the interviews (Bryman 2004). As the sample selected for a qualitative interview is based on the purposes of one's study (Kvale 1996), I tried to select appropriate respondents for my interviews from diverse backgrounds. This meant that extreme care was to be taken for selecting the sample. Kvale (1996) argues that if the sample taken is too small, statistical generalisations or testing hypotheses of inter-group differences may not be possible. On the other hand, if the number of interviewees is too large, thorough interpretations of the interviews may be difficult to make. Thus, it is up to the interviewer to decide to interview as many interviewees as may be considered necessary which would help in what one needs to know (Kvale 1996:101-102).

Similarly, Bryman (2004) suggests that if the scope of the qualitative study is broad, more inter-group comparisons in the sample and more interviews would be needed to be carried out. He further argues that a larger sample would be necessary when comparisons are made between males and females, different age groups, and the different types of research participants. The sample of my study was large enough for me to compare the urban and rural context of the problem under investigation. As I was also aiming to explore gender and age specific context, my suggested sample therefore needed to be enough to allow me to derive relevant issues out of the given interviews.

Although my "working knowledge of the contexts of the individuals and settings" (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:57) greatly helped me in selecting the sample for my research, at the same time I had to negotiate with the concerned gatekeepers for "maximum variation sampling" (Patton 2002:234). This meant that I had to explain

the purposes of my research and the type of people I was interested to interview, thus avoiding the trend of being provided with interviewees who would provide ‘permissible’ responses.

***Sample for the interviews***

The proposed sample for the interviews prior to the fieldwork is presented in the following table:

**Table 4.1 Proposed sample for interviews**

	<b>Parents</b>		<b>Teachers</b>		<b>Principals</b>		<b>Total</b>
	Mother	Father	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Urban	5	5	5	5	1	1	22
Rural	5	5	5	5	1	1	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>44</b>

The following table presents the interviews done with the various participants in the research study schools:

**Table 4.2 Interviews held**

	<b>Teachers</b>		<b>Parents</b>		<b>Principals</b>		<b>Total</b>
	M	F	Fathers	Mothers	M	F	
Urban Boys’ School	4	-	4	-	1	-	9
Urban Girls’ School	-	3	-	3	-	1	7
Rural Boys’ School	5	-	5	-	1	-	11
Rural Girls’ School	-	6	-	0	-	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>34</b>

The interviews were conducted with purposively selected respondents in the four schools selected from the urban and rural areas of Peshawar. As I aimed to interview a diverse set of people, the number of respondents selected from each group needed to be sufficient to enable me to make valid comparison of the results. The aim here was to get rich and diverse opinions of the respondents. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:56) the way one purposefully select “people (or settings, organizations) for a study acknowledges the complexity that characterizes human and social phenomena.” They further argue that for purposive sampling, numerous strategies could be used, but the sampling process is driven by the ‘focus of inquiry’ and the judgment of the researchers as to the suitability of the approach used. However, despite my best efforts I could only interview three mother-participants in just one girls’ school (see Table 4.2). With hindsight, I could have interviewed and

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hold FGDs with fathers in the girls' schools. However, since I interviewed fathers in the boys' schools, I also asked questions from them about their interaction and relations with their daughters. This in many ways compensated for, contrasted with and triangulated the mothers' data.

I therefore, used *maximum variation sampling* (Patton 2002:234) to help me capture and describe the central themes that cut across the diverse sample of parents, teachers and the respective principals. Whilst it may not be easy in a qualitative study to select a representative (diverse) sample, I always made efforts towards this by using my own experience as an 'insider.' Besides, heads of the schools were requested to arrange a meeting with the teachers, in which I explained the purpose of my study and requested help to facilitate the research process.

The time specified for an interview depended on the nature and quality of the data generated but the usual duration was between thirty minutes and one hour. However, some of the interviews recorded were more than one hour. Having considered the sampling issues for the interviews, it is also important to outline the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method and consider these in the light of my fieldwork.

### ***Strengths of interviews***

My experience of using interviews for my study proved very helpful. I will draw on Denscombe's (2003:189-190) suggested strengths of using semi-structured interviews and will expand on these strengths according to the context of my study.

The flexible and interactive nature of the semi-structured interviews helped to generate detailed information about the issues and themes of parent-teacher relations through the various research participants. As the respondents were the key informers, this led to producing valuable insights about the issues, which happened in their lives. Apart from doing some pilot interviews, I did not have prior experience of conducting interviews. However, with little practice and using my conversational skills, I quickly found myself comfortable in conducting effective interviews. As the respondents were interactively exchanging their ideas and experiences, most of the time, I managed to explore effectively and efficiently their priorities and opinions about the issues that pertained to home and school matters.

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Furthermore, since the interviews were held in real time, unlike the other methods of data generation, I effectively utilized the flexibility of this method by using probes and prompts whenever needed. Moreover, the flexibility in the interviews also helped me to make reasonable adjustments to the interviews as and when required. As the interviews were interactive, I could effectively clarify things to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the responses provided. This was also done to ensure the validity of the information collected. As the interviews were prearranged and scheduled for a suitable time and place, this ensured their high response rate. Being an ‘insider,’ knowing about the cultural norms and traditions, I mostly conducted the interviews in an informal conversational manner. This was supported by using the language of the respondents for effective communication (most of the interviews were done in the Pashtu language; some were also done in the Urdu language). As I would facilitate the interview process for the respondents, most often the interviewees spoke at length about their experiences. This, besides being considered as a rewarding experience, was also a source of providing new perspectives into the lives of the interviewees. For some of the respondents, the net result of participating in the interviews seemed to have been therapeutic (or as a way of adapting their habitus according to their insight and experience), leading possibly to some change and improvement in the way they interacted with their children and their related issues and aspects of the school. For instance, in one of the interviews in the RBS, a parent said that having participated in the interview he came to know that he needed to have some contact with the school and teachers of his child (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.1.4**).

#### ***Limitations/problems of interviews***

The pre-and post fieldwork experience of the interviews was different and it was only when I came back from my fieldwork that the limitations and issues of interviews surfaced more fully. Denscombe (2003:190) suggests some limitations and problems of interviews, which I will expand on and extend in the following lines, given the experience I had in the field.

Apart from the first few interviews in which I was conscious enough of my skills of interviewing, interviews with teachers and parents were quite exciting and I kept on gathering data, which seemed to come with ease. However, the data analysis phase can be difficult and time consuming (e.g. Cohen *et al.* 2007). I therefore went through the daunting experience of data analysis with overwhelming feelings of

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procrastination. Unlike questionnaires where questions are pre-coded, the ‘end-loaded’ nature of interview data made the task of transcribing, coding and analysis relatively difficult for me.

Semi-structured interviews are famous for ‘flexibility’ and ‘interactive’ ways of engaging two people in a one-to-one communication. These features also become its demerits. This is because the non-standard responses generated during the course of an interview make the data analysis of such open format responses a difficult task.

There is also an issue of sampling in qualitative research interviews. As the data produced in my interviews was context and person specific, the results thus obtained could be unique to those specific settings. This may raise consistency and objectivity issues and thus may appear to have an adverse effect on the reliability of the data. However, the probability of this limitation could be countered with two arguments. Firstly, my emphasis in this study was to see a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 2000) in the data generated, meaning that the emphasis here was to see how people give meaning to their lived experiences—which were specific to person, context, social and cultural aspects of my study area. Secondly, as the interviews were not the sole method I used for my research, other methods—focus group discussions, field notes, documentary analysis and picture documentation—also formed part of the research process, so the triangulation of the results thus made would counter any reliability and validity issues.

Another frequently identified limitation of the interviews is that the data produced may not be that what people actually do in their daily lives. In other words, people with preconceived notions and prejudices would tend to paint a picture according to their likes and dislikes. I can argue here that both the interviewer and the interviewee cannot claim full impartiality during the interviewing process. However, this can be minimized provided the interviewer has the knowledge and skills to counter and check such practices. In my fieldwork, I had contemplated this well before the beginning of my research. I tried to educate people and respondents before and during the interviews to be honest in whatever they said. I provided this information at many instances to counter the ‘stereotype’ with which people disguise their words and actions with something ‘presentable’ and ‘permissible’ in such social situations.

Respondent’s inhibition is another issue identified as a cause of concern during interviews. The factors that may inhibit interviewees during the interviews from

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speaking or expressing their mind appropriately are the physical settings, recording equipment, interviewer's effect and the interviewee's relative exposure and experience with such situations (Denscombe 2003). Whilst some or all of these factors may have had their influence on the interviewees in the fieldwork, I consider that the most important of all these was the interviewer's effect. This has the potential to make or mar the interviewing experience, which meant that it was up to me how effectively or efficiently I deployed my skills during the interactive process of communication. My personal experience with the various interviewees was that I tried to develop interviews in an informal manner so that the interviewees regarded their experience as an ordinary day experience. However, I cannot claim that I was fully successful in this effort. There was definitely some inhibition towards the interviews because of many reasons, such as my social class, status, and education and difference of gender. Not only that the above mentioned factors would have played their part in the inhibitive behaviour of the respondents, some other elements such as personality, power dynamics, political and cultural issues, information of a personal nature, and interacting with women (female teachers) would have had a different impact for different individuals in the interviewing experience. I was aware of such issues and I tried to minimize all their effects in the interviews. Furthermore, it is also argued that as the interview in some ways is a forced and arranged setting, this could be a daunting experience for some people (Denscombe 2003). This was definitely the case in my study with those participants, especially parents, who did not have any prior experience or exposure to research interviews. To avoid the interviews being a daunting experience for the participants, I would quickly capitalize on my informal communication skills (which of course were in Pashtu!) to develop the interviews from some common interests with the participants, which mostly worked well.



**Photo 4.1 Interviewing a parent – going ‘native’**

Interviews as a whole can be a huge burden on resources, not only in terms of time, but also of travel, transcription and physical engagement (Denscombe 2003). I have pointed out in the beginning of this section that the transcription of the interviews and data analysis had been a source of many problems for me. The transcription of the interviews was particularly difficult because I had done most of the interviews in the Pashtu language. For the sake of clarity and to effectively capture the context of the respondents’ understanding, conducting interviews in Pashtu language were vital. Moreover, my difficulty of transcribing the interviews further increased because of translating the interviews into the English language. The difficulties faced here related to the use of correct grammar in English and effective communication of the context of the interviews. Both of these issues had their toll in terms of my efficiency, time and mental strain.

It is very tempting to invade one’s privacy, which when done could be very upsetting for the respondent and for the interview process as a whole (Denscombe 2003). Conducting research is to be strictly governed by guidelines properly documented and legally binding for the researcher and research participants, with particular emphasis given to ethical issues, informed consent and other issues pertaining to harm or injury

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to the respondents/participants. My experience of the fieldwork in this study is that, ethical considerations and informed consent were not considered as an issue or given high priority either by the gatekeepers or by the research participants, except in relation to interviewing the girls and mothers, which itself was a cultural issue. There were even instances in which people would complain as to why they had not been involved in the research study. However, I strictly followed the research ethics guidelines of the University of Nottingham and BERA by providing proper orientation (both written and oral) to the prospective participants and thereafter kept a proper record of the consent forms of the participants who participated in the study.

#### **4.5.2 Focus group discussion**

Whilst, there were a number of problems that I encountered during the interviewing of parents and teachers, it was the focus group sessions, which posed the biggest challenge of all.

The main aim of conducting focus group discussions among the participants was to explore the key research question: How do parents and teachers interact and communicate in public secondary schools in Peshawar? For this to be done, focus group discussion with parents and teachers were planned to be conducted in the respective schools in the urban and rural localities, involving male and female participants separately.

Whilst I was clear about the purposes of conducting focus group discussions and had a clear understanding of the specifics and the procedures involved for recruiting various research participants, arranging focus group discussions with the participants had numerous problems. I discuss the issues concerning the focus group later in this section. I also discuss the limitations of the focus group method as highlighted in the literature. I then extend and relate these limitations to the social and cultural context of my study.

My aim of using the focus group method was to help the participants share their unique perspectives and opinions and beliefs about the topic. The decision to use the focus group method alongside others was also based on authenticating and validating the results of the interview data, field notes and documents. I considered that all these results would lead to the triangulation of the findings and support the discussion (Bryman 2004; Cohen *et al.* 2000; Patton 2002).

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Bloor and Wood describe focus group as:

A series of audio-recorded group discussions held with differently composed groups of individuals and facilitated by a researcher, where the aim is to provide data (via the capture of intra-group interaction) on group beliefs and group norms in respect of a particular topic or set of issues. (Bloor & Wood 2006:88)

The focus group has become a popular form of qualitative method and has been introduced into the social sciences from marketing and advertising fields (Bryman 2004; Darlington & Scott 2002; Denscombe 2003; Robson 2002). Bryman (2004:346) argues that the focus group method "... is a form of group interview in which: there are several participants...; there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning." Payne and Payne also echo the features of focus groups identified by Bryman. Payne and Payne (2004:103) contend that a focus group is "a special type of group discussion with a narrowly focused topic discussed by group members of equal status who do not know one another." Similarly, Krueger and Casey (2000) have identified five characteristics of the focus group method. They argue that focus group include: "(1) people who (2) possess certain characteristics and (3) provide qualitative data (4) in a focused discussion (5) to help understand the topic of interest" (Krueger & Casey 2000:10).

There has also been emphasis on the intra-group dynamics of members within a focus group. For Payne and Payne (2004) group members in a focus group should have equal status but should not know one another. Others (Bloor & Wood 2006; Krueger & Casey 2000) suggest selecting relatively homogenous groups that have certain basic characteristics of age, gender, occupation and social background in common. However, the suggestion is that focus groups with "close friends, family members or relatives, or closely knit work groups" are to be used with caution (Krueger & Casey 2000:11). Still, others argue that "by recruiting from pre-existing friendship groups, work groups, neighbourhood groups and the like, focus group researchers may be able to tap into group interaction that approximates to naturally occurring data that might otherwise be only slowly and painfully accumulated by an ethnographer" (Bloor & Wood 2006: 89). The focus groups that I used in my research were with teachers and parents. Whilst there was homogeneity on the part of each group, these groups contrasted each other (Bloor & Wood 2006) which provided opinions and

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perspectives distinctive to those groups (Krueger & Casey 2000). This led me to extract the various trends, patterns and themes from the data generated through the discussions.

There was also an issue of how many people I should include in a group. Writers vary in suggesting the number of participants for a group. Denscombe (2003) is of the view that the number of people in a focus group should be between six and nine. Others recommend groups of six to eight participants (Bloor & Wood 2006). Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that the typical composition of focus groups ranges from five to ten people. They further maintain that the size of a group can be as few as four to a maximum of twelve individuals. My focus groups fell within these ranges, with the focus group for parents being within the minimum range and the focus group of teachers falling in the medium and maximum ranges.

In arranging my focus group discussions, I followed the suggested features of a focus group identified by Denscombe (2003:169) for holding discussions. The role of the researcher in the focus group method is unique compared to other data generation methods, as their role is to facilitate or moderate the sessions. As a moderator, the researcher is responsible for allowing and encouraging group interaction between the participants. At the same time, the moderator is expected to resume a backstage role, to avoid being directly involved in the discussion. Keeping in view the flow of discussion and the nature of issues discussed, the researcher's role is to facilitate the focus group discussion to reach its logical conclusion.

In my fieldwork experience of moderating focus groups, I tried to ensure that the discussions in the various groups were held around the topic I had introduced at the beginning of the session. Besides providing orientation in oral and written form, I had also made use of charts and vignettes to help the participants brainstorm their ideas for the focus group discussions. However, it appeared to me that some participants would find it difficult to initiate a discussion and to argue at length about the topic. The reasons behind this could have been the lack of proper experience and exposure of the participants to such environments and of the social and cultural norms to challenge other people's ideas. Therefore, my stance as a moderator was less neutral; I had to incite participants to probe each other's understandings and experiences concerning the topic. To help elicit information, I also encouraged interaction among

the participants in the groups. The emphasis here was on generating a collective view, rather than the aggregate view.

***Sample of the focus group***

My aim of arranging focus groups with the respective sample (teachers and parents) was to generate and capture those aspects of the research not explored through other methods. Since focus group interaction was based on a topic supplied by the researcher, the views of the participants that emerged were thought to provide important insights and understandings of the phenomenon under investigation (Cohen *et al.* 2000:288, citing Morgan 1988). Whilst there were still many issues, it was relatively easy to arrange focus group discussion with male respondents. The possibility of running focus groups with females (teachers and mothers) proved to be very difficult. I could not arrange focus group sessions with mothers in both the urban and rural girls’ schools because of cultural restrictions, and consent issues. A suggested sample prior to the fieldwork for holding each focus group with the various parents is given in the following table:

**Table 4.3 Proposed sample for focus groups**

Sample	Parents		Teachers	
	Mothers	Fathers	Females	Males
Urban	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
Rural	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
Total	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>

As the above table shows, the proposed focus groups for parents and teachers were constituted from urban and rural populations. The number of respondents proposed for each focus group was just about the right number, as Morgan (1988, 1997) suggests that a 20 per cent over-recruitment may reduce the risk of some participants not turning up for the study. The actual focus group sessions that I held with various participants are as follows:

**Table 4.4 Focus groups held**

Focus group	Parents		Teachers	
	Mothers	Fathers	Females	Males
Urban	<b>Could not be held</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>
Rural	<b>Could not be held</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Could not be held</b>	<b>6</b>
Total	<b>-</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>

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I had contemplated problems of doing research with females, especially with mothers in the rural context. It can be seen in the above table that I could not arrange focus group discussions with mothers in either of the urban and rural contexts. There were many issues involved. Although I had arranged for a female volunteer researcher to conduct focus group sessions with mothers, all the female students who were asked to seek consent of their mothers for their participation declined my request for participation in the research activity. The reasons could have been that they were not allowed by their husbands, or that they did not feel that were confident enough to talk about such issues or that they were preoccupied in their household chores or because of their perceived lack of education levels. Similarly, in the RGS, despite my best efforts and the principal's positive attitude, I could not arrange focus group sessions of teachers and when asked about it the principal politely declined. Similarly, due to cultural sensitivities the principal was of the view that mothers would not participate in focus group sessions.

There were issues around arranging FGD of fathers in both the rural and urban schools. Twice I had to reschedule the focus group session in the urban school, because of parents not turning up (except one) as they had promised. In the end, I had to conduct it with three fathers. Likewise, I had the same experience at the RBS of rescheduling the FGD. Despite this, in the end I was successful to conduct it with five fathers in attendance. The rest of the focus group sessions with teachers in the urban and rural schools, although having other problems, were done successfully. My observation of the teachers' sessions was that no sooner than a focus group discussion started, some of the teachers were disinterested in the discussion and would try to leave citing some of their preoccupations. It was usually very difficult to handle such scenarios, as I personally did not want anyone to be forced to be part of the discussion. It may have been that these few teachers took part in the focus group because they felt morally pressured by other interested and active colleagues.

### ***Strengths of the focus group***

To help locate the significance of focus groups as a research tool in my study, it is worthy of merit to discuss some of its strengths and advantages identified in the literature (Denscombe 2003:169; Bryman 2004:347-348). I will expand and extend these in the light of my experience in the field.

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As the focus of my study was to explore relatively non-sensitive and non-controversial issues, most of the participants had a positive experience of interacting in the focus group discussions. They appreciated the centrality of the issue and its impact on the overall performance of children.

An individual's participation in a group discussion is based on a host of factors. Whilst education may be an important determinant of sharing one's ideas, I observed that the most interactive of the participants were those who seemed to have extensive public interaction in their work places. Interactions of such people in the group also encouraged others to participate and share their experiences. It was then due to these relatively informal interchanges, that the focus group discussions sometimes led to important insights that otherwise would not have become known through interviews alone.

Furthermore, during the discussions my approach had always been to encourage people to talk in an unstructured way about their experiences. This led to unique opinions and perspectives being generated by the participants. I had to be very active during the focus group discussions, insofar as the group dynamics and conducting a meaningful discussion among the participants was concerned. There were instances in which the focus group discussion appeared to be focus group interviews, where I was considered as the person to be answered to. In such instances, I would try to engage the participants in discussion. This was done through questioning different people and encouraging them to probe each other's views and come to terms with—either individually or in a group as a whole—the reasons for holding such views.

Whilst there were some cultural issues restricting people from challenging ideas, I would try to elicit through participants a variety of views on a particular issue. This effort sometimes led individuals to argue with one another and to challenge each other's points of view. By so doing, the participants themselves would arrive at realistic accounts of what they thought about the topic.

In the literature, one of the features of using the focus group method is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to learn more about the ways people collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it. I cannot claim that in my experience of arranging focus group discussions, all of the participants of the various groups would have collectively made sense of the topic under discussion. However,

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there were instances, especially when working with teachers, where their sense of and construction of the meaning of the topic was quite obvious.

### *Limitations/problems of focus group*

I faced numerous problems and issues arranging focus group discussions. These ranged from the initial contact with potential participants to arranging discussions of teachers and parents. Every group had its own issues and concerns.

Due to various factors, it was difficult to record properly the discussions that took place, which included disturbance from outside and noise and disturbance within the group. It was very difficult to control participants, despite having being told to wait for their turn. Speakers interrupted one another and talked simultaneously, especially when the group was large, such as in the case of female teachers in the UGS. There were times when there were tendencies to the formation of sub-groups to discuss issues. Then, I had to intervene and guide the flow of the discussion.

One of the limitations of focus groups is that people are reluctant to disclose thoughts on sensitive, personal, political or emotional matters in the company of others. But there were variations in this. Those teacher participants having leftist views, had openly disclosed their thoughts whether those pertained to parents, the school structure, to the principal or even to their colleagues. In contrast, the participants coming from a right wing perspective, tended to provide permissible responses. However, my experience of holding focus groups with teachers and parents was that most participants were more critical in the discussions compared to that of in the interviews.

I had to be skilful in dealing with the extrovert characters who were dominating others in the proceedings of the focus group into expressing opinions and not letting others speak. In such situations, I would put a question to participants who would not be that involved to let them speak and participate meaningfully. Compared to my experience with interviews, sometimes with the focus group discussions I felt I had less control over the proceedings. Despite this, I would use prompts and probes to guide the discussion.

Whilst huge amounts of data can be produced very easily through focus groups, it is argued that to develop a strategy to analyse the themes and patterns of interaction in the data is a difficult task (Denscombe 2003). I had been through this daunting

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experience, and sometimes it was not possible to understand what the participants had been talking about because of noise and interruption. Not only were intra-group dynamics difficult to handle, it was difficult to organise a time and place for the focus groups that was agreeable to everyone involved. Whilst I faced fewer problems arranging the focus groups of teachers, holding focus group discussions of fathers was very difficult. I had to contact the fathers many times to have their consent and assurance for turning up, but most would still not come.

Bryman argues that in holding focus group discussions, there is also an expectation that participants will express more culturally acceptable views compared to individual interviews (Bryman 2004:359-360). This was the case with some of the participants, and my orientation before the focus group was mostly around encouraging the participants to talk about issues openly and to avoid providing permissible and ideal responses. However, the transcription of the recorded data was more time consuming, as there were instances in which the participants spoke simultaneously.

#### **4.5.3 Field notes**

I kept a diary for recording my field notes and experiences, which happened during the course of the fieldwork. For the first two days, I was very detailed in writing all that happened during the course of day. However, afterwards I learned to write those aspects of the daily interaction that I considered had relevance to my research. Writing field notes was not a linear process for me. The issues surrounding seeking official permission to have access to schools had a considerable toll on my performance and which resulted in writing delays and skipped days. Therefore, such issues accompanied and encountered in the field made the task of writing field notes difficult.

Patton highlights the importance of field notes in these words:

Part of the purpose of being in a setting and getting close to the people in the setting is to permit you to experience what is like to be in that setting. If what it is like for you, the observer or participant observer, is not recorded in your field notes, then much of the purpose for being there is lost. (Patton 2002: 303-304)

Patton (2002) argues that the time of entering the field marks the beginning of the arduous task of taking field notes. Where possible and convenient, I kept writing my journal in the schools but when it was not possible, I would complete my notes at home or at any other suitable place (Cohen *et al.* 2000:146). I recorded whatever I

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believed was worth noting from the research perspective. As most of my field notes were descriptive, I supplemented these with all the demographic information, which included date and place of note taking, details of people and physical settings and the social interactions and activities that took place at the time of recording the details (Patton 2002). It is argued that recording such information not only helps aid the recall of the researcher, it can equally provide an alternative experience to the reader of the report (Patton *op.cit.*).

#### **4.5.4 Documentary data**

The purpose of documentary data in the present research was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to collect documents used by teachers and the school administration related to the various aspects of parent-teacher relations and home-school links. Besides knowing about the interaction and communication practices initiated by the school with home, I also considered that their use could throw some light on the role of principals in the respective schools where I did my research. Secondly, I also made use of the government educational policies and plans to:

- analyse the historical context of the topic under study;
- evaluate the relative importance given to parent-teacher relations;
- explore initiatives and frameworks for linking home and school; and
- to locate their role in the broader social and cultural practices in society.

In this manner, documents as data, both historical and contemporary, were a rich source for my research (Punch 1998). The documentary sources of data can also be used in conjunction with other methods such as observation or interviews, thus ensuring triangulation of the results produced (Punch 1998). The varieties of documents that can be used by social researchers include diaries, essays, personal notes, biographies/autobiographies, institutional reports and government pronouncements and proceedings (Jupp 1966, cited by Punch 1998).

Bryman (2004:381) argues that documents come from a diverse set of sources which though not being prepared specifically for the researcher are ‘out there’ physically to be assembled and analysed for research purposes. Payne and Payne (2004:61) regard documents as ‘concrete objects’ which results after people record their knowledge, ideas and feelings in some form. The form therefore presented could either be written or visual.

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According to Robson (2002:348-349) ‘written documents’ consist of not only books, newspapers, magazines, notices and letters but sometimes the term is extended to include non-written documents, which are electronic or pictorial in nature. It is argued that as documentary data are produced for some other purpose they are non-reactive and therefore are ‘unobtrusive’ in nature (Robson 2002:349). In the context of schools and educational settings, Robson (2002:352) suggests that the following documents could be collected and analysed:

- written curricula;
- course outlines, and other course documents;
- timetables;
- notices;
- letters and other communications to parents.

The documents that I collected and analysed included various government policy documents and reports, and school registers, students’ progress reports and letters to parents (general as well as individual) (see **Appendix I** and **J**).

For assessing the quality of documents, the suggested criteria are as follows:

- how *authentic* the document or object is, which could therefore be relied and depended on;
- the evidence of *credibility* is also to be seen which confirms that the document is free from errors and distortions;
- representativeness of the documents is another criteria which needs to be known to researcher; and finally,
- as interpretation depends very much on the cultural context, therefore, the *meaning* must be clear and comprehensible (Bryman 2004:381; Payne & Payne 2004:63 citing Scott 1990).

Given the above discussion, and the criteria for assessing the quality of documents, of the four schools that I researched two of the schools had documentary procedures and practices in place for various purposes, such as for recording teachers’ movement and attendance, performance and evaluation, and for students’ attendance and reports. In one of the rural schools, the principal had designed a template for communication with parents, which consisted of a number of student issues that needed to be reported to parents (Appendix J).

With the approval of the principals, I took pictures of all these and have discussed these in the light of the results of the interviews and focus group discussions. Furthermore, as also indicated above, I also obtained access to the public documents, which are in the form of educational policies, plans and reports. Relevant sections and

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aspects of these reports have been analysed and critiqued (see **Chapters Two** and **Six**).

#### **4.5.5 Photographs**

The use of photographs was one of the methods that I used to document some of the contexts and to triangulate the findings of the data obtained through other methods. The intention was also to document the cultural dynamics and messages and the strategies that underpinned the physical and material existence of things and the associated practices of the agents. This was done to enrich and illuminate the findings of the parents and teachers and the analysis that resulted from these findings. The use of photographs was thus made to project the culture and associated bodily habitus of the agents that underpinned most of the practices of parents and teachers.

According to Prosser & Warburton (1999:82), “culture is a way of constructing reality and different cultures are simply different constructions of reality.” What they mean by this is that people of different cultures interact differently in their specific cultures. However, the authors argue there is always an order and form in the way people go about doing different things. This order manifests itself in the form of categories and patterns within culture where people make sense of and interact in ways compatible with the general ethos of the culture. For all this to be understood, visual means of capturing the context is very important (Prosser 1998; Prosser & Warburton 1999). The content captured in the form of photographs and images can be used to interpret and explain patterns, meanings and messages attached to certain contexts.

Social researchers have always been associated with what we can read (text, statistics) or hear (interviews, conversations) and the visual aspects of research have mainly been ignored in qualitative research (Silverman 2001:193). This is why my aim of using images was based on aiding the text-based explanations of the collected data. The use of images is further argued to highlight other dimensions of the research locale.

Silverman (2001) argues that it is our research questions and inevitably our theoretical orientation that inform us what to look for and how to obtain the images. The analysis of images thus poses complex methodological and theoretical concerns (Silverman 2001:194). Having said this, and keeping in view the sensitivity of the issues around the use of images not only from the research ethics perspective but also from the

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social and cultural dimensions of the research area, for every image that I made, I sought prior permission and consent for the use of the same from the individuals concerned. Furthermore, as issues concerning interactions with women were more sensitive, I took every care to have equal respect for the ethos.

Payne and Payne classify images into four categories:

- Images/pictures already made by other people which have the potential for use with one's own research
- Image making and pictures as a way of eliciting information by working collaboratively with the informants
- Researcher making images during the course of the fieldwork
- Images used for adding more clarity to the findings, usually in the form of words. (Payne & Payne 2004:239)

Keeping in view the above categories, the nature of my research was such that most of my images of the fieldwork were based on physical settings and interaction between people (category 3).

Bryman outlines three prominent roles of photographs:

- As *illustrative*. Though their role is considered as limited, photographs are used to 'illustrate points' and thus 'enliven' the otherwise dull discussion of results.
- As *data*. Photographs may be viewed as data in their own right. They could equally become part of the researcher's field notes and in case of extant photographs they become the main source of data of the field in which the researcher is interested.
- As *prompts*. Photographs may be used to entice people to talk about what is represented in them. Such a use may encourage the participants to bring forward their various perspectives and beliefs about the way they see things in pictures. (Bryman 2004:384)

My main aim of using photographs was to use them for illustration as well as for data purposes. This suggests that photographs obtained in the field were used to contextualise the context and illustrate the underlying discussion of the interviews and focus group data. The field notes taken alongside the photographs were used later to elaborate the contexts in which photographs were taken. Furthermore, photographs as an *illustrative* aid were used to help support the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

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## 4.6 Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative data analysis is “fundamentally a nonmathematical analytical procedure that involves examining the meaning of people’s words and actions” (Maykut & Morehouse 1994:121). It is a process that “involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen *et al.* 2007:461). More specifically, it

...consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. (Creswell 2007:148)

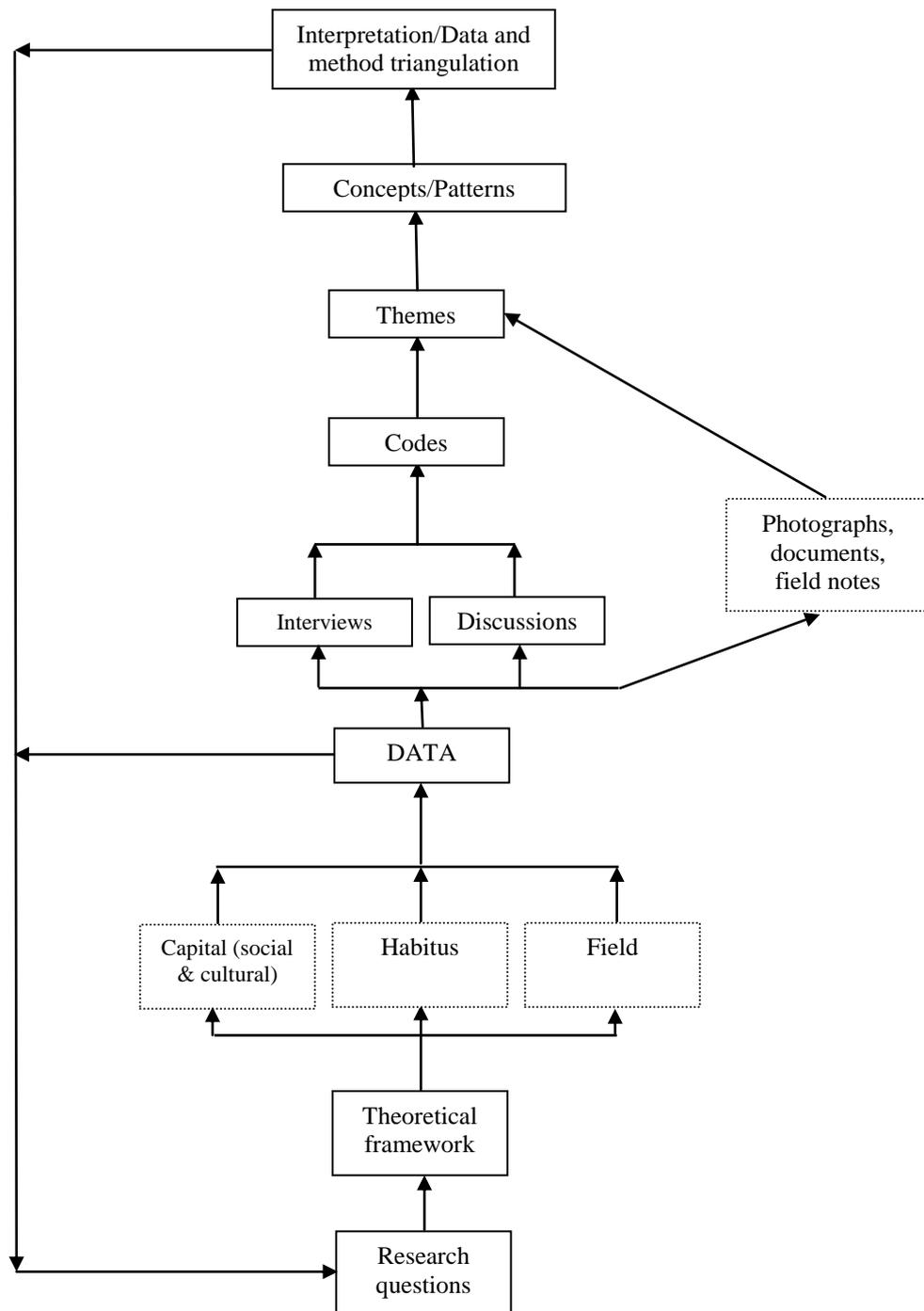
Whilst it is clear what qualitative data analysis entails, writers argue that there is no single procedure or method to analyse and present qualitative data (Creswell 2003, 2007; Denscombe 2002, 2007; Maykut & Morehouse 1994; Robson 2002; Patton 2002), rather it is up to the researcher and their justification of the principle of *fitness for purpose* (Cohen *et al.* 2007:461). The procedure I adopted for data analysis and interpretation consisted of five main stages:

**Table 4.5 Stages of data analysis and interpretation**

1	Data preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transcribing and cataloguing the data</li><li>• Preparation of data</li></ul>
2	Initial exploration of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exploration of recurrent themes and issues</li><li>• Pictorial representation/mind maps of themes</li></ul>
3	Analysis of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coding the data</li><li>• Grouping the codes into categories and themes</li><li>• Comparison of categories and themes</li><li>• Generating concepts and patterns</li></ul>
4	Representation and display of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Written interpretation of the findings</li><li>• Incorporating photographs, field notes, documentary data</li></ul>
5	Validation of the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data and method triangulation</li></ul>

Adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clarke (2007:129)

Figure 4.1 provides the conceptual and analytical framework that I adopted for data analysis and interpretation:



**Figure 4.1 Conceptual and analytical framework for data analysis and interpretation**

The data analysis was the more difficult and intellectually challenging stage of the research and hence difficult to start the ‘story.’ This process was more difficult and taxing for me, as I had to translate and transcribe the interview and focus group data simultaneously from Pashtu into English. During the translation/transcription of the data, extreme care was required as far as possible so as not to miss the cultural nuances and the underlying tones and messages of the participants.

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The data analysis involved working in different mediums, transposing sound to text and text to diagrams and vice versa. This was rightly “a process of journey and arrival at different points” (Gray 2003:147), as wholes were converted into parts and parts into fragments. This was the ‘analytical stage’ (Gray 2003), where besides the data reduction, I was continuously engaged in the process of interpreting and shaping the data. The interpretation involved a dual process of theoretical scaffolding and providing contextual ‘explanatory insights’ of the data (Gray 2003). Prior to identifying the themes, I worked extensively to categorise the data according to similar traits, which were then grouped together (see **Table 4.5, Stage 3**). This process was done manually, first by cutting and arranging texts of the interviews and focus group discussions and then by drawing pictorial diagrams to have a better understanding of the underlying dynamics of various aspects of the data. This helped to have a better grasp of the broader structures of the various categories that seemed to fit with each other, thus emerging in the form of themes. The next stage involved giving shape and structure to the themes by imposing broader concepts and patterns that had a logical flow. The final stage involved writing and interpretation of the findings.

As can be seen from Figure 4.1, the primary focus of the data analysis and interpretation was to refer back to the research questions (Merriam 2009:176). However, this does not mean that the research was deductive; rather the research design was emergent and inductive in nature (Merriam 2009:169), in which the data analysis was based upon four guiding principles (Denscombe 2007:287-88). I adapt and elaborate these principles in the context of my study:

*The first principle:* The analyses of the data and the conclusions drawn from the research are firmly rooted in the data. It means that the findings are grounded in the evidence that I gathered.

*The second principle:* The explanation of the data emerged from a careful and meticulous reading of the data. This does not imply that the data could ‘speak for themselves’ or that their meaning was self-evident; rather the process of interpretation involved producing meaning out of the ‘raw’ data.

*The third principle:* I had to be careful to avoid introducing unwarranted preconceptions into the data analysis. These could have been my personal prejudices

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or biases based on my knowledge of previous theories and research. To avoid these being a hindrance to good analysis I adopted as far as possible a reflective stance throughout the research process.

*The fourth principle:* The data analysis involved an iterative process. The development/integration of theory, hypotheses, concepts or generalizations were based on a process in which I constantly moved back and forth, comparing the empirical data with the codes, categories and concepts that were being used.

The research design therefore underpinned the use of inductive logic. This meant that I moved from the data to the theory and from the particular to the general. For the most part, the analysis of data involved discovering things from the data, of generating and confirming theories based on what the data contained, and of moving from the particular features of the data towards more generalized conclusions or theories.

#### **4.7 Validity and reliability: establishing authenticity and trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, to establish the robustness and ‘credibility’ of the research evidence (Lewis & Ritchie 2003), it is vital that “the researcher must have some ways of demonstrating that their findings are ‘true’ otherwise there are no good grounds for anyone to believe them” (Denscombe 2007:296). Qualitative researchers can use at least four strategies through which they can establish the trustworthiness of their findings and research. These include internal validity (credibility), reliability (dependability), generalizability or external validity (transferability) and objectivity (confirmability). I discuss these strategies with an aim for establishing the trustworthiness of my findings and research.

##### **4.7.1 Internal validity or credibility**

According to Merriam (2009:213), “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality.” However, reality is to be seen as how people construct and understand the world as “there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning of their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes” (Merriam 2009:214). The validity or credibility of an account can then be established “if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise” (Hammersley 1992:69). This means that the researcher needs to

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demonstrate the extent to which “their data are accurate and appropriate” (Denscombe 2007:297). Since internal validity “hinges on the meaning of reality” (Merriam 209:213), “it is the feasibility or credibility of the account that a researcher arrives at that is going to determine its acceptability to others” (Bryman 2004:275). However, the credibility of an account cannot be determined unless we consider this question: “Are we accurately reflecting the phenomena under study as perceived by the study population?” (Lewis & Ritchie 2003:274). The answer to this question in turn rests in “the strength of the research methods used and the quality of analysis and interpretation that takes place” (Lewis & Ritchie 2003:274). Therefore, to maintain internal validity, throughout the research study I kept checks of the following kinds:

- *Sample coverage*: As described earlier (see **Sections 4.6 & 4.7**), my effort in this research has been that the sample frame is free from any known bias. Moreover, the sample coverage was based on an inclusive approach towards the constituencies known, i.e. the sample consisted of parents/teachers, males/females, mothers/fathers and respondents from different SES.
- *Capture of the phenomena*: Throughout the fieldwork I endeavoured that the environment and quality of questioning were sufficiently effective for the participants so that they could express their views freely and fully.
- *Identification or labelling*: The data analysis was structured in a way that the various phenomena were identified, categorised and 'named' in ways that reflected the meanings assigned by study participants.
- *Interpretation*: I endeavoured that there was sufficient internal evidence for the explanatory accounts that were developed through the empirical evidence.
- *Display*: I have tried to portray the findings in a way that they remain 'true' to the original data and hopefully will allow others to see the analytic constructions that have occurred. (Lewis & Ritchie 2003:274)

To address the matters of accuracy and appropriateness of qualitative data, some ways have been suggested for validation; these include, for example, triangulation and member or respondent validation (Lewis & Ritchie 2003; Denscombe 2007).

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation involves “systematic comparison of findings on the same topic generated by different research methods” (Bloor & Wood 2006:170). The principle behind this is that the researcher can get a better understanding of the topic if they view it from different positions (Denscombe 2007:134). Because each position or “method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data

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collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (Patton 2002:555-56). Triangulation could be achieved through various approaches, which include methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, triangulation through multiple analysts and theory triangulation. The approach that I incorporated for the present study involved the use of *triangulation of sources*. In this approach, different qualitative methods (e.g. observations, interviews, documented accounts) are used to compare or validate data. The present study employed interviews, focus group discussion, photographs and analysis of documents and field notes as qualitative methods for the research. It was, therefore, through these methods that attempts were made to triangulate the findings. In this regard, Patton argues that “it is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off, not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in what ever conclusions are drawn” (2002:556).

#### ***Member or respondent validation***

Respondent or member validation is a form of triangulation in which the researcher checks the accuracy of their findings with research respondents (Bloor & Wood 2006:170). Respondent validation “provides a check on factual accuracy and allows the researcher’s understandings to be confirmed (or amended) by those whose opinions, views or experiences are being studied” (Denscombe 2007:297). Its aim is to “seek corroboration or otherwise of the account that the researcher has arrived at” (Bryman 2004:274).

Whilst the usual process for respondent validation involves taking research evidence (interview transcripts, data, and findings) back to the research participants for confirmation (Bloor & Wood 2006; Bryman 2004; Denscombe 2007; Lewis & Ritchie 2003; Merriam 2009), I had to adapt this strategy for my fieldwork. This involved validating the evidence from the participants in ‘real-time’ in the interviews and focus group discussions. Since the interviews and discussions were interactive, involving a mutual exchange of ideas, my strategy was that I would regularly corroborate the views and opinions of the participants by presenting a summary of what I would have understood they had meant. The benefit of providing a summary was that not only respondent validation was ensured but also in most cases, this proved to be a reflective experience for the participants through which new insights and probes were made possible.

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Whilst in some ways this process may have taken more time than usual and would have appeared repetitive to some participants, there were a number of issues and reasons that I had to consider. Firstly, there was the issue of the time itself. Most of the respondents were busy people and they did not have the time, energy and in some ways interest to go through the transcripts and data. Secondly, many of the parent participants could not even read and write, due to which it was impractical to validate the textual data through them. Crozier *et al.* (2005:2) have also reported similar issues with respondent validation. Thirdly, there was the issue of logistics in that once the interviews and discussions were done it was hard to trace/locate the participants for validation purposes.

#### **4.7.2 Reliability or dependability**

Generally, reliability refers “to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam 2009:220). The issue of replication of the research findings in social sciences and especially in the qualitative research genre is problematic and hence contentious. Therefore, reliability “is an impossible criterion to achieve in practice as different researchers will always produce different versions of the social world” (Bloor & Wood 2006:148). In social and qualitative research, writers argue that instead of focusing on reliability, one needs to give due consideration to the dependability or consistency (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 2009) of research findings.

Dependability involves that researchers demonstrate “that their research reflects procedures and decisions that other researchers can ‘see’ and evaluate in terms of how far they constitute *reputable procedures and reasonable decisions*” (Denscombe 2007:298, emphasis in original). Lincoln and Guba (1985) therefore suggest an ‘auditing’ approach to establish the worth of research for determining the criterion of trustworthiness. The audit process involves, “ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process—problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, and so on—in an accessible manner” (Bryman 2004:275). To establish the dependability of the findings of my research, throughout this Chapter I have endeavoured to follow the ‘auditing’ process. Moreover, I have also kept and collated a complete record of the various documents and procedures of the fieldwork and the overall research process for establishing the dependability of my research.

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### 4.7.3 Generalizability/external validity or transferability

Generalizability entails “the extent to which the findings of a study can apply to a wider population” (Bloor & Wood 2006:93). The notion of ‘generalizability’ “tends to be associated with quantitative and more positivistic styles of research” and refers to the “quality of the findings that is measurable, testable and checkable” (Denscombe 2002:149). In the qualitative research genre, the generalizability of research findings have been called in to question because of the researchers working with a small number of samples and within embedded contexts (Bryman 2004; Denscombe 2007; Marshall & Rossman 1995, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985:124), therefore, propose the concepts of *transferability* (which is the degree of direct function of the *similarity* between two contexts) and *fittingness* (the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts) as the basis for dealing with qualitative findings. Transferability then “is a more intuitive process in which the relevance of the specific research findings to other events, people or data is imagined rather than actually demonstrated” (Denscombe 2002:149).

For establishing the transferability of the findings, the suggestion is that “the reader needs to be presented with relevant details on which to base a comparison” so that they can “infer the relevance and applicability of the findings (to other people, settings, case studies, organizations etc.)” (Denscombe 2007:299). Thus, “the reader of the research uses information about the particular instance that has been studied to arrive at a judgment about how far it would apply to other comparable instances” (Denscombe 2007:299). In this sense, the question for the reader becomes ‘To what extent could the findings be transferred to other instances?’ (Denscombe 2007:299). In this study, by deploying the concepts of habitus, field and capital, I have endeavoured to provide a rich and detailed description of the relations between parents and teachers and of the respective social and cultural contexts that impinged on their relations and structures. The account thus presented is one that merits the transferability criteria.

### 4.7.4 Objectivity or confirmability

Objectivity or confirmability in qualitative research entails the extent to which the findings or results of a study are based on the research purposes that are free from the influence of the researcher’s bias (Denscombe 2007:300; Jensen 2008:112; Miller

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2008:572). However, “it needs to be recognized that no research is ever free from the influence of those who conduct it” (Denscombe 2007:300).

Therefore, in qualitative research the “notions of subjectivity are largely acknowledged and embraced” (Miller 2008). Subjectivity “calls for a reflexive account by the researcher concerning the researcher’s self and its impact on the research” (Denscombe 2007:301). In this sense, data and analysis then “authentically, purposefully, and contextually emerge from the dynamic intersection of researchers’ and research participants’ unique identities, beliefs, ideas, passions, and actions” (Miller 2008:573).

This is what the present research seeks to ‘confirm’ and establish that the researcher “has acted in good faith” and “has not overtly allowed [his] personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it” (Bryman 2004:276). This is where research ethics come into play, which is the focus of discussion of the next section.

#### **4.8 Ethical issues**

Research ethics are “guidelines or sets of principles for good professional practice, which serve to advise and steer researchers as they conduct their work” (Bloor & Wood 2006:64). These relate to “the system of moral principles by which individuals can judge their actions as right or wrong, good or bad” (Denscombe 2002:175). These guidelines, codes, or principles suggest that researchers conduct their research in an ethical manner, with an expectation that they “act professionally in the pursuit of the truth” (Denscombe 2002:177). By following these ethical principles in earnest, researchers can enhance the integrity of their research (Israel & Hay 2006).

The present research was governed by BERA’s ‘Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research’ (2004), which have also been adopted by the University of Nottingham. Therefore, there was an expectation that I abide by and work according to the ethical guidelines of BERA.

Concerning the specificity of ethical principles, in literature, many of these guidelines or codes overlap in priority and detail. For instance, Bloor and Wood (2006:67-68) discuss three principles that pertain to informed consent, protection of participants’ identities and ‘no harm’ to participants. Bryman’s (2004:509) ethical principles include issues such as harm to participants, informed consent, privacy, and deception.

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Similarly Cohen *et al.* (2007:51-75) produce an exhaustive list of issues that include, among others, the following:

- Informed consent
- Access and acceptance
- Ethical dilemmas
  - Privacy
  - Anonymity
  - Confidentiality
  - Betrayal
  - Deception

Moreover, Denscombe's (2002:176-90) ethical principles consist of the following:

- Codes of ethics
- Ethics approval
- Moral and legal acceptability
- Researcher integrity
- No misrepresentation or deception
- Protect the interest of participants
  - Avoiding stress and discomfort
  - Confidentiality of data
  - Protection of identities: anonymity
  - Avoiding undue intrusion
- Security of data
- Informed consent
  - Consent from children and vulnerable members of society
  - Degrees of consent
  - Adequate information
  - Renewable consent and the right to withdraw
  - Boundaries of consent

In addition to the above, Denscombe (2007:141-45) offers three point principles, which include:

- Protection of the interest of participants
  - safety considerations
  - avoiding psychological harm
  - confidentiality of information
- Avoiding deception or misrepresentation
- Informed consent

Whilst all of these principles are important for conducting ethical research, I will refer to and discuss those from the above and from the BERA's guidelines that were of prime importance in the context of my research.

#### **4.8.1 Researcher integrity**

Researcher integrity is the first and foremost ethical principle that determines the overall conduct and quality of research and its findings. This requires that researchers

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“act professionally in the pursuit of truth” and are “committed to discovering and reporting things as faithfully and as honestly as possible, without allowing their investigations to be influenced by considerations other than what is the truth of the matter” (Denscombe 2002:177). Throughout the research process, my earnest effort had been “to be independent, objective and honest” in the way I conducted and reported the research (Denscombe 2002:178). Therefore, at the outset, without any pressure from the sponsors of my studies (Denscombe 2002), I was at liberty to choose a topic of my own choice, and design and conduct the research according to my interests.

#### **4.8.2 Voluntary informed consent**

Since most of the data gathering process involved conducting semi-structured interviews and holding focus group discussions with parents and teachers, as part of the ethical guidelines it was mandatory that I obtained their consent for participation in the research. Informed consent meant that I needed to make sure that the participants understood and agreed to their participation without any duress, prior to beginning the research (BERA 2004). The principle of informed consent entailed providing detailed and meaningful information to the participants in plain and simple language (mainly Pashtu) explaining: the nature of the research, what was required from their participation, who was undertaking and financing the research, why it was being undertaken, and how the research was to be disseminated and used (Bloor and Wood 2006:67).

I made every effort to ensure that getting the consent of the participants was not a matter of ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ but as far as possible I would make sure that the participants’ consent was “full, wholehearted and not begrudging” (Denscombe 2002:186). I also did not consider consent to be an end in itself, rather the participants were provided with information that they could ‘withdraw’ from the research any time, when and if they desired so. This was especially the case in the teachers’ focus group discussions in the boys’ schools where some teachers during the first 10 or 15 minutes would leave the discussion, citing some pressing needs.

My experience of the fieldwork in this study is that informed consent was not considered as an issue or given high priority either by the gatekeepers or by the research participants, except in relation to the participation of mothers and some

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female teachers, which itself was a cultural issue. Most of the difficulties I faced in regard to mothers' participation in interviews or holding focus group discussion with them involved seeking informed consent of a diverse set of potential participants, but in most cases because of the cultural implications most mothers (probably because of their husbands refusal) did not consent to participate. Surprisingly, however, there were even instances in which some male teachers seemed to complain why they had not been involved in the research study. However, I strictly followed the research ethics guidelines of the University of Nottingham and BERA by providing proper orientation (both written and oral) to the prospective participants and thereafter kept a proper record of the consent forms of the participants who took part in the study. A copy of the consent form is provided at the end of the thesis (see Appendix B).

There was also the issue of consent for taking photographs in the girls' schools. Since I was aware of the social and cultural implications and sensitivities of taking photographs, I would make sure to cross out the clause in the consent form that pertained to the participants' consent for taking their photos. This was done to make sure that the participants were clear about what they had been consenting for. However, I did take some photographs of the exteriors of the buildings and of the staff room and the principals' office etc. with the consent and permission of the concerned principals.

#### **4.8.3 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities and privacy were one of the main concerns of conducting the research in an ethical manner. Whilst in many ways, most of the participants (excluding females) and many gatekeepers also did not consider anonymity and confidentiality to be major issues, probably because of the cultural dynamics, I had to make sure through repeated verbal assurances and through the Consent Form (see Appendix B) that their data was to remain confidential and anonymous.

Concerning anonymity, Denscombe (2002:180) argues, "It is normal good practice to avoid publishing reports of the research which allow individuals or organizations to be identified either by name or by role." In this regard, Bloor and Wood (2006:68) suggest effective ways of protecting identities through "secure data storage, removal of identifiers, amendments to biographical details, and the use of pseudonyms

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(applicable to names of individuals, places and organizations).” Throughout my research, I have made every effort to ensure that the participants remain anonymous. However, the pseudonyms that I used for the schools where I did my research were based on the context and type of people they represented i.e. UBS for urban boys’ school, UGS for urban girls’ school, RBS for rural boys’ school and RGS for rural girls’ school.

To ensure that the participants and schools remained anonymous, I needed to make sure that I maintain confidentiality of the data and information in the first place. As the confidential treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research (BERA 2004:8), promising confidentiality of information therefore was a way to ensure participants’ right to privacy (Cohen *et al.* 2007:65). Most of the data that I obtained from the participants were in the form of voice-recorded interviews and discussions, which after translation and transcription were kept securely in separate files in the MSOFFICE Word. Moreover, to avoid any reference to the research participants and to the schools where the research was undertaken, edited copies of the photographs and pictures have been used in the thesis to maintain confidentiality.

#### **4.8.4 Incentives/compensation and reciprocity**

In the fieldwork, I had to juggle with the issues of reciprocity and incentives/compensation for participants in a manner to maintain an ethical standard and at the same time to avoid compromising the quality of data (Patton 2002). BERA’s guidelines offered useful advice in this regard:

Researchers’ use of incentives to encourage participation must be commensurate with good sense and must avoid choices which in themselves have undesirable effects (e.g. the health aspects of offering cigarettes to young offenders or sweets to school-children). They must also acknowledge that the use of incentives in the design and reporting of the research may be problematic; for example where their use has the potential to create a bias in sampling or in participant responses. (BERA 2004:8)

As the participants in my research seemed to have different socio-economic statuses and backgrounds, I had to be tactful in offering compensation to them, and therefore to avoid bias in sampling and responses of the participants. Moreover, before considering the use of incentives or compensation, there was also the related issue of cultural implications and sensitivities that needed to be kept in view, as it would have

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turned out that a wrong move could have offended the participants. For instance, with many teachers, it would have been culturally undesirable that I offered cash to compensate them for their time. Similarly, after interviewing a parent in their house and later offering them cash as compensation would have been considered derogatory and the incumbent may have been offended by such a gesture.

However, in the RBS the majority of the parents, who participated in the interviews and discussion, were on a low income or worked on daily wages. They had to leave their work to participate in my research, which for many would have meant a loss in their earnings. Therefore, with the consent and approval of the teacher who was facilitating my research, I compensated each participant for one day's wage, after concluding the research activity. However, I would make sure that it was very clear to the participants that, although they were being paid for their time, they were not being paid for their responses (Patton 2002:413).

Concerning the teachers and principals of the schools, I needed to reciprocate in a manner that was commensurate with the moral and ethical guidelines of the research, and which could have given the participants some sense of purpose and motivation towards their part in the research process. Concerning researcher reciprocity, Marshall and Rossman argue that:

Qualitative studies intrude into settings as people adjust to the researcher's presence. People may be giving their time to be interviewed or to help the researcher understand group norms; the researcher should plan to reciprocate. When people adjust their priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher's presence, they are giving of themselves. The researcher is indebted and should be sensitive to this. Reciprocity may entail giving time to help out, providing informal feedback, making coffee, being a good listener, or tutoring. (Marshall & Rossman 1999:90)

Whilst most of the participants did not expect to receive something in kind in return for extending help and providing information (Creswell 2007:243), I reciprocated in a number of ways. For some teachers, participation in the interview and research seemed to have a therapeutic experience, as they seemed to have benefitted from "expressing their views and sharing their story" (Bloor & Wood 2006:68). This seemed to be so, because I always tried to be a sympathetic and good listener (Bloor & Wood 2006; Marshall & Rossman 1999). In addition, since for the majority of the teachers it was their first experience to have participated in an activity that required them to express their feelings and to "speak their minds" (Woods 1986:69) in an open and informal manner, many of them after the interviews would be anxious and not

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sure whether they contributed anything important. I would reciprocate by “providing informal feedback” (Marshall & Rossman 1999:90) with words of reassurance and encouragement about the importance and worth of their contribution towards the study. Finally, in appreciation of their contribution for allowing me to conduct research in their schools and for volunteering to take part in interviews and discussions, with the consent and approval of the principals of the respective schools, at the end of my research in each school I distributed writing diaries amongst all teachers. However, I would make sure that it was very clear to the participants that the writing diaries were given in recognition of their time and not for their responses (Patton 2002:413).

#### **4.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided a discussion of the philosophical paradigms, research methodology and methods, which I pursued during the course of my research. A social constructivist approach guided the research, as it required exploring and in-depth understanding of the relations between parents and teachers in their given environments of homes and schools. Therefore, a qualitative case study methodology was adopted that involved the use of various methods to generate data of various types. The methods used in the study were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, documentary analysis and use of field notes and photographs documentation. The data gathered were analysed and interpreted through an analytical framework adapted from Creswell and Plano-Clarke (2007:129). The issues of validity and reliability arising out of the interpretation of the findings have been discussed. The research followed the ethical guidelines of the University of Nottingham and BERA. Ethical issues have been discussed thoroughly in the light of the research and issues concerning the rights of the respondents/participants, and confidentiality and anonymity of their data addressed.

In the chapter that follows, I present the findings and discussions on teachers.

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## Chapter Five — The Dynamics of Teachers' Interaction and Communication

The first of two chapters on schools and teachers, in this chapter I focus on and explore teachers' communication and relations with parents. In order to do this, I operationalise the theoretical tools that I discussed in Chapter Three by contextualising the perceptions and experiences of teachers in their respective social settings. The chapter consists of three sections.

The first section introduces and discusses communication practices and experiences of teachers with parents and explores the role of habitus and field in structuring these interactions/practices. In particular, it discusses teachers' contact with parents at the individual and institutional level and demonstrates that for most teachers, communication with parents is not a norm rather an "exception" (Khan *et al.* 2005:208). It also shows that given the socio-cultural conditions and traditions, some teachers use 'credit slips' as a form of contact with parents that signify the role that social capital plays in parent-teacher relations.

The second section extends the discussion of the first section further by examining teachers' practices and experiences that underpin various structural, functional, and cultural practices, which are shaped individually and collectively, and reciprocally by the teachers' habitus and field structures. For example, it examines the constraints that teachers say are in the way of effective communication with parents, and explores the issue of 'mock' parents, before demonstrating the disparities that exist for girls as having a 'layered' parental influence. It also demonstrates that some teachers contact parents only when they have some 'personal interest' i.e., when they have some personal issue or problem, before discussing some of the cultural sensitivities that some teachers describe as obstacles to contact with parents.

The focus of section three is to discuss the role that institutional habitus plays in structuring teachers' practices and communication, individually and collectively, using a number of themed aspects of communication by teachers and schools. For instance, it discusses the structuring role of the institutional habitus that conditions teachers to describe their relations with parents as 'strange,' that lack support and respect for parents, which also underpin seeing home and school as separate entities. It also explores teachers' perceptions of the role of school heads in the

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communication with parents and highlights the influence of power and politics within the school that structures communication practices with parents.

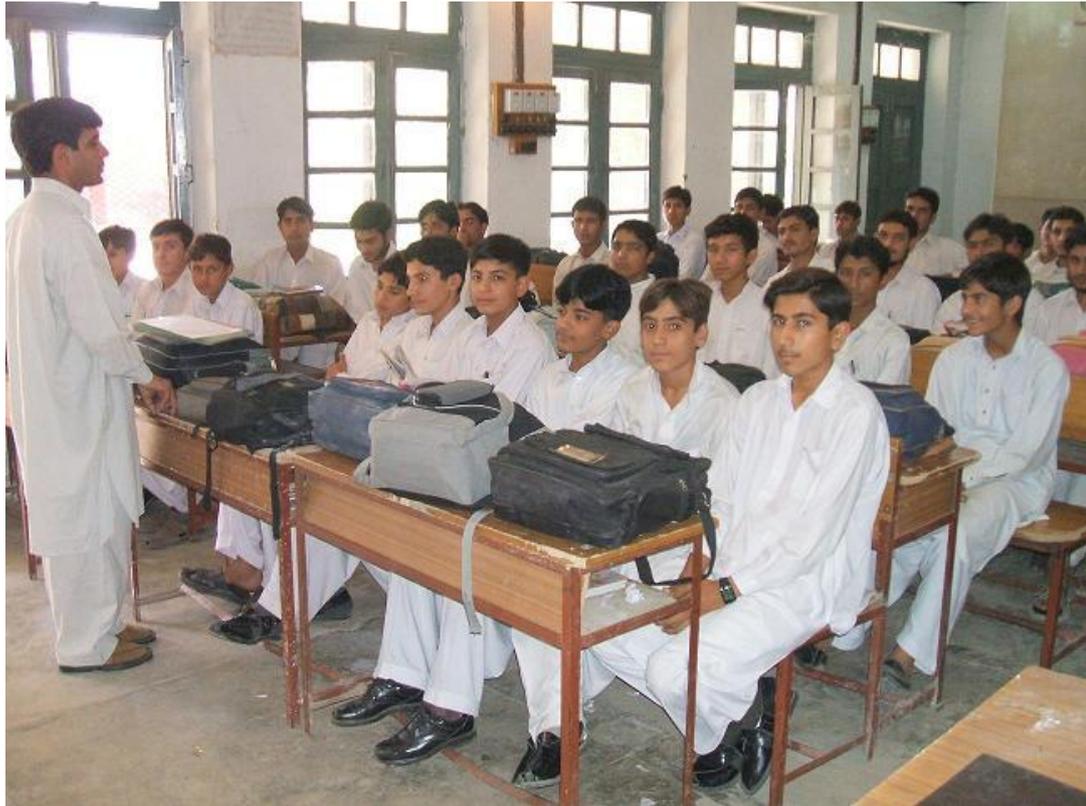
### **5.1 Communication models or habitual patterns?**

The findings suggest diverse patterns of communication of teachers with parents, which highlight the significance of the role that the habitus plays in structuring people's thoughts and actions. However, the teachers' practices were not in isolation from the respective field settings, rather the institutional habitus collectively shaped and influenced such practices. Moreover, given the culture and class dynamics in which public schools function, the perceptions and practices of the teachers about communication with parents depicted the important role that the habitus, capital and field plays in structuring individual and collective practices of the teachers.

Whilst most participants generally appeared to have consensus on the basic forms of communication with parents, in some ways they held opposing views about their communication experiences with parents. These differences appeared grounded in the teachers' individual habitus and in some respects in the particular school cultures, which seemed to have been shaped, structured and influenced by the respective school heads. However, whilst these teachers' perspectives were culturally embedded in their contexts, it is worthy of mentioning that their experiences are shared cross-culturally with developed countries. In their research in Australia, Connell *et al.*'s (1982:53) portrayal of working-class families, and the description given by public secondary school teachers that working-class parents lack interest in their children's education, also resonates with the experiences of the teachers I interviewed in Pakistan. Hence, given some of these similarities, the differences in culture and the associated dynamics of school structures governed and shaped the lives of all teachers involved in the everyday aspect of interaction and communication in schools, to which I now turn.

#### **5.1.1 The role of habitus in structuring practices**

To help support the discussion that follows and to provide some contextual background that may help illuminate the nature of relations of teachers with their students and indirectly with parents, photo 5.1 provides one pictorial representation:



**Photo 5.1 A classroom in the RBS**

A look at the following two quotations, without a proper and deep understanding of the context (field) they come from, might give an impression that the “relationships between teachers and parents are functional” (Crozier 2000:90), and that the communication channels are structured around solid individual and institutional trajectories:

We write to them, and ask students to tell their parents to visit school. We also make telephonic communication depending on the issue under consideration. Then they do come and discuss their daughters’ issues. (Teacher UGS)

Depending on the requirements of the situation, I either give a small chit to tell the student to ask his father to visit me in person or just ask the student to communicate orally my request for a visit to school. This has a better effect on students and their fathers then visit the school. (Teacher RBS)

Yet, implicit in identifying the means of contacting parents (i.e. written letters or chits, through students and telephonic communication) is the structure and context of communication, which is not only influenced by the structure of school as a field itself but also by the individual habitus of the respective teachers themselves. In other words, the teachers did have (in their individual capacities) their own unique ways of sending messages to parents. However, the fact that given the impediments the

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teachers had in schools (such as overcrowded classrooms, teaching workload, school environment etc.), much of the communication of teachers was deeply embedded in the institutional habitus and the structure of social transactions derived from the broader social settings. Therefore, in this sense much of the respective habitus and the practices of the teachers were regulated and in some ways reproduced by the respective field settings. This is what appears to come across from the quotation of one teacher from one of the rural schools:

No, I do not have any provision for this. It is because I do not have a mobile [phone] nor do most of the fathers have who live in our village. So contacting parents through such means as mobiles, or telephone is not possible. The only means of contacting them is through chits or through face-to-face interaction. (Teacher RBS)

There is some indication here that the respondent's personal orientation and habitus shaped what he saw as the 'reality' or practice for most fathers in the village. However, 'reality' is a subjective term and people do tend to see things differently and share these accordingly, as one teacher in the same school spoke about using a mobile phone as a communication strategy for contacting parents:

I would sometime call parents from my mobile while I am in my class to tell fathers that their child has not come to school. I have reformed many students by directly contacting their parents. I have telephone contact numbers [of the fathers] of most of those students who are troublemakers, are irregular in their attendance, or are not working hard in their studies. (Teacher RBS)

The use of a mobile phone for contacting parents is a positive strategy for communication with parents, but in the respective context may be seen as problematic, both structurally and culturally. Its use may only be feasible in cases where a teacher knows some or many of the parents personally and has close ties with them. The use of a mobile phone was not a feasible and possible option for contacting parents because it occurred at the personal expense of an individual teacher and may disregard some of the culturally embedded sensitivities surrounding contacting parents. Moreover, whilst in rural schools contacting parents (usually fathers) did not seem to be a problem for teachers, as many of them personally or indirectly knew each other, some male teachers in the urban school shared their experience that calling parents at home using their own initiative may annoy some parents. They explained that culturally some parents get offended if a male teacher spoke to their female family members, which resulted in complaints against the teachers.

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The indication here is that the teacher uses his mobile phone as a deterrent and a reformatory tool (as is evident from the above quotation), which, given the respective context, may have some ethical implications as well. In highly authoritative school and classroom environments, the way teachers communicate with parents in front of the students in the classroom may not only run the risk of them sharing some private information about a particular student, but it may also impact negatively on the behaviour of students. The important issue here is that the majority of teachers I interviewed or had discussions with indicated that communication with parents was usually non-existent, unless there were some chronic academic, behavioural or conduct problems with students, and the means for such contact would normally be the students themselves.

### **5.1.2 Communication ‘channels’: individually structured or institutionally determined**

Unlike the schools and the principals of the urban schools, both the male and female heads in the rural schools seemed to have a functional approach towards the affairs of their schools, which was evident from the data I gathered. They had been applying different strategies and measures to document and streamline the various activities of the teachers and to improve the learning experiences of their students. This was more so in the RBS, where the head had only been in the office for around two months. During this time, he had managed to initiate a number of registers for documenting the various activities and aspects of the school and classrooms (see **Appendix I**). Most importantly, he was working on a draft copy of a letter template for communication with parents (see **Appendix J**). The principal in the RBS therefore seemed to have an important influence on the teachers in the way they shared their experiences about the means of contacting parents:

Our principal’s request to us [teachers] is to send letters to parents [for informing them about their child’s progress and other related issues]. When there is no response to these letters then we ask someone [students] living nearby to ask parents of students in question to pay a visit to school. And when this does not work, then naturally, the student has to be punished or [he] will leave school because of the fear of punishment. (Teacher RBS)

Whilst documenting the process and means of contacting parents becomes clear from the above excerpt, the teacher reveals an aspect of his habitus pertaining to punishing students as a strategy to make them call their parents to school. Although, the use of corporal punishment was officially banned in schools, it did not seem to be a problem

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for most teachers (especially males), as is evident from the quotation above. Due to the cultural acceptability of the use of punishment to discipline children at home or in school, many parents did not see that as an issue and were in favour of its use, but only to a certain level (see **Chapters Seven and Eight**). This is a huge deterrent for students, and one of the causes of drop out of students from the public schools, which is reflected in the less than 30% ‘survival rate’ [staying on right through to the final year of schooling] of students in the public schools in Pakistan (GoP 2003d).

Concerning contacting parents, another teacher in the RBS shared the following perspective about the various aspects of communicating information to parents and the related dimensions of parental responses:

For this, the channel is that we write a chit, which mentions the issues that needs to be communicated to parents. .... This [note] is then given to a student who lives nearby to the home of that student for whose father the communication is meant. [This is done to avoid the child in question being a barrier in communication with parents.] Mostly, the father would not give any response. He [father] would take the note and despite being told about the school visit or to acknowledge the receipt of the note, he would keep the note and would not come. Even if he [father] pays a visit, we don't see any improvement in the student, despite providing complete information about the issues concerning their child. (Teacher RBS)

There is clearly a pattern here that illustrates the underlying dynamics that had structured the teacher's practices and communication with parents. Despite some of the apparent differences in the way the teachers expressed themselves in all the schools, there was a sense of collectivity of the habitus and the institutional habitus seemed to have a collective structuring influence over the communication practices of all teachers. Moreover, there was a clear sense of labelling parents as an uninterested party, without much acknowledgement of the role and the responsibility of the school and teachers themselves. This view was common in most of the teachers' interviews, both in the urban as well as in the rural schools. As I discussed above, this signified the structured role of the habitus of teachers and the structuring influence of the school and community over teachers.

### **5.1.3 Communication with parents: ‘there is no provision unless there is a problem’**

It became abundantly clear from the interviews of and discussion with teachers that communication with parents centred on some specific issues of children, which most of the teachers did not see as organised on institutional lines:

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No, we do not communicate with them. There is no provision unless there is a problem with a child. With those students who are having some problem, we ask them to tell their parents to come to school. But they usually do not visit. (Teacher UGS)

I would call mothers to school, when ... a child would ... fake vomiting to avoid their [examination] papers or would say that they have severe headache or just do it for fun... (Teacher RGS)

I get telephone contact number of parents, if they have any. But usually we only call parents when there is a discipline problem, quarrelling or rowdy behaviour of their child. (Teacher UBS)

This sets apart the perspectives of the teachers I introduced in the beginning of this section, and provides a contrasting dimension in the way different teachers viewed or spoke about the same experience. This also suggests that the teachers' habitus, institutional habitus, and the overall field influence (of both the school and society) had an important role in structuring the individual practices of the teachers and their communication patterns with the parents. In other words, as is evident from the excerpts given above, communication with parents was not a priority, unless there was a serious issue or problem with a child. Moreover, this also establishes that the contact with parents seemed not structured, at least consciously, at a collective school level and thus was left to individual teachers to pursue in the way they deemed appropriate.

However, whether it was due to their working-class status or education levels, most parents, whilst aware of the many benefits of visiting school did not see this as a norm or an obligation to communicate with the teachers of their children (see **Chapter Eight**). In my fieldwork, both in the urban and rural contexts, despite having obtained prior consent and confirmation of their participation, very few turned up for the interviews and focus group discussions. I had to change my plans and make contact again for further appointments. This did not mean that parents were not concerned about their children's future. However, most teachers were of the view (and many parents also admitted this, as discussed in **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**) that parents relegated issues of their children's education to teachers. This in Epstein's words represents and exemplifies separate spheres of influence between the home and school contexts (Epstein 1995).

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#### 5.1.4 The use of ‘credit slips’

In the RBS (and to some extent in the other schools as well), there appeared to be a form of contact between parents and teachers that relied on social capital within the rural community to get things done about one’s children. The use of ‘credit slips’ (Coleman 1988:S102) seemed to be at work behind parents’ entrusting their children’s responsibility to the local teachers and other personnel of the school.

In distinguishing the forms of social capital, Coleman (1988) explains that in the structure of social relations people tend to do things for each other and in so doing establish ‘obligation’ and ‘expectation’ of each other. A person who has done something for another person can make use of that favour as a ‘credit slip’ to call upon in a situation where it may be needed. The favours may range from material to non-material credit slips, depending on the nature and context of the social situations in which they are held. In a rural environment, the idea of ‘credit slips’ may have deep family and friendship associational value, where people may simply put the responsibility of their children on the people they know through various means. Thus, the responsibility would range from having a strict control over the child to resolving problems and disputes arising in school. One teacher explained the various aspects of such links with parents:

Actually, our school is in a village where the environment is such that people [fathers] say [to me] that “you are [working] in school so you keep an eye [take care] on my child.” So all such responsibility of a child falls on the shoulders of those teachers and *chowkidar* [security guard/gatekeeper] who are from the local village. They say [to me], “I have left [the responsibility/affairs of] my child to you and you are responsible for him [child].” Most of the time, the practice is that as the majority of parents do not come to school, their request is that if there is some problem regarding their child, I should try to solve it. (Teacher RBS)

Here, although a teacher or other school personnel may not derive direct benefits from the ‘out-of-the-way’ services they offer to parents and their children, they may reap the benefits in the form of clan solidarity or support in other indirect non-material or material forms, which may not be directly derived from the existing services for one’s children. However, the assumption of adults that they hold a certain kind of moral obligation or a ‘credit slip’ to keep in check the behaviour of children in their various spheres of life may become a problem when a father whose child has been disciplined in any manner object to or confront the adult who has disciplined his child. This may lead to rivalries and serious consequences for the parties concerned. In the FGD at the

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RBS, one teacher referred to an incident in which an adult from their village had stopped a child from some activity. This resulted in a feud, later involving firearms. This signifies the generally accepted notions of the taken for granted socially sanctioned responsibilities of disciplining children, which at times may lead to problems and misunderstandings that may have implications at a personal and mutual level.

### **5.1.5 Section summary**

In summary, most teachers seemed to have an effective understanding of the various means of communication with parents. However, it was evident that most teachers cited various constraints (such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources) and their other professional engagements as hampering their communication with parents. In this sense, the communication of teachers with parents was deeply embedded in the institutional habitus and in the structure of social transactions that the teachers had embodied in their habitus from the broader social settings. Therefore, most teachers were of the view that communication with parents was non-existent, unless in very rare cases of some chronic academic, behavioural or conduct problems of pupils. Moreover, whilst most teachers made little contact with parents about very specific issues of children, it became apparent from the discussion that communication of teachers was individualistic and not organised along institutional lines.

It also seemed apparent that the teachers' habitus, institutional habitus, and the overall field influences had an important role in structuring reciprocally the individual teachers' communication and practices with parents. However, there was also some evidence that suggested that in the rural schools for some local teachers the use of 'credit slips' underpinned parents entrusting the various academic, social and personal responsibilities of their children. However, the findings appear to suggest that whilst 'credit slips' may have had some positives in terms of clan solidarity and mutual acquaintance, its use by adults as taken-for-granted capital to discipline children either in school or outside in society may lead to problems and rivalries. In terms of comparisons of the schools, the findings suggest that though in most cases communication with parents was an individual matter of teachers, the heads in the rural schools fared well compared to their urban counterparts in school effectiveness and communication with parents. In this sense, the institutional habitus of the RBS was geared more towards policies of inviting and informing parents about pupils'

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various matters. I now turn to the communication dynamics of teachers to analyse more closely the underlying structures that shape and influence teachers' interaction with parents.

## **5.2 Communication practices: exploring structures within structures**

In the previous section, I discussed various communication practices or strategies of teachers with parents. In this section, I explore in detail various other factors that structure and influence the communication practices of teachers. The teachers' data suggest that for most teachers the structural and functional aspects of the school seem to affect their communication with parents. The participants also consider the issue of 'mock parents' and gender differences as aspects that influence their interaction and communication with parents. Moreover, teachers' communication is also underpinned by implicitly determined and deeply embedded cultural nuances that shape and structure teachers' interaction with parents.

### **5.2.1 The issue of resource, time, and workload: examining the 'constraints' and structures**

At the structural and functional level, most teachers were of the view that many in-school factors determined and influenced the nature and extent to which they made contact with parents. The most mentioned of these were time and resource constraints, workload, and excessive number of students in the classroom. These experiences were shared across the board, i.e. both male and female teachers in both the urban and rural schools referred to the various issues as constraining their practices. However, there were differences in the way various teachers spoke about their experiences, which highlight the differences between their individual habitus and the respective institutional habitus in which the schools functioned.

There was an underlying dimension to the patterns of teachers' responses about their communication with parents. Many teachers therefore viewed the structural and functional constraints of the school as limiting factors in their communication with parents, which is better captured in the following quotation:

Yes, I did initially solve some problems. But, [later on] due to time constraints, workload, lack of proper guidance [in contacting parents] and my teaching load of English and Mathematics, I did not have sufficient time to contact parents. Had the strength [number of students] been less in my class, I would have continued contacting parents. (Teacher UGS)

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The issue of overcrowded classrooms and time constraints are limiting factors in the way teachers communicate with parents. However, the question here might be one involving systemic issues, which can be seen as deeply embedded in the structure of the school itself. There is an indication here that, as the institutional habitus seemed centred on some specific aspects of school life, contact with the parents was not considered possible or feasible and therefore implicitly considered as an auxiliary aspect. This could indicate that the structural and functional aspects of school shaped the individual and collective attitudes of teachers toward the issue of parental communication. Furthermore, the social and cultural climate of the school acted as the official and sometimes unwritten code of practice, obliging teachers to conform to its norms. Therefore, for many teachers to work individually or collectively to involve parents in their children's academic and personal life was overshadowed by the structural and functional constraints of the schools.

As I discussed above, the way the participants shared their perspectives about their practices had an underlying pattern. Many participants had a clear understanding of the importance of involving parents and communicating with them. However, the institutional habitus played an important role in structuring the teachers' practices and shaping their habitus:

Here, it again comes to the problem of individual attention to students. If we were to give individual attention to students, then problem identification and calling parents would have been smoother and hassle free. Because these things are not done in a proper order, everything goes unchecked. It is because of the excessive number of students that I cannot contact parents regarding academic issues of their children. What time would I be able to give to parents as I have got around 4 to 5 classes [to teach] a day? There is also an issue of space, where parents would be received and briefed about issues of their children. (Teacher UBS)

Here again, student numbers and workload underpins the communication practices of the teacher. However, there is also a more subtle aspect mentioned here, which pertains to institutional habitus. The structure of practices of teachers and their justification for not being able to communicate properly with students and their parents not only revolved around the constraints they argued hindered their practices, but also the school structures and cultures were not oriented towards aspects or measures for involving or communicating with parents. In other words, there is an indication in the above quotation that despite having awareness about doing things in the 'proper order,' the activities and practices were not organised as they should have

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been and hence the expression ‘everything goes unchecked.’ In the UBS, many teachers whom I interviewed expressed their concern about the role that the school head played in the school as an administrator and leader. They argued that it was a political position/post, which was given to those people who were well connected with the officials in the Directorate. For these teachers this resulted in the head taking less interest in the school affairs and more interest in the affairs outside the school, which they argued affected the community and learning environment of the school.

In a similar vein, another teacher in the same school, whilst outlining the mechanisms through which communication with parents was possible, referred to systemic issues as constraining their contact with parents:

It is my personal experience, or you may call it observation that, parents usually do not make contact with schools—whereas [from the school’s side] in the absence of the required facilities and resources, it is relatively less likely that schools may [initiate] contact or communicate with parents. Their [school’s] only source being students, a [verbal] message is communicated only through them [to parents] in disciplinary matters or when some other bad thing happens to a child that prompts the school administration to contact parents. Contact with parents is non-existent on issues pertaining to academic deficiencies or attendance problems of students. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

Given the above assertion and the responses of other respondents, it seems evident that most teachers had developed a homogenised understanding of the parents and of their role in the children’s school life. For instance, as indicated in the above excerpt, most teachers saw parents as uninterested and thus homogenized them respectively. Moreover, whilst most teachers were clear about the nature of their communication with parents, they did not see that as an essential or important part of their regular practice. There is also an indication here that in the structure of the school culture and practices, communication with parents was generally not a well thought out and planned activity. In most cases, it would have been disciplinary or conduct related matters of the students that would make teachers communicate with parents. Many teachers therefore considered communication with parents along a scale, at the base of which they saw conduct and discipline matters of students and at the top the higher order academic and performance-oriented communication.

There is also a more subtle issue concerning communication and interaction of teachers with students in the classroom and school. The important thing here to consider is the tone and manner of teacher-student interaction. In the study schools, whilst there were some differences between the patterns of interaction of female and

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male teachers with their students, generally for most male teachers the patterns of their relations with students were structured along a ‘master-subject’ continuum. In this arrangement, teachers saw themselves as ‘masters’ and were assumed to wield power and authority, whereas their students, as ‘subjects,’ were expected to be obedient, unquestioning and uncritical. Thus, teacher power was not only uncritically culturally sanctioned but it was also deeply entrenched and permeated in the teachers’ habitus. In this regard, Khan *et al.* (2005:209) document five sources of teacher power in government schools in Pakistan; teachers face/have: “little threat of losing their job,” “little oversight by education officers,” protection of “political authorities,” protection of a “teacher’s [sic] association,” and lastly “very poor and uneducated constituency of parents, which provides no threat or countervailing power.” It was also due to the perception of wielding more power and authority in their respective social spheres (especially in the school context) due to which most teachers saw most parents as submissive, unquestioning, and therefore weak in their interaction and relations with the school and teachers (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1** for related discussion).

One example would help illustrate this point further, which would give some understanding and insight into the teacher’s role in the interaction dynamics and their power and influence in school over students, which implied the use of authority without the fear of parental reprisal. During my fieldwork in the RBS, when I was with the principal in his office, a matter was reported back to him that involved a teacher and one of his 10<sup>th</sup> class students, who came from a poor family background, with his father working as a security guard:

Some days previously, the teacher had punished the student because he did not have the required notebook. After the punishment, the student dared to reply that he was unjustly punished. The teacher saw this response as a challenge to his authority and pride. He in return punished the student more severely and expelled him from his class. The student later on pleaded for forgiveness but the teacher was adamant. The two teachers who were reporting the matter to the principal said that the teacher in question was making tall claims and was boasting about using his connections with the high-ups to settle things for himself. After this incident, the student was even ready to leave the school for good but the other teachers and the principal had been trying to settle the matter. The principal said to me that had it been the fault of the student, he would have punished and even expelled the student. However, he said that here we have a teacher who is behaving in a childish manner and that if he intervened personally the situation might get worse. The principal did not seem to intervene personally, probably to avoid confrontation. Then he instructed the other teachers to resolve the matter and

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make the teacher understand his role and responsibility towards the school and students. (Field notes 02/12/06)

As might be evident from the vignette above, the most surprising thing here is that, despite what appears to be the highhandedness of the teacher concerned, there was no mention of the role of the father and his involvement to query, or at least discuss, the incident in question. This might not only mean deliberate parental exclusion from the school life, but it also tells about the powerlessness of parents in the school affairs of their children, which seems to suggest that such actions were inscribed in the habitus of the agents involved. Also important was the manner in which the principal did not personally intervene and seemed to exert his influence indirectly through the mediating teachers most probably because of the power implications that would have strained the principal's and the teacher's relations with each other, and which may have had political repercussions. It seems to imply that, whilst the principal had only been posted in the school for a little more than two months, he clearly seemed to have 'a feel for the game' by resolving such issues indirectly to keep his integrity and for avoiding outside political interference in his school.

The example given above may have been one of the extreme cases of teacher-student interaction. However, given the prevailing constraints of schools and an authoritative institutional habitus, underpinned by the habitus of teachers and their respective social and cultural capitals, students and their families were not seen as positioned equally in most matters.

Likewise, the way the teachers amplified the constraints surrounding their work patterns and the constraints of meeting and discussing issues with parents exemplified the role of habitus and the respective field influence of school in structuring their practices individually and collectively:

... meeting with parents needs time, sitting together and we haven't got much time and they cannot come later in the day. Even if they come later in the day, then I might not be able to give them proper time. I am busy attending classes in the morning ... In an empty period [free class] I can give proper time to parents, but when I am busy and a parent visits me, we just talk about important issues. I also give advice to some fathers not to make their child work [do jobs] ... (Teacher UBS)

It was not only the school culture that had shaped and influenced the practices of the teachers, but also the class dynamics of the teachers, which resonated with their dispositions, played an important role in structuring the structures of their practices

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collectively. The institutional habitus that evolved did not seem to focus on the students and their parents but on the processes and mechanisms that would ensure the communication and completion of the course contents. This was so because many of the teachers prioritised the importance of memorising the course contents by the students and the completion of their courses as the desired outcome of their work patterns.

In a similar vein, as might be evident from the above quotation, most teachers seemed to have embodied the “compensation ‘pathological’ model” (Bastiani 1983:115; Goode 1982:82) in their interaction with parents. As the teachers had a monopoly over matters of a professional nature, the working-class parents were therefore compensated for their ‘cultural deficit’, ‘language deprivation’ etc. (Bastiani 1983; Goode 1982). Most teachers were of the view that generally parents considered them powerful, all knowing, and therefore better placed at teaching and guiding their children.

Talk of a contact with parents also made some teachers to talk about it as a separate entity and mechanism, which required planning, documentation and thus involving constraints. Whilst there was an examination system in place in each school, the results of which most teachers said were usually sent home through the students themselves, for some teachers a coordinated and concerted effort to help a documented system for maintaining progress of students and communicating that to parents was not a workable option. One teacher effectively expressed this in the following words:

We do not have any documentary procedure in place whereby we would send progress reports of students to their parents. There are many problems in keeping such a record system—time, space, maintenance constraints are involved. (Teacher UBS)

The evidence here suggests that the workability of such a system entailed numerous constraints for the teachers and schools. This suggests that the working of the schools was structured along set patterns of practices, which were teacher-centred that considered curriculum delivery and finishing course contents as high on the agenda and high priority tasks. This was evident from most of the teachers’ interviews and discussions, in which they either referred to the subject load as constraints or saw their preoccupations in school as hindering their communication with parents.

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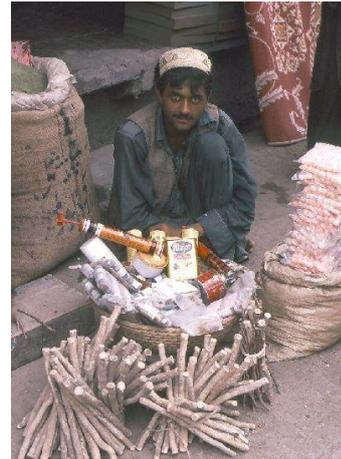
Resultantly, for most teachers any mechanisms or alternatives suggesting a deviation from the set routine were seen as unworkable.

### **5.2.2 The issue of ‘mock’ parents**

Whilst there were other issues for which teachers would communicate with or send messages to parents, some teachers in the boys’ schools referred to visits of unrelated persons or ‘mock’ parents as an issue, which involved a minority of students who were difficult to handle. In order to save their ‘skin’ and that their parents may not get to know about their school problems, some students when constrained to call their fathers were said to be accompanied by people not related or directly related to them:

No. [There are] no other sources of communication [with parents]. Students are the main commodity of their fathers with us, but asking students to call their fathers is an exercise in futility. Sometimes it has also happened that students would come along with someone unrelated and present that person as their father or brother. The principal being used to such tactics would ask for their [relation’s] identity to prove their relation to the student. Thus such people, pretending to be the father and brother of a child would then make lame excuses [ID left a home, forgot to bring it etc.] to avoid being caught lying. (Teacher UBS)

The prevalence of ‘mock’ parents was an issue with those students who had chronic academic or most importantly conduct problems. Here there is a need to consider the structure of such transactions and their underlying dynamics. Many teachers in the interviews and discussions were of the view that since the public schools were catering to the working and poor class, there were always some students in every class (especially in the higher classes of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) who were delinquent in many respects. No matter what the teachers did, from giving corporal punishment and fines to warnings and the threat of expulsion, they would not reform. For such students involving their fathers was one way of reforming them. However, according to the teachers, as these students were the main contact between the home and school, they would adopt avoidance strategies so as not to involve their fathers in school matters. Such students would not involve their fathers in their school problems and some of them would use ‘mock’ parents. Some teachers in the UBS said that some students were even found to have paid money to a street vendor to accompany them and pose as their parent, guardian, or brother.



**Photo 5.2 Street vendors**

The underlying practices and strategies of many teachers and the principal in the UBS in such instances therefore seemed to have centred on their ‘hard,’ ‘tried’ and ‘tested’ investigative techniques, which required the students to comply with the school’s regulations, which in many cases would result in various forms of punishment. In this sense, the institutional habitus mirrored the broader culture that prevailed outside the school boundaries that had an important role in structuring the habitus of the agents and their communication dynamics in school. The role of the PE instructors therefore in the boys’ schools, besides their other professional duties, included maintaining discipline and administering punishment. The following entry from my field notes provides a descriptive account, which involved a student who was ‘caught’ using a mobile phone in the lavatories:

At the time of leaving the school, I noticed a student in the principal’s office, pleading to the principal about something, whilst at the same time continuously crying. I could not gather what it was [about]. When I asked the principal about the class the child was studying in, he replied that he was in the 7<sup>th</sup> class. A little later, the PE instructor entered the office, having a stern look and appearance, holding a big cane in one of his hands. By that time the child, who was sent outside the principal’s office, also entered whilst still continuously crying. The PE instructor showed the principal a small mobile phone and said that the student was caught using it in a toilet. The child kept on crying. Both the principal and the PE instructor kept saying to the child to ask his father to visit school [in connection with this matter]. But the child would not go and kept on crying. I then left the principal’s office with many questions unanswered. (Field notes, 05/09/2006)

This field note might give some insight and understanding into the field dynamics and structure of the school practices. However, the issue here is also one that is deeply embedded in the class status of the teachers and students, involving differences in the

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use and appropriation of varying forms of social and cultural capital. More simply, this was a clear example in which the student did not possess any power to discuss or plead his case, except to cry in order to influence the PE instructor and the principal. Moreover, in so doing, the principal was of the view that the child wanted to avoid his father's involvement in this issue as that would have meant more trouble and punishment for him. This is problematic since this reveals that both the teachers and parents considered students as problems and did not address the actual problems the students faced or got into. This may have been one of the reasons, why some students did not want to involve their parents in their school issues. Some teachers in the RBS also alluded to such parental avoidance strategies of some students, through which such students were said to involve unrelated persons in their school affairs:

... And when I press for their visit, they [students] would be accompanied to school by someone unrelated out of the neighbourhood, after we investigate their affiliation ... (Teacher RBS)

Most of them [parents] are farmers and there are some [parents] that work in government services in ancillary [mostly manual] jobs, as peons, gardeners, security guards and clerks. Whenever you ask students for their fathers to visit school, their response would be that: 'my father is gone for his job,' or 'my father is a farmer and is gone to the fields.' When such students feel that they are obliged to call their fathers, then they would be accompanied by unrelated persons and would say, 'this is my brother and he will give guarantee that I will not do a such-and-such thing again.' In such ways, they would [try to] get out of their crisis. (Teacher RBS)

As I discussed above, the number of students involved in such practices was considerably small and such instances of the students involving others, other than their parents, were rare. However, the implication of the teachers that this was an issue indicates that the institutional habitus and the habitus of all stakeholders involved were also predisposed to such practices of 'mock' parents and that involved maintaining order and discipline and other functional matters of the school.

### **5.2.3 The issue of gender disparity: 'girls given less importance'**

In both the urban and rural girls' schools, female teachers were very clear that gender disparities existed for girls, in both the home and school contexts. Most of the teachers were of the view that girls were treated less favourably compared to boys. For them the social and cultural traditions, underpinned by the patriarchal norms and customs, favoured boys more as they were perceived as a source of earning and support, and girls as an economic liability. This in turn influenced parental

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dispositions and their communication dynamics with the school. Although both boys and girls faced many overlapping issues in their respective school contexts, which pertained to the structural and functional aspects of the schools and those that involved their home and parental constraints, girls were at a disadvantage in many ways:

... mothers and fathers in the poor [and working] class give less importance to their daughters. They would ask about their sons but not about their daughters. (Teacher UGS)

The above assertion resonates with the findings of a number of studies on gender disparities for girls in public school education in Pakistan (e.g., Aslam & Kingdon 2008; Filmer 1999; Levine *et al.* 2008; Sawada & Lokshin 2001). The disparities for girls can be non-material (i.e. less importance, care and love) and material (i.e. educational expenditure and other provisions). For instance, Aslam and Kingdon (2008:2588) found significant pro-male bias in educational expenditure as a within-household phenomenon, which they argue exist because of “differential labour market returns to education for males and females.” Sawada and Lokshin (2001) also found that social class and occupation of parents affect educational investment decisions for girls in Pakistan. Moreover, Aslam and Kingdon (2008:2587) argue that gender disparities in education and schooling outcomes for males and females in Pakistani households “are more strongly discernible in Balochistan, NWFP and FATA, and in rural areas” of Pakistan. There is a pattern here, which suggests that in Pakistan “gender disadvantage is small among the rich but quite large among the poor” (Filmer 1999:19). Given that the social class and occupation of parents determine the type of schools children go to (Sawada & Lokshin 2001), most teachers in the interviews and discussions therefore viewed the notion of public school education as predominantly for the working-class and poor.

The findings also reveal that most female teachers saw mothers as a homogenous group. Many of them described mothers’ role in their daughters’ education in such words:

They [mothers] are so busy in the home that they do not want to go out. When there is some issue or problem with a student or there is some function [programme], which would require the mothers’ presence, their response is usually negative, even when students are strictly told to communicate our message to their parents. Mothers mostly being uneducated are usually

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unaware of their daughters needs; whether they should enquire about how their daughters are coping in school. (Teacher UGS)

This suggests that mothers' interaction and communication with the school was constrained by their home environment and engagement patterns, which was implicitly determined by their educational levels and cultural constraints. Likewise, for the teachers in the RGS, the patterns of gender issues for girl students were not much different:

Some students say that when they go home their mother would say, "you have spent all day at school [reading and studying] and are now doing the same at home." So, they say that they don't have time to do their homework at home. I tell them that I am aware of these issues and that is why I ask many of the mothers to come to school after their daughters fail the exams and discuss with them their daughters' issues ... Some students have financial problems and face the risk of leaving school. I try to discover such students who may be around 10-15 in number in each class. They come from extremely poor families. (Teacher RGS)

In addition to their teaching experience with students, most female teachers seemed to have a thorough understanding and experience of the underlying dimensions of gender disparities for girls in their various contexts. This could be because they themselves had gone through similar or related experiences during their childhoods and at various stages of their lives. For most of the female teachers, there was not only a personal reflection concerning the gender inequalities in education, but they were also more empathetic towards their students, as is evident from the above quotation. This was more particular in the case in the RGS, probably because of the institutional habitus developed and maintained by the head due to which most teachers mentioned that they were more involved in solving the problems of their students.

#### **5.2.4 'Personal interest' as a communication practice**

In the boys' schools especially, a particular pattern of teachers' communication with parents became evident, involving teachers using their position to get some personal favours done through the parents of students. Whilst this was not a general trend, many teachers referred to such patterns of communication of other teachers in their schools. Given that parents have their children studying with teachers in the school and due to the cultural desirability of respecting teachers and submitting to their authority, in many ways parents would be more than willing to help their children's teachers in their personal problems, when asked by their children. The use of a 'credit slip' (Coleman 1988) as one of the forms of social capital would be at work here as

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the teacher would in turn be obliged to give more attention to those students whose fathers would have helped them in their personal issues or problems:

However, [in a way of confessing ones faults] when we have a problem concerning our gas or electricity bills, then we are very keen in locating those students whose fathers work in the gas or electricity departments. [About such students] we do know a lot of their details and keep a record of their telephone numbers as well. [Teachers are laughing!!!]. We cannot tell only lies here, some truth needs to be talked about as well! (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

In the more advanced Western cultures and societies, one might question the nature of such a type of teacher's contact not only as unacceptable but also as highly unethical. However, given the Pakistani cultural context and the social class of teachers, such practices for some or many teachers may not only have been inscribed in their habitus, and therefore seen as justified and permissible, but the only way of alleviating their problems and saving money at the same time. The fact that the specific interests of some teachers make them communicate with parents or fathers questions their claims in which they always complained that they could not find time to connect with the families and parents.

### **5.2.5 Cultural nuances in communication practices**

For many teachers there were underlying cultural underpinnings of making contact with parents. For some teachers, therefore, communicating with their students' home was shrouded in mistrust and cultural sensitivities:

No, there is no such system in place. Neither they [students] would ask their fathers to visit school nor would I ask them [to call their fathers to school]. If I do so, fathers may think what purpose is behind him calling me to school. The problem is that the social mindset is such that people may think that the teacher might be in need of something or there would be something else of the teacher's personal nature. (Teacher UBS)

This might indicate that the practices of the teachers and parents had predefined boundaries, which none of the parties concerned was supposed to cross. This might also show that the school practices and education had a specific scope and limit and thus some teachers did not consider engaging with parents more closely because of the perceived cultural constraints.

In a similar vein, for some teachers therefore, communication with parents was more than a systemic issue that involved cultural sensitivities of talking to females:

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I don't have any official allowance for getting in contact with fathers through the telephone ... if I contact the fathers through my own resources, they may become suspicious as to the purpose of the contact and making telephone calls to home could be a source of problems for us. Sometimes female members of the house may attend to the call and thus could question the nature of the contact. It has happened in schools that teachers have contacted homes of their students and [school] disciplinary actions have been taken against them about such contacts. ... Even our principal has been contacted by fathers that such and such teachers are contacting us [parents] by phone and they should not be doing so. (Teacher UBS)

Whilst this would have been an issue for some teachers, as telephonic contact with parents was not usually the norm, rather students themselves were considered as the most common way through which teachers communicated with parents, when and if they needed to. However, principals were better placed to communicate telephonically with parents provided they had the parents' contact details and the situation required so. Here, the issue of school culture had an important role, because it would be the principal and the teachers who would set a particular tone, either individually or collectively, for working, interacting and dealing with parents. Associated with these issues was the potentially negative social and cultural connotation of contacting people (especially females) in the home of students. Since it is culturally undesirable for the unrelated males to have a conversation with unrelated females and vice versa, it was therefore not expected that male teachers would contact the home of students frequently. The above excerpt clearly states this sensitive issue and the perils of such a contact. Given the various problems of both the school and home, the lives of the stakeholders involved therefore were on opposing continuums. In Epstein's (1995:702) words, this represented "separate spheres of influence," where the institutional habitus of the school operated a policy of non-interference in the affairs of the home and saw some specific roles and responsibilities as part of its structure and function. This is the area, I now want to explore and discuss further in Section 5.3 that follows.

### **5.2.6 Section summary**

In this section, I explored the communication practices of teachers with parents in more detail by considering a number of themed topics. In considering communication with parents, for most teachers many in-school factors determined and influenced the nature and extent to which they made contact with parents. For the teachers, time and resource constraints, teaching load and overcrowded classrooms were the main and

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often cited factors that they argued did not permit them for having any contact with parents. In this sense, the teachers saw the structural and functional constraints of the school as limiting factors their communication with parents. What this implied is that in most cases the school structures and cultures were not oriented towards the various aspects and measures through which effective communication with parents could have been made. Whilst for most teachers communication with parents did not appear to be an essential or important part of their regular practice, what appeared evident was that for most of them the institutional habitus had structured teachers' dispositions in a way that they had developed a homogenised understanding of the parents and of their related aspects and practices of school communication. In this sense, most teachers seemed to have embodied the "compensation pathological model" (Goode 1982:82) in their interaction with parents.

Communication practices and experiences of the male teachers with parents also revealed an aspect of parent-teacher relations and contact in which a minority of problem students, in order to avoid the direct involvement of their fathers in their school problems, would resort to the use of 'mock' parents. The prevalence of mock parents was an issue with those students who had chronic academic or more importantly conduct problems. However, the institutional habitus and the teachers were predisposed to such practices of mock parents and such issues were investigated accordingly. For most female teachers the issue of gender disparities for girls in education generally and specifically for parent-teacher interaction and communication existed more compared to boys. For most of them, girls were treated less favourably compared to boys because of the social and cultural traditions that underpinned the patriarchal societal norms in which boys were perceived as a source of earning and support and girls as an economic liability. For most of the female teachers, mothers' communication with the school was constrained by their home environment and engagement patterns that were implicitly determined by their educational levels.

Whilst most teachers rarely communicated with parents, 'personal interest' of some teachers as a strategy of communication with some parents involved teachers finding about those parents who could solve their personal problems. This involved some teachers using their position to get some personal favours done through the parents of their pupils. In such instances, many parents would reciprocate to such teachers because of the cultural desirability of respecting teachers and submitting to their

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authority. For some teachers, however, communication with their students' home entailed cultural nuances, which were shrouded in mistrust and cultural sensitivities. Some teachers thought that if they contacted parents, parents would think that the teacher would be in need of something or wanted some personal favours. However, some other teachers considered communicating with parents in their home by telephone as culturally sensitive and inappropriate if they talked to the females at home, which in some cases resulted in complaints against some teachers.

### **5.3 Institutional habitus and communication practices**

In this section, I present findings that have shown the role of institutional habitus in structuring and influencing teachers' habitus and practices in the various school contexts. The data suggest that institutional habitus structures and gives a collective tone to the practices of teachers and various aspects of school life. The experiences that the teachers shared suggest that institutional habitus influences teachers' perception of parental presence in school, sets the tone for the way parents are received and interacted to and underpins teachers' habitus to see school and home as separate spheres of influence. The data also suggest that teachers, heads, and politics could have a role in forming and influencing institutional habitus, which in turn affect the quality of practices in schools.

#### **5.3.1 Meeting parents an 'alien thing'**

Much of what most teachers talked about meeting parents centred on the various constraints they faced in school, which they argued hampered their practices and interaction with parents. This collective understanding of the teachers of their constraints and practices underpinned the institutional habitus of the schools. The resultant practices were therefore seen in the light of the field dynamics of the school that determined much of the teachers' habitus and practices. In this sense, the institutional habitus represented a "complex amalgam of agency and structure" (Reay *et al.* 2005), which was instrumental in shaping and influencing the practices of teachers and their opinions about these practices. The main argument of most teachers was that they were not satisfied with the facilities they were working with and within their professional commitments, which they said rarely left them with any time to pursue issues of the children and to accommodate parents in the school. Whilst the various constraints did seem to have a major role in the structure and functioning of

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the schools, the fact that the institutional habitus of the schools was collectively oriented towards some specific aspects of school life meant that meeting parents did not generally constitute a part of the school functionality. This led to many teachers arguing that meeting parents was not the norm and some maintained that teachers saw this as an ‘alien thing.’ One teacher articulated this well:

Had there been any provision for inviting parents to school, at least once in a year, we would have held a meeting with parents of children of various grades at different times of the year. Furthermore, had there been sufficient time [allocated] and [relevant] facilities provided, then neither we [teachers], nor they [parents/mothers] would have considered meeting each other to be an alien thing. We would have known that there would have been a problem or an issue and that’s why some mothers have come to school. (Teacher UGS)

The sense we get here is that meeting parents was not a structured component in the general format of the school procedures. As has been highlighted in the quotation above, most teachers acknowledged the importance and need of parental visits to school. However, the field dynamics of the schools structured and functioned in a way that parents were not seen as having any role in the school life, nor did most parents themselves take any role in the school affairs apart from sending their children to school (see **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**). From these findings, it seemed that there was some general understanding or implicit acknowledgement of keeping parents at some distance. This resulted in an expectation amongst teachers of parental non-interference:

And I say that, when someone suddenly appears in school, then it looks very strange. We [teachers] would think that, “because we would not have held a meeting nor would be in the know-how that a student has a problem or would have sent someone [after them for a visit to school] or we would have given any warning to a student, then why are they interfering [in our work].” [Upon enquiry] mothers would say that “my daughter is ill and I want to take her to the doctor,” or they would say that, “someone has died and their daughter needs to go with them to the village or to the home to look after things.” We then let such students go with their mothers. For such mothers, [as they are in a hurry,] they do not have to sit [and wait in a room] and quickly leave the school. However, there are [some] private schools where parents are invited after every 6 months or 12 months for a meeting about their children’s progress. Thus both teachers and parents are aware of what they specifically have to do when they meet up with each other. (Teacher UGS)

Indeed, there were mechanisms and procedures in place in all the schools, through which the principals or senior teachers would deal with the issues and concerns of parents visiting the school. However, the schools generally did not offer a welcoming

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environment for parents and for some teachers the mere presence of the parents on the school premises meant that there was a problem. As might be evident from the quotation above, the focus of the schools was mainly on issues and aspects of students that entailed the management and practical aspects of the schools' functionality. In other words, the schools were oriented towards tasks and practices that required students' compliance with discipline and maintaining order.

The institutional habitus was also influenced by a number of other factors such as the social class of parents and infrastructure of the schools, especially in the girls' schools.



**Photo 5.3 RGS Teachers' Staff Room**

Teachers in the girls' schools appeared to be not satisfied with the facilities in their schools and especially of their staff rooms. In the UGS, some teachers explained that they did not have proper chairs for use in their staff room. They said that during break time, teachers sat on desks. This may have affected their self-esteem and personalities. In the RGS, the facilities in the staff room were very basic, as is evident from the photo above. Apart from the physical provisions and space issues, the students and teachers in the RGS had to endure the noise of the aircraft that landed or took off quite frequently from the runway of the airport, which was close to the school building.

Many teachers in all the schools were also of the view that, as most parents came from a working-class background, they did not have the required understanding and awareness of how to interact and when to interact with the teachers in the school. This seemed to have an influence on structuring the attitude of teachers towards parents.

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### 5.3.2 The issue of ‘respect’ and ‘support’ for parents

From the research data, an aspect of teachers’ interpersonal relations with parents emerged which centred on the issue of ‘respect’ and ‘support’ for parents. Some teachers were of the view that because of the attitude of some teachers, parents get discouraged to interact with them:

Another reason is that, even when a father comes to school, normally our teachers—due to their lack of awareness, or because of not knowing the importance of parental visits—do not properly welcome them. Or when fathers come and they are not given the progress report of their children in a proper way—not only by the Form Master but also by other subject teachers—then [when such fathers are not properly welcomed] they get discouraged and next time they do not come. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

The institutional habitus seemed structured around and reflected the prevailing social class and culture issues of the society in the school life, which filtered down to and mirrored in the behaviours of teachers (Reay 1998a; Reay *et al.* 2005 referring to McDonough 1997). This meant that whilst there was a general pattern that all teachers followed, the individual differences in and between the teachers positioned them to employ their own strategies of dealing and interaction with the parents who visited them. Here again the interpersonal relations between the teachers and parents depended on a number of factors, such as the social class of parents, and whether they knew the teachers they were visiting.

One important point, which became apparent from the teachers’ data and also from the parents’ data, was that the majority of parents who visited the schools either knew the principals or teachers themselves or through some of their acquaintances. This gave the parents the ‘credit-slip’ that they used to help address their issues and concerns. Many teachers were of the view that a very small number of parents visited school without having any association with any teachers. In such cases, some teachers said that when such parents felt that they were not valued or treated well they felt discouraged from future visits to school. However, such cases were very rare, since parents only visited their children’s school when there was some serious matter or in case of their children’s failure in examination (see **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**).

### 5.3.3 Home and school: ‘separate spheres of influence’

For most teachers, in both the boys’ and girls’ schools, there was clearly a sense of an understanding and acknowledgement that school and home had ‘separate spheres of influence.’ This meant that the institutional habitus had positioned or conditioned

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teachers to ‘resolve’ or ‘manage’ issues of children, which many teachers saw as their responsibility, without involving families or parents. There was therefore a strong sense among many teachers that portrayed “separate spheres of influence” (Epstein 1995:702) between the school and home. The underlying justification of this was not only the institutional habitus but also an established and consensual cultural understanding on the part of parents who regarded teachers with deference and acting ‘*in loco parentis*.’ This is what shaped the habitus of many teachers, who seemed to share the following understanding:

No, well in such issues home is not involved. So far as classroom issues are concerned we try to resolve them in school. We do not let a student tell his father or brother about the classroom problem of either being beaten-up or bullied by another student. We ask them [such students] not to talk about such issues at home and inform us [teachers] of what problems they face: If we [teachers] cannot solve such issues, our principal would be able to tackle your [students’] school related problems. (Teacher UBS)

One might consider here the context in which such situations are enacted on a daily basis in the classroom and school where the institutional habitus is preconditioned to practices and behaviours that are structured around the various constraints teachers claim to face and the social class of students. Moreover, one might also consider here the fact that, as parental visits to school was an “exception” rather than a norm (Khan *et al.* 2005:208) most teachers focused more on such activities as completing their course contents, maintaining order and discipline and managing their classes. For most teachers therefore the possibility of contacting parents did not seem to be of much help in their work or in the academic or personal improvement of their students.

### **5.3.4 ‘Educated ignorance’ and ‘selfish motives’?**

Many teachers, especially in the boys’ schools, were of the opinion that, despite the understanding and awareness of the importance of parental involvement and visits to school, some teachers only made contact with those parents whom they considered would help them solve their personal problems. In the FGD in the UBS, one teacher revealed such a type of contact with parents:

So far as in private schools, teachers have a record of phone numbers of all their students. My children are in a private school and whenever they miss their school due to illness, injury or some other issue, the teachers and school enquire about the reasons of their absence. In the government schools, people [teachers] do not bother much about these issues such as recording the telephone numbers of their students [for contact with parents]. However, [in a way of confessing ones faults] when we have a problem concerning our gas

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or electricity bills, then we are very keen in locating those students whose fathers work in the gas or electricity departments. [About such students] we do know many of their details and keep a record of their telephone numbers as well. [Teachers are laughing!]. We cannot tell only lies here: some truth needs to be talked about as well. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

Some aspects are worth discussing in the context of the above excerpt. It became abundantly clear from the data and my fieldwork experience that most teachers had their children admitted to a private school, which is also mentioned in the above quotation. Most teachers therefore preferred private education for their children, compared to public education even though it was free. This also meant that the teachers had sufficient income to afford private education for their children, unlike the predominantly working-class parents who sent their children to public schools. The principal of the RBS and some teachers remarked that since the teachers themselves knew about the low standard of their teaching and the constraints, which influenced the quality of school life, they did not want to educate their own children in public schools.

Here in the above excerpt, the teacher is well informed and knowledgeable about the instances and strategies that private schools use to communicate with parents, but acknowledges that this is not the norm in public schools. This means that, although teachers were aware about the benefits of parental visits, they did not consider adopting such strategies as the institutional habitus was not oriented to such practices and they themselves felt constrained to make any contact with parents.

An interesting and somewhat astonishing factor is the statement of the teacher in the quotation above in which he claims to show keen interest in locating and contacting those students whose parents could help him solve his personal problems. This raises some ethical concerns about developing communication channels with some parents for personal issues and disregarding the majority of other parents who would not appear to be of some personal help to the teacher. The personal help obtained/offered could be many things to many teachers, for example undertaking particular services. This may be especially the case in the rural areas where parents and students on the receiving end would consider themselves culturally and morally obliged to offer their services or other material things for free or at very nominal charges. In the urban context, the desirability of obtaining personal help/benefit from students and their parents would depend on the personality of the teacher, the social environment of the

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school and the nature of the teachers' problems. In the above excerpt, the teacher talks about sorting his utility bills through those parents who work in the relevant departments. Naturally, when problems of such teachers are resolved they would reciprocate by giving more attention and be lenient to children whose fathers have provided help to those teachers.

### **5.3.5 Uninterested head and autocratic leadership?**

One of the contrasting features of the schools that emerged from the interviews of and discussions with the teachers was that the school heads seemed to have influenced the institutional habitus in numerous ways. Whilst most teachers of both the RBS and RGS had positive views about the leadership abilities of the school heads, and many teachers had some appreciation for the head of the UGS, many teachers in the UBS were critical of the management abilities of their school head. There was a sense that the interplay between power and politics at the UBS had clearly shaped the field dynamics of the school, which in turn might have influenced the quality of teaching and learning and contact with parents. Many teachers were therefore critical of the school principal and his role in school effectiveness.

In facilitating school improvement, the literature widely acknowledges the key role of the principal/head teacher as a leader (Simkins *et al.* 2003). The principal as a leader therefore has an important role in school effectiveness, in contacting parents, organising activities and taking initiatives in the school. However, in many developing countries, principals have only minor significance, probably due to "cultural climates that seem to value education less" (Oplatka 2004:431). In the context of Pakistan, Simkins *et al.* (2003:288) conclude that, "national culture is an important variable in influencing leadership behaviour ... that ... is mediated by system and personal factors." Therefore some common distinguishing features of school principals in developing countries include: "limited autonomy, autocratic leadership style, summative evaluation, low degree of change initiation, and lack of instructional leadership functions" (Oplatka 2004:427). Most teachers in the interviews and FGD in the UBS alluded to the above features that prevailed in their school and some were even more critical of the principal's role in the school that had shaped and influenced the institutional habitus. The distinguishing features of principals identified by Simkins *et al.* (2003) and Oplatka (2004) were also echoed by one teacher in these words:

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There is no such tradition here. In government schools, there is no such concept [of holding parents day]. In reality, there is no encouragement in government schools. Any activity requires permission from the head of the institute [school]. But, the head of the institute [school] is either short of time, is less interested or is unmotivated etc.; his aim is to run the school in a routine way and complete his service. He does not have the creativity [to pursue activity-based things]. Furthermore, because heads of schools are appointed on a seniority basis, not through a competitive examination process, they are mostly aged and have less stamina to do such creative things. As the saying goes, “a principal is the mother and father of school,” so he should organise all activities of the school. It means that all the powers of school functioning and its authority flow from the office of the principal. Every work needs to be brought to the notice of the principal; otherwise, this could be tantamount to misbehaviour on the part of a teacher. (Teacher UBS)

Clearly, there is a sense of discord and discontentment here, which not only underpinned the institutional habitus as discussed by other teachers, but these teachers also indicated that the principal’s position carried power and authority that strengthened and perpetuated the autocratic role of the principal. Given that many teachers had comparable qualifications to those of the principal, the young and middle-aged teachers felt discouraged because of the lack of interest and bureaucratic attitude on the part of the principal. The underlying implication of the teachers in identifying the various issues at the school was that since the primary task of teaching and learning in the school was not properly maintained and monitored, the talk about engaging or contacting parents was not seen as a priority.

### **5.3.6 Institutional habitus: power, politics and principal’s role**

Whilst the respective individual and collective habitus of teachers clearly fashioned the way the various activities and practices were carried out in all the schools, the role of the principal was considered important in managing the schools, as the principals possessed power and authority and had the potential to bring about change. Therefore, the quality of instruction and interaction depended on their leadership. However, as I discussed in the previous section, some teachers in the UBS were more critical of the role that the principal was playing in the school and they said this clearly affected the school environment, learning experiences and management aspects of the school. One teacher raised these issues and the role that politics and power that underpinned the head’s appointment:

The problem in our government schools is that the [school] administration is very weak and has a political influence. My [outgoing] principal was interested in appointing a person as his successor, for whom he lobbied and got the approval of the minister as well. However, upon contacting the EDO,

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the application [of that person] was thrown in the bin and such a third class [not competent] person was given the job who was unaware of the school administration and who could not play any role in its administration, which was a disaster for the school. Here, due to political issues, such people are appointed [as principals] which lead to devastating consequences for the functionality of school. When the [school] system is disrupted, it affects the teaching [and learning] process. And when [the process of] education is impaired, it not only cuts my ties with parents, it also severely hampers my own interaction with my students. [Then resultantly] I as a teacher do not go to my class on time. I do not even go to my class sometimes for four or five days, and no one asks me why I have not attended my classes. ... I do not ask my students why they were absent from the school yesterday and what was the reason. So, is it not important on my behalf that I ask my students why they were absent from the school? Asking students about their absence from school is also a form of interaction with them [besides teaching]. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

There are clear indications of the role of power and politics that led to shaping and influencing the institutional habitus, which the teacher claims in turn had consequences for the way various activities and practices were performed in the school. The important point here is the teacher's indication that the lack of proper management and control functions of the principal led not only to the disruption of the ties of teachers with students but also with the parents. The teacher was sentimental about this issue and wanted to show how the head's role influenced the institutional habitus in ways that generally affected the micro interactional aspects of teacher-student interaction and instructional activities. The views expressed in the above quotation are also echoed by researchers for the appointment of principals, leading to such type of consequences for the functionality of schools. Oplatka (2004:432, citing Lahui-Ako 2001) reminds us that in some developing countries "nepotism plays a key role in the appointment of new principals ... in spite of the candidates' lack of relevant qualifications or merit in many cases."

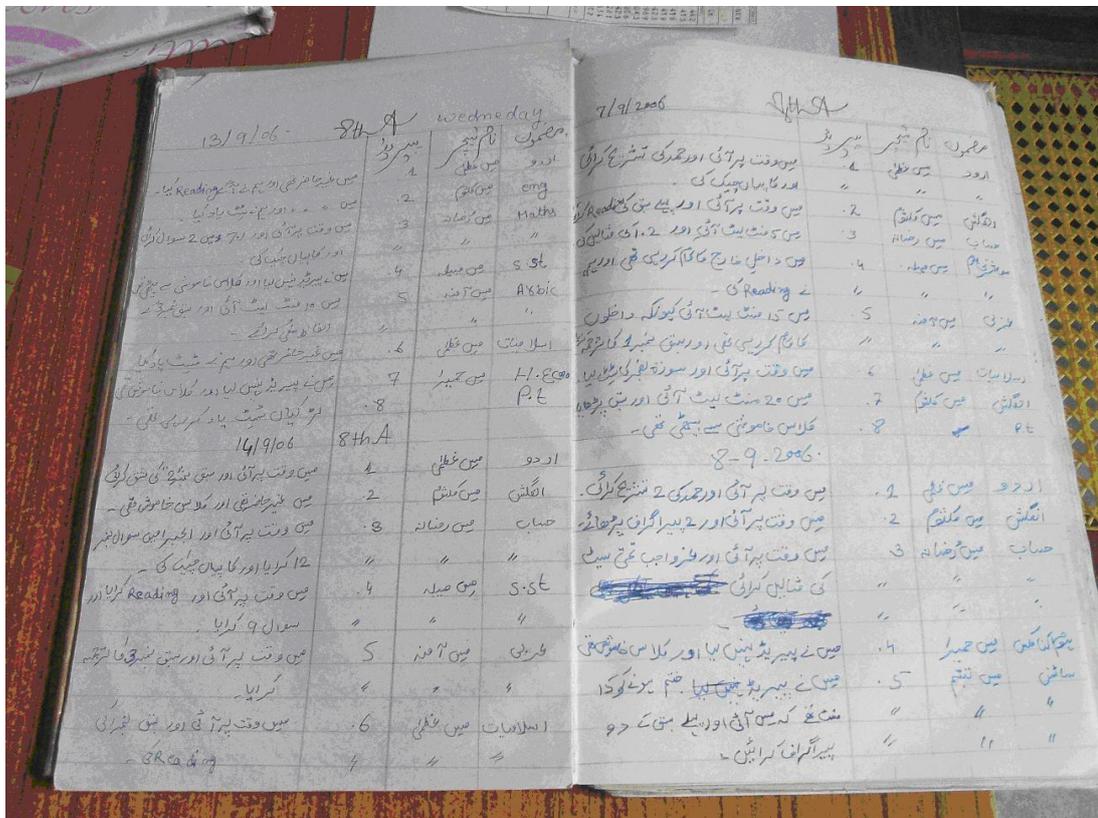
### **5.3.7 Heads with a difference?**

As I discussed above (**Section 5.3.5**), teachers in the RBS and RGS clearly had appreciation for the way the heads performed their duties at their schools. Most teachers therefore argued that their principals were committed and took a keen interest in improving the teaching and learning in their schools. Although there were clearly pertinent issues concerning the effective functioning of both urban and rural schools, the principals in the rural schools had relatively more control of the academic and administrative functions of their schools. However, their evaluative approach was summative rather than formative, as has been corroborated by Oplatka (2004:438):

In Pakistan, principals are expected to evaluate the extent to which teachers perform in accordance with the government-prescribed curriculum and other regulations by looking regularly at pupils' books and teachers' comments in them. (Oplatka 2004:438, citing Simkins *et al.* 1998)

This summative approach of the heads can be seen in the light of the institutional habitus that has a long standing historical reciprocity of shaping and structuring teachers' habitus and vice versa. For the head of the RBS therefore to be able to talk about change and alternative ways of teaching and learning were not seen as feasible options by the teachers.

The following two examples will further illuminate Oplatka's (2004) assertion and the role of institutional habitus:



**Photo 5.4 Teachers' progress and evaluation register (RGS)**

In the RGS, the female principal had devised an evaluative mechanism of recording the daily progress of teachers in their respective classes in the school. For this purpose, student monitors had the responsibility of maintaining the Progress and Evaluation Register. Photo 5.4 depicts an image of a page of the register. The four columns on each page of the register record information (in Urdu) under the captions of: subject, name of teacher, class/period, and details of the use of instructional time. At the end of each working day, the students of the respective classes would bring

their registers to the office of the principal for the principal to have a look at what went on in every class. This was one of the strategies of the principal to check on the performance of the teachers.

Likewise, in the RBS, the principal had introduced a daily report book of teachers' progress. This Report Book resembled the progress and evaluation register of the RGS, in both structure and presentation of details. Here too student monitors had the responsibility of recording details of the instructional activity in their respective classes. One evident difference of this school with others was the principal's interest in systematising the school's activities and normalising the academic life of the school. Most of the teachers at the school expressed these views in their interviews.

At the time of my fieldwork, the principal of the RBS had been in the office for merely just over two months. However, his interest in the school affairs and its progress seemed evident from the production of various registers, the delegation of authority to some senior teachers and his interest in leading by example by teaching alongside the teachers (which is not something people would usually expect from a principal, especially in a senior grade). As a result, the institutional habitus mirrored these measures not only in the teachers' interviews but also generally through the various activities in the school. Photo 5.5 presents an image from the RBS teachers' Daily Report Book:

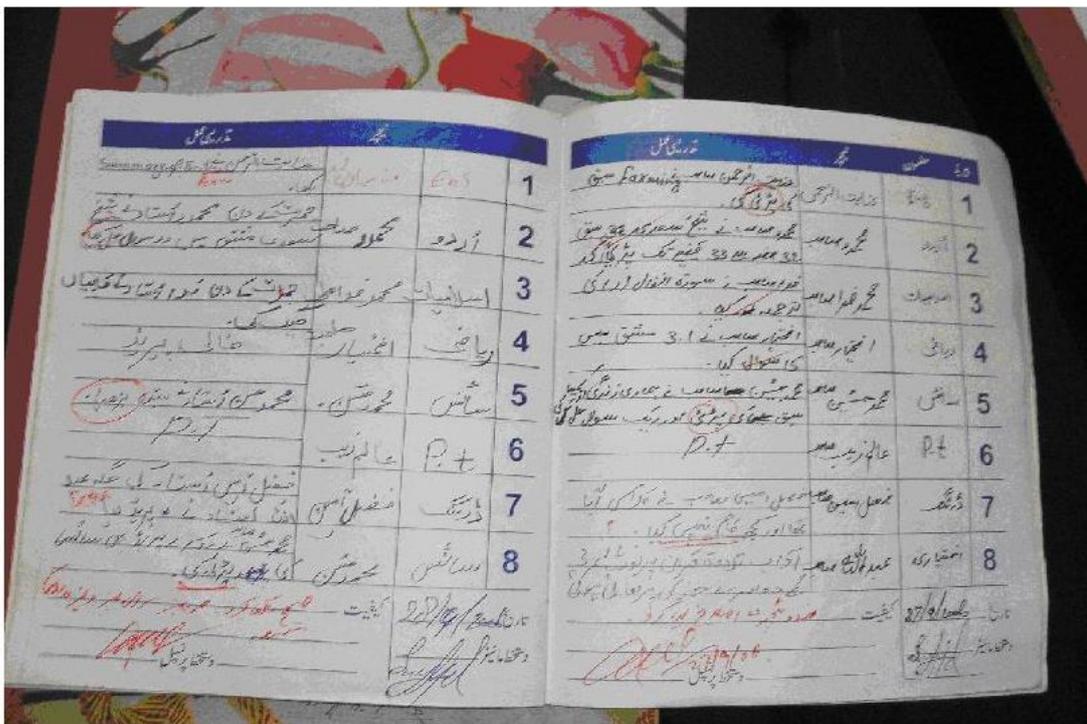


Photo 5.5 Teachers' Daily Report Book (RBS)

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A few aspects are worth discussing here about the above photo. As might be evident, what I gathered by looking at some of the report books of the different classes in the RBS was that the principal was keen on checking what went on in every class during the day. Another aspect of this exercise was the principal's correction of grammatical mistakes of the students' comments in the instructional activity column. This might have meant two things: that the student monitors themselves might have been academically weak, even though they were supposed to be academically good compared to other students in the class; and the corrections by the principal might signify that the students needed to improve and this was also a strategy to make the teachers engage with their students. The other aspect of this summative evaluation through these registers was that it was a sort of 'reality check' for the teachers, as the principal would put a question mark or put some comments where a student had written that a teacher had not done anything in the class.

One of the arguments of the teachers in support of their case was that the students they received from the primary schools had a weak basic education. For them, to teach and learn within a specific time what appeared to be a densely structured course may have been difficult for both the teachers and students. However, the issue here is multidimensional in character. From the theoretical standpoint, the principal wanted to bring about a change in the institutional habitus by using summative evaluation procedures as a means towards formative evaluation. The principal was of the view that the formalised way of checking progress of teachers was bureaucratic and was felt as such by the teachers as well. However, in a school that saw five principals only staying for one year and five months altogether out of a total of three years and five months (i.e. the school was without a principal for two years and one month) one can expect many problems in its overall effectiveness.

#### **5.3.8 Systemic issues as stumbling blocks?**

Given the power and authority that the heads possess within a bureaucratic, top-down, hierarchy, a principal has the potential to construct an institutional habitus, which supports and facilitates the teaching and learning process for both the teachers and students and helps create a process of involving parents in school. However, systemic issues were the main concerns of both the teachers and the principals. These mostly pertained to physical, functional and other related professional aspects of the schools. Given this context, the possibility of interacting with parents was problematic. This

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suggests that much of what the principals could do was to be preoccupied in the management and maintenance of the school (Oplatka 2004). Whilst there were some differences in the way the heads managed their schools, their main concerns were to:

...maintain discipline, order equipment, determine staffing needs, schedule activities, manage school finances and resources, allocate staff, and ensure that teachers keep accurate records. (Oplatka 2004:432, citing Chapman & Burchfield 1994 and Chi-Kin Lee & Dimmock 1999)

It became abundantly clear that the teachers' habitus and the field structure of the schools were clearly positioned and predisposed to those practices and activities that were seen as part of the usual or normal life of the schools. Clearly, there were issues surrounding the systemic issues of the schools. However, apart from acknowledging the importance of parental engagement in school, moving beyond the already established patterns of practices made most teachers to argue that the constraints they faced in school did not grant them sufficient time to communicate with parents.

### **5.3.9 Section summary**

This section has considered teachers' practices of communication with parents in the light of the institutional habitus of the school. Although most teachers considered communication with parents important, the findings suggest that the majority of teachers were of the view that due to the various constraints of school, meeting parents on the school turf was generally uncommon. This meant that the institutional habitus was collectively oriented towards some specific aspects of school life in which for most teachers meeting parents was not considered as part of their school functionality. This led some teachers to describe the presence of and meeting with parents as an 'alien thing.' Moreover, some teachers raised the issue of 'respect' and support for 'parents' in the school and argued that when some parents visited school and were not valued or treated well, they felt discouraged for communicating with the school in future.

There was also the issue of 'separate spheres of influence' embodied in the institutional habitus for the teachers. Some teachers therefore explained that they rarely involved parents or home in the affairs of students in situations of quarrelling, or bullying etc, which appeared to suggest that teachers assumed their role as '*in loco parentis*.' A somewhat intriguing issue was that whilst the institutional habitus mostly disregarded parental communication, some teachers were very keen to locate and

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contact the parents of those students who could help sort and solve their personal problems or issues, such as sorting utility bills.

The heads of the schools and their leadership qualities seemed to determine and influence much of the institutional habitus and the quality of practices within the schools. Many teachers were critical of the role that the principal in the UBS played in the school affairs and hence some of the teachers described the principal as uninterested and autocratic whilst others considered the head's post as one that involved power and politics. Although some teachers also appeared critical of the role of principal of the UGS, the majority of teachers of the RGS and RBS appreciated and commended the role that their respective heads were playing in terms of the school affairs and in maintaining and enhancing its quality. The principal of the RBS was even more keen on communicating with parents and informing them about their children and therefore had taken a number of steps regarding this, such as a letter template informing the parents of the various issues of their children (see **Appendix J**). However, generally systemic issues seemed to have determined and were described by most teachers as not letting them to have any contact with parents.

#### **5.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have focused on teachers' perceptions and experiences of communication and interaction with parents. I have discussed the dynamics of teachers' communication with parents that individually and collectively underpinned the dispositional stances of the teachers' habitus and field influence of the schools. I have shown that the underlying influences and structures of teachers' dispositions and field dynamics led most teachers to portray parents as uninterested in school visits and presented them as homogenised. However, there were variations in the way different teachers shared their experiences, which established the role that the habitus played in the respective teachers' lives. The pattern that emerged from the teachers' experiences was that generally the schools did not have formalised and institutionalised procedures for contact with parents. However, communication with parents emerged as a complex, dynamic and patterned process that was far from random, which was not only engrained in the specific situations but was also underpinned by power and class dynamics of the stakeholders.

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In the next chapter on teachers, I explore and discuss teachers' perceptions of power dynamics, parental involvement, barriers and PTA.

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## **Chapter Six — Teachers’ Relations with Parents: Perceptions of Power Dynamics, Parental Involvement, Barriers and PTA**

This chapter explores four aspects of teachers’ communication practices with parents, which involve perceptions about power relations, parental involvement, barriers to parental visits and the role of PTA in school.

The first section explores various power relation structures between teachers and parents, with emphasis on the role of culture, habitus and field dynamics in teachers’ practices. For example, I discuss that generally most teachers see themselves as dominant and confident in their relations with parents, whilst describing most (uneducated) parents as deferent and submissive to teachers’ authority. I also show that for some teachers relations with some parents are marred by confrontation, squabbling, tensions and power tussles, which involve both educated and uneducated parents. This highlights the importance of the interplay between the role of habitus and field in the structure of practices.

The section second provides a discussion of teachers’ perceptions and experiences of parental involvement and visits to school. In particular, I discuss that generally for most teachers, at an individual and institutional level, parental involvement and visits to school is not a structured component of their practices in school. I also show that for some teachers, however, parental involvement has a ‘layered’ influence that operates from the home, which influences decisions about girl students in school. Moreover, I also discuss some teachers’ experiences of using their personal initiative to organise co-curricular activities for students, leading to instances of parental involvement and benefits that the school accrued from such engagements.

Section three discusses perceptions of barriers to parental visits or participation in school, highlighting the individual and collective experiences of teachers and the role of school culture. For instance, I examine the claims most teachers make that schools pose no barriers to parental visits, and analyse the constraints teachers say prevent them for engaging with parents. I also consider the various aspects of school culture or field influence that many teachers say acts as obstacles to parental involvement.

Lastly, section four explores the various aspects and dimensions of the role that the PTA has in school. In particular, I consider and examine policy provisions regarding the importance of parents and their involvement in the education of children and

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consider teachers' views on the structural and functional aspects of the role the PTA has in school.

### **6.1 Perceptions of power dynamics**

The focus of this section is to explore teachers' perception of the role that power plays in the relations with parents. Power is a critical and crucial factor in the structure of relations between teachers and parents; it is implicit in the conceptualisation and appropriation of all forms of capital whether material, cultural, social or symbolic (Swartz 1997:73). Its use and appropriation therefore then is played out in the teachers' habitus and the field dynamics of schools that structures the relations and practices between teachers and parents in many complex ways, collectively as well as individually, in subjective ways. The experiences that the teachers share therefore are varied, subjective, and deeply ingrained in their personal and school structures. Whilst there are many similarities between the experiences of teachers about the role of power in interaction with parents, there are some noticeable differences between the experiences of both male and female teachers in both the urban and rural schools.

An analysis of the teachers' data reveals that for teachers in both the urban and rural schools, predominantly due to a number of parental factors, the perception of power relations with parents involve seeing them as submissive and deferring to teachers' authority. The data also reveal that for some female teachers, both in the urban and rural schools, the issue of squabbling and confrontation of uneducated mothers underpins the power dynamics of their interaction. However, for some male teachers power relations with some parents are rooted in power tussles and tensions, which exemplifies the role that people with political roots or other perceived power bases make use of in the interaction with teachers. Related to this theme is the issue of social positioning of teachers and school and the related social class and status symbols that for some teachers invoke a feeling of powerlessness. Moreover, the experiences of some teachers involve balancing out or dealing with parents who are unruly, aggressive, and threatening. Some teachers share their concerns about their experiences of grappling with the handling of dominant parents and parents who disregard teachers' authority. However, most teachers perceive themselves more powerful and dominant, with most parents submitting to their authority, whilst invoking the culturally situated demeanours of respect for teachers.

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### 6.1.1 Uneducated parents are ‘submissive’ and ‘deferent’

Most teachers in the interviews and discussions in both the boys and girls schools were unanimous in their views that, given their experience of interaction with parents, the uneducated parents mostly did not see themselves equal in power with teachers and were usually submissive and deferent to the teachers’ authority:

The uneducated parents consider themselves a bit awkward and admit, through their actions and expressions, that they do not know much [about the activities in school]. However, educated parents operate on a level of equality. (Teacher UGS)

The reasons for such an imbalance in power relations were many. For teachers, the difference in the levels of education with parents was one of the primary reasons for the perceived difference in uneven power distribution. This difference in the power relations could be interpreted as the difference in the amount and appropriation of cultural capital for parents to interact with teachers in unfamiliar and uncharted field structures that operated on a different set of logic and practice compared to their usual social settings of home and work. More specifically, the ‘educated’ teachers held firm professional positions in the school structures and were equally confident in the game that was being played in the field. However, the ‘uneducated’ parents did not possess the right amount and quality of habitus required to make sense of the structure and function of school practices, to make their case and thereby interact with teachers on a level of equality. This difference in the levels of education and of habitus was the reason due to which many teachers seemed to argue that many parents relied on the teachers’ judgement and decision about their children’s education:

... There are also some mothers who come and say to us, ‘you alone know what is best for our daughters and you handle them accordingly.’ (Teacher RGS)

As might be evident from the above, many teachers experienced the imbalance in power relations by mentioning aspects of their mutual interaction that clearly portrayed a perspective of the parents that saw teachers not only as knowledgeable but also as having responsibility for their children’s upbringing and moral development. Others also echoed and shared these views:

Yes, there is some role of power dynamics between teachers and parents. It is somewhat tilted towards the teachers’ side. They [parents] behave in an apologetic [submissive] manner, because they have their children with us. (Teacher UBS)

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Understandably, the difference in education levels and the lack of parental habitus in not being conversant with the field dynamics of school had implications for parents' uneven power relations with teachers. However, the fact that the parents had their children with the teachers in school had an underlying cultural connotation that obliged parents to be submissive and respectful, as has been indicated in the quotation above. Whilst there were some differences in the way teachers experienced the issue of power relations with parents in the urban and rural schools, for some teachers who had experience of rural schools, most mothers were submissive and deferent to teacher authority:

... However, in rural backgrounds, mothers consider teachers as superior and submit to their authority in all matters of their children. When I was in another rural school sometime back, mothers there also considered teachers as superior. They would say that whatever you say is right and they [mothers] would follow. ... (Teacher RGS)

It is worth reiterating here that for most teachers interaction with parents was not a formalised and structured procedure. This was usually not seen as part of the school curriculum or an essential aspect of the school life. Rather, for most teachers, interaction with parents only involved a negligible portion of their commitment. It only happened with a minority of parents who, because of the school or through their own need, had to pay a visit to discuss the issues of their children. The parents were also said to come in more numbers during and around the examination period for issues around the failure of their children or their promotion to the next class. The resultant experiences of such interaction formed the basis for the perception of teachers about the nature of power relations they experienced with parents.

Given this backdrop and the experiences of the teachers with parents in terms of the difference in the levels of education, cultural capital and the habitus that led to the perception and use of differential power structures between teachers and parents, it was not surprising that most teachers saw the majority of parents as submissive and deferring to their authority. However, some other teachers in both the girls' and boys' schools shared other perspectives that shed light on the differences between the nature of power relations between some mothers and some teachers who visited girls' schools and fathers or guardians who visited boys' schools. These teachers saw some parents as 'squabbling' and 'confrontational' and a source of a 'power tussle' and 'tension.' I discuss these perceptions in the sections that follow.

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### 6.1.2 Uneducated parents: ‘squabble’ and ‘confrontational’

Unlike the discussion in the previous section in which the majority of the teachers saw most parents as submissive and deferring to their authority, the evidence gleaned from the teachers’ data revealed that not all teachers had the same type of experience of power relations with parents. There were differences in the way some female teachers experienced and spoke about their interaction with some mothers in school. This was more so in the UGS than in the RGS. These teachers perceived uneducated mothers as confrontational and arrogant when they visited the school for various reasons. Many of the female teachers interviewed also shared the view that uneducated mothers squabbled about minor issues. The reasons these teachers gave for such a behaviour of mothers was that the family and social life of such mothers already relied much on squabbling and confrontation and therefore listening to reason and proper argument was not their norm. In other words, the structure of the habitus of such mothers was preconditioned or predisposed to compensate themselves for the imbalance in power by adopting a confrontational stance. Moreover, teachers were also of the view that the mothers’ attitude may have been because of factors like the lack of proper awareness about school processes, less patience, an inability to see other people’s opinions and perspectives objectively, and to gloss-over the apparent lack of understanding and knowledge of the educational issues of their children at home and school:

They [mothers] attempt to subdue us through their talks and actions. ... The majority of the illiterate parents become confrontational on very petty issues whereas [mostly] educated parents would try to understand a situation. The uneducated parents mostly want to impose their point of view on us, probably because in order to compensate for their lack of education they do not want to see themselves as a weaker lot. ... [They think that] if we are not pressed, then we would pressurise them. (Teacher UGS)

Whilst clearly there would have been a number of other factors that would have led to and structured the practices that led some teachers to portray or depict mothers in such ways, there is some indication here that these consequences of interaction were also because of a sense of lack of trust and understanding between the teachers and mothers. Given their work patterns and the structuring forces of the institutional habitus, teachers expected that mothers should have the necessary knowledge and understanding of the underlying processes involved in matters of their children and the manners for interaction with teachers. Conversely, for such mothers the perceived

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dominant stance of the female teachers and the mothers' own unique habitus made them take a stance that they thought was justified and hence they expected the teachers to take-up and deal with their issues as they desired. This lack of understanding of each other's point of view therefore led to trust problems between the female teachers and mothers, which resulted in power-struggles that led to confrontation and squabbling.

Given the perspectives and experiences of teachers, a general pattern emerged from the data that suggests that most teachers described and generalised parents collectively, and viewed them as uneducated, deferring to the teachers' authority and having little interest in their children's education. However, the data also suggests that it was the respective teachers' habitus and the role that the institutional habitus played in structuring their practices and related behaviour patterns that led to the portrayal of parents in a specific manner, which some teachers portrayed and experienced as the confrontational stance of parents. One teacher in the UGS shared the following perspective about the way interaction and related power issues with uneducated parents unfolded:

Very few parents are educated. They only come to squabble about their daughter's failure, and they argue that why have we failed their daughter [in examinations]. They do not ask the reasons which would have led to their daughter's failure. Neither are they interested in paying visits during the [academic] year to enquire about their daughters' progress or problems. The [examination] result cards [though meant for their parents] are usually signed by students themselves to avoid punishment by their parents. Parents usually argue that they have not been informed about the academic weakness of their daughters and that the teaching quality at the school is not good. (Teacher UGS)

Clearly there is also some indication here of a perceived lack of trust and understanding in the relationship with parents and the parental stance is portrayed as confrontational and argumentative. To understand this, there is a need to consider the structure and the context in which these practices occur and the underlying structure of the habitus of teachers that gives way to such a depiction of their relation with mothers.

As I discussed in the beginning first two sections of Chapter Five, much of what most teachers talked about their interaction with parents centred on the various structural and functional constraints in the school that they said did not let them to have effective communication with parents. Moreover, the interviews of and discussions

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with the teachers revealed that many teachers communicated with parents only when a meeting with parents was inevitable and in situations that involved some conduct or academic problems of pupils. However, the fact that in the absence of institutionally determined formalised procedures for contacting parents, a majority of the teachers reported and faced various gaps in their communication with parents. Accordingly, this structured teachers' interaction with parents, their narrative of parental demeanours, the context of parental visits, and the underlying power implications of such interaction.

For many teachers, therefore, the examination period was the peak of their interaction with parents, which for some teachers entailed heated discussions, and the confrontational tone of mothers that underpinned their daughters' failure or other exam related issue, as has been pointed out in the quotation above. Most teachers argued that by showing their interest more in the examination results, parents were not interested in the education of their children; rather they wanted their children to move up to higher grades. For the teachers, the parental tendency to place less emphasis on the process (i.e. enquiring about school progress and problems encountered by their children during the academic year) and more on the product (i.e. examination results) was an indication that they valued education less than the acquisition of certificates and degrees. However, unlike the female teachers' experience and portrayal of mothers as confrontational and squabbling, for some male teachers in the RBS the issue of power dynamics with some parents involved power tension that the teachers said left them with a feeling of being inferior.

### **6.1.3 Parents as a source of 'power tussle' and 'tension'**

The findings suggest that for most teachers, in the structure of society the public school system lay was positioned at the lower rungs of the educational ladder, which seemed to have shaped and structured the habitus of the social agents towards public schools according to their respective space and position in society. These respective field positions of the people determined the nature of power the different agents could use and, in some cases, exploit when they interacted with teachers in school. In other words, for most teachers, most of the people or parents they interacted with considered themselves submissive, considering their status and position and due to the cultural desirability of respecting teachers. However, male teachers were also of the view that those parents or people who had some political connections and were

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relatively well off were more likely to cause ‘trouble,’ considered teachers inferior and would use their status and position to influence teachers to their advantage. The use of position and status therefore had deep underlying social and cultural connotations, which, when used in an undue way, led to unpleasant experiences for some teachers:

Certainly, quite a few parents would be a source of a power tussle and tension for teachers. Some of such people would be *Nazims* (local council administrator) while others would have political roots, to assert their authority. When they come to school, the way they approach and talk to us and the language they use all means that they consider us inferior. Such approaches are unbecoming of interactions in an educational atmosphere. ... They say that the school belongs to them; the area belongs to them: whether students learn or not, it is their right to come to school. ... We try to make them understand that it is all for the benefit of students, what we do in school. But all our efforts fall on deaf ears—no change in their attitude and behaviour. (Teacher RBS)

It is worth reiterating that for most teachers such experiences were not a common occurrence. However, these occasional experiences of power relations with some parents/people supported the class-based situated position of public schools and teachers. The above statement is an example of the use of power play between the teacher and parents and other people who visited the RBS. However, there were different layers of power dynamics between parents and teachers, which not only depended on the differences between the urban and rural contexts but also on situation-to-situation. Hence, many teachers were of the view that the nature of power relations between teachers and parents moved between subtle influences to more blunt and aggressive approaches especially in the rural areas. However, most teachers were of the view that only a few parents had extreme views or volatile temperaments. This is in line with the findings of Ranson *et al.* (2004) in their study of communication dynamics of ‘storming’ or ‘unruly parents’ in secondary schools. However, whilst Ranson *et al.* (2004) have identified a number of expressions of ‘storming’ parents given the context and culture they studied, the experiences of teachers in my study of ‘unruly’ and ‘threatening’ parents were grounded socially and culturally within their respective habitus and field influence, which I discuss below.

#### **6.1.4 ‘Unruly’ and ‘threatening’ parents**

In addition to the various forms of power dynamics that the teachers explained underpinned their relations with parents, which led to the feeling of unease and

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powerlessness for some teachers in the schools, some teachers in both the boys and girls schools spoke about unruly parents and those that threatened the teachers. One teacher in the RGS expressed the following views about her experiences with mothers who were unruly and threatening:

Some mothers are such who are very arrogant and misbehave with us. They go to such lengths in saying that ‘you come here just for pleasure and sit in school doing nothing’ or threaten us that ‘I would go and transfer you to some other place [*school*].’ (Teacher RGS)

As I discussed elsewhere in this chapter, for most teachers it was very rare that they faced a situation in which parents had an arrogant stance or downplayed the teachers’ authority. According to some teachers, at the core of such acrimony of parents with teachers was the fact that a teacher might have punished a student, which would have led to misunderstanding and confrontation with teachers. In many cases, however, it would have been the parents themselves, who because of their confrontational stance, wanted to create a situation which they could then exploit and fulfil their desired objectives, such as the promotion of their children to next class etc. In order to counter such incidents, the school head was better placed and had the responsibility, to tackle, intercept, and deal with such ‘storming parents’ (Ranson *et al.* 2004).

Compared to the boys’ schools, the girls’ schools had clearly specified protocols even for mothers for whom the classrooms would usually be out-of-bounds. The institutional habitus in the girls’ schools therefore underpinned strong social and cultural notions. These notions were not only physically visible and felt in terms of the barriers and gates that acted to filter out problems and concerns at the very entrance of the school, but also once inside, there were invisible barriers and boundaries that needed to be respected and understood and therefore not to be crossed. The reasons for such checks and balances and the restrictions were because of the cultural sensitivities around the responsibilities of managing girls and ensuring their honour and well-being.



**Photo 6.1 A view of the entrance gate to RGS**

Therefore, whilst a visit of and access to the inside of the school and classrooms by a male person was mostly highly unlikely, except in cases when some officials visited the school or in case of some repairs and maintenance, there was some leeway in terms of giving access to mothers to classrooms in some situations. Many teachers therefore were of the view that since many mothers visited only when their daughters failed the examination, it was then that the tensions would flare up and mothers would tend to become unruly and arrogant.

However, in case of the boys' schools, for many teachers the issue of 'unruly' or 'storming' parents (Ranson *et al.* 2004) was one that in some cases went to such extremes as resolving matters with the barrel of the gun:

There are some parents, who have threatening behaviours and threaten us of transfers to other schools, through their connections with high-ups such as

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ministers. I have also seen that parents have brought guns and pistols to threaten teachers of extreme consequences, when their children were meted out with corporal punishments. This is all ignorance, and lack of education. Had it not been due to this, how can one think of bringing guns after one's child's teacher? (Teacher RBS)

Given the above excerpt, there is a need to explore and discuss the structure of the habitus of the agents involved that would lead to situations where parents adopted a threatening stance and became confrontational. Again, I would like to reiterate here that, for most teachers, parents did not pose any threat; in fact, most parents were seen as submissive, obedient, and deferent in their authority. However, since in the social space and practices, for many people generally the habitus construction was such that, rather than to discuss and reason to resolve their issues, getting physical at times was considered as the only option to settle disputes and matters with other people in society and sometimes with teachers in school. Given this background, for some parents, whose children would have been given punishment, the deterrence of the use of physical force would be the only language they could properly deploy in matters of such conflict. Whilst such incidents were said to be very rare, the fact that these incidents do happen and the way they happen illuminates the underlying structure of the habitus of the agents involved. Moreover, for such teachers, the very use of the perceived or possible threats of violence creates an imbalance in power relations skewed in favour of the 'storming parents.'

Similarly, for some teachers, parental arrogance and aggression was also due to their association with or belonging to a social class, which was more socially and politically connected, and they were relatively well off to challenge a teacher's authority and overpower them in different ways. This resulted in a parental sense of belonging to a higher-class social prestige over teachers, which the teachers said was particularly aimed to manipulate the situation to their advantage.

### **6.1.5 The role of 'social class,' 'status' and 'social positioning of teachers' and power relations**

As I discussed above (**Section 6.1.3**), at the heart of power dynamics between the teachers and parents was the issue of social class that was underpinned by the respective habituses of the agents, contextualised in the social space in their mutual practices. For most teachers, the social perception of social class regarded wealth and resources as an entity of social prestige and status. This in turn determined the social positioning of the agents, within their relative place and space in society that

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ultimately determined the kind and pattern of power relations perceived to be enacted in different social situations.

In other words, what the teachers viewed in terms of the imbalance in power relations was not the difference between the social and cultural capital with parents or other people who visited school, but the difference between the social class that relied much on ones wealth and related political leverage that they could appropriate in their interaction and communication. Considering such an imbalance in power relations and the perception of status and position of public schools and teachers, most teachers therefore viewed their profession and status as low in the eyes of society compared to other professions such as medicine, engineering etc. This situated subjective low-status symbols of teachers in the social gaze led some teachers to experience feelings of powerlessness when they interacted with people who considered themselves superior and dominant in their stance:

At that time, I feel that “why did I join the teaching profession. Now the teacher has become so weak [powerless] that people from outside [the community] would come and would say: ‘I will do this and I will do that’ [be threatening and insulting].” Personally, I had an unpleasant incident with a guardian, whose brother remained absent from school for around 10 days. When he [the student] came afterwards, I sent him back [home and told him] not to join the school until accompanied by his father or brother. When his brother visited me-who happened to be a doctor-he spoke with a lot of arrogance and was adamant on compelling me to let his brother join the school. I replied that, “I have not rusticated the child but just wanted to talk to you about the child in question.” He responded: “I am a very busy person and I cannot just come to school to bow in front of you.” (Teacher RBS)

As might be seen from this excerpt, the social thinking and the influence of home and community environment seemed so pervasive, conditioned, and structured, even for some educated people, that to think beyond one’s habitus and class status was a difficult matter. The teacher was clearly perturbed by the incident, which left strong memories of an encounter and communication that involved culturally situated power structures, which considered teachers and teaching as unequal and unimportant. On the one hand, the social space that the schools established had limited space for parental involvement and was typically shaped by deep codes that reinforced professional authority and parental deference (Ranson *et al.* 2004:272). However, on the other hand, the same social space had a different set of power undertones that were driven by status and class structures positioned in the habitus and field dynamics of the agents to overpower teachers’ professional boundaries. It may have been due to

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these power structures and the lack of awareness or acknowledgement on the part of some parents that a request for visiting and meeting teachers was considered as a waste of time.

#### **6.1.6 Power relations: ‘a teacher feels more dominant’**

Related to the theme that I discussed in the beginning of this section (**Section 6.1.1**), in which most teachers perceived and described most parents as submissive and deferring in their authority, was the theme of teachers’ feeling dominant in the structure of power relations with parents. It became evident from the data that most teachers usually saw themselves more dominant and confident when they interacted with parents. In this regard, there was consensus amongst most teachers in the boys’ and girls’ schools in both the urban and rural contexts. One teacher thus shared the following views:

Insofar as school issues and students’ information are concerned, psychologically a teacher feels more dominant, empowered and in control. He [teacher] can also interact with parents on equal footing, without being dominant in stance. Because parents are needy [concerning their child], they feel obliged and are submissive. (Teacher UBS)

Clearly, the field dynamics of schools had a different set of logic and practice compared to the structure and function of the home, which most teachers considered was the basis of unequal power relations with parents. In other words, parental habitus seemed to have lacked the necessary tools to negotiate and effectively appropriate the structure of school practices that pertained to the various aspects of their children’s education (see **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**). Moreover, as I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the social and cultural capital that the mostly working-class parents made use of in their interaction with teachers were probably not sufficient for the parents to comprehend the educational jargon and the field dynamics that underpinned the school life, which led to the perception of teachers’ feeling more confident and dominant. In addition to these factors and the social class dynamics of parents, (even if parental habitus was comparable with that of the teachers) the fact that the cultural desirability and acceptability of entrusting one’s responsibilities for children’s education to teachers meant that parents viewed teachers as more powerful and their stance as more obliging. It was probably due to some or all of these factors that led some teachers to say that parents treated them with respect:

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Most parents treat me with respect. Because I am their child's teacher, [culturally and religiously] a majority of the parents consider that appropriate to respect teachers. Only about 2% or 3% of parents would be bad in their behaviour and would be threatening [teachers] of reprisals. (Teacher RBS)

### **6.1.7 Handling dominant parents**

For most teachers, the accepted generalised pattern of interaction with parents underpinned an understanding that the public schools usually catered for the poor and working-class. However, some teachers expressed the view that there were some students from middle-class families, which was either because the parents wanted to educate their children as they themselves were educated in public schools or because they wanted to spread the cost of their children's education or due to some other related reasons. This meant that the middle-class parents did have some role in the nature of school relations with teachers, but that it was mainly obscured by the teachers' habitus that predominantly depicted a generalised notion of working-class parents as a homogenised entity of parents in public schools.

Discussions in some sections above indicate some patterns of teachers' experience of power relations with some dominant parents that mostly involved non-academic issues and matters. Yet, there was hardly any mention or hint of the patterns of power relations, that the research literature has documented, about teachers' experience of interaction and relations with middle-class parents involving academic or other related matters (e.g. Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Crozier & Reay 2005a; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a). Nevertheless, some teachers in the RGS did talk about some interaction of middle-class parents involving power relations with teachers and the principal that indicated the presence and appropriation of aspects of the notion of cultural capital and the use of habitus and field structures:

... once a mother of a student who seemed literate came with a complaint that her daughter's teacher had ticked as correct an incorrect piece of writing of her child and said to the principal that 'what kind of principal are you and what sort of teachers are working under you?' Then the concerned teacher was called to explain herself. The principal then explained, and actually the problem really is that as I have just said earlier that there are about 80 or 90 girls [in the class] and you give homework every day or every two days and you only have one free period. It is obvious that you cannot check these notebooks in just one period, either you will leave children [*on their own*], would teach them or would check their notebooks. And when it comes to English or Mathematics, then each and every spelling [*and detail*] has to be looked into carefully. Then such mothers are told that amongst 80 students, teachers are not at a fault here. ... If the mothers are wise and think rationally then they do not make a fuss of it otherwise, it becomes a contentious issue.

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But finally, the principal assures them that ‘ok it was the teacher’s mistake and in future she should be careful.’ (Teacher RGS)

Such instances of parental visits or enquiries were considered rare, as the description and experiences of most teachers mostly circumvented managerial and functional issues that involved conduct and disciplinary issues. Clearly, the teacher in the above excerpt tries to justify and balance out the imbalance in power relations by attributing the error or mistake to the teachers’ work patterns and the management of oversubscribed class sizes. However, there is another underlying pattern to such experiences of power with some parents in this school. This was because for most teachers the principal had an important role in enhancing the learning experiences of students and in some ways creating awareness among the parents, which led to relatively increased parental interest in the school compared to the parents of other schools.

As I have discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter and in Chapter Five, by comparison with all the other schools, most teachers of the RGS were of the view their principal managed the school with dedication. There was some evidence towards this as according to the teachers the way the principal had organised the school activities relating to both students and teachers, and the troubles the principal took to arrange the various resources and fulfil the shortfall of teachers for the school through a bureaucratic system made a difference to the quality of school life. It was probably because of this that many teachers said that most parents did not want the principal to be transferred from the school. It seemed that it was due to these measures and the efforts of both the principal and the teachers, which encouraged some mothers to question and demand an explanation for matters relating to the academic aspects of their daughters.

#### **6.1.8 The ‘hysteresis effect’ of parental habitus**

The above theme discussed middle-class mothers’ interaction with teachers and principal that involved balancing of power relations between the stakeholders. However, one other pattern of power play emerged from the teachers’ data, which involved incompatibilities and friction between teachers and parents, underpinned by the feeling of field encroachment for teachers in school. This appeared perplexing and interesting, in addition to being submissive and deferent to teachers in most matters of their children’s education, the same (working-class/uneducated) parents were

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described by teachers as indifferent to teachers' authority by exhibiting practices and behaviours that defied the structural dynamics of the school. This indicated that for some teachers, because of the gaps or differences in the levels of habitus, parental practices in school were felt and experienced as out of step or displayed a 'structural lag.' Bourdieu (1990b:59) calls this "hysteresis of habitus," which is "the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions" of agents, which some parents could not appropriate, because of the field differences and the associated differences in the quality of habitus. For one teacher the "*hysteresis effect*" (Bourdieu 1977:78) of parental habitus seemed to underpin the structured or conditioned role of the habitus and field in parental practices or interaction:

When I was in another school in another village, mothers there did not bother to go through official or formal procedure of seeing or taking their daughters from school. They would go straight to their daughter's class and would take them. They would totally ignore my authority and did not bother to give details as to where and why they are taking their daughter. I as a head-teacher then intervened and changed their habits, and trained all the people to follow the required procedures and formalities in such instances. It was hard for them to do away with their old habits, but I was successful in changing their behaviours. Mothers there were so indifferent in their behaviour that they would not greet us when we [teachers] would be sitting in the courtyard of the school. (Teacher RGS)

It seems clear from the above excerpt that mothers in their practices in the school replicated their habitus that mirrored the structures and practices of their home and community field dynamics. Hence, the teacher experienced that there was no harmony between the mothers' habitus and the field structures of the school (Reed-Danahay 2005:130), as the school operated on a different set of logic and practice that required appreciation of and adherence to the rules and practices of the institutional habitus. Bourdieu explains this more succinctly:

The presence of the past in [the] false anticipation of the future performed by the habitus is, paradoxically, most clearly seen when the sense of the probable future is belied and when dispositions ill-adjusted to the objective chances because of a hysteresis effect ... are negatively sanctioned because the environment they actually encounter is too different from the one to which they are objectively adjusted. (Bourdieu 1990b:62)

Since the 'dispositions' of the mothers were 'out of phase' and their practices 'objectively ill-adapted to the present conditions' (Bourdieu 1990b:62) of the field dynamics of school, the practices of mothers were seen and described as a challenge to teacher 'authority,' which required intervention for changing or adapting parental

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habitus according to the structures and practices of the school. This shows that the perception and experience of power relations with parents was far from simple. Rather the perception of interaction with parents in school was a diverse and complex process that had different meanings for different teachers, which signified the role of habitus and field in structuring teachers' perceptions and practices.

### **6.1.9 Section summary**

This section considered perceptions of power relations of teachers with parents. It would appear from the discussion above that, most teachers were unanimous in considering that most (working-class and uneducated) parents did not see themselves equal in power with teachers and school and were usually submissive and deferent to teacher authority. For many teachers the difference in the level of education of teachers with parents was one of the primary reasons for the perceived difference in uneven power relations of parents. This suggests that the resultant difference in the quality of habitus between the teachers and parents implied that a majority of the parents relied on the teacher judgement and decision about their children's education. In addition, most parents were said to be submissive and deferent because of the cultural connotation of the teacher being their children's teacher due to which parents were said to be submissive and respectful.

However, some female teachers shared another dimension of power relations with some uneducated mothers in which they described mothers as squabbling and confrontational, and arrogant on some minor issues or on the failure of their daughters in examinations. For these teachers, such an approach of these mothers was because they themselves came from such a home background where it was common to get confrontational on trivial issues. However, in case of the male teachers, some described and had experienced that some parents and other people were a source of power tussle and tension in school. This meant that people who had political connections and were relatively well off were more likely to cause trouble, considered teachers inferior and would use their status and position to influence teachers to their advantage. In addition, for some teachers some parents were unruly and threatening. Many female teachers were of the view that as some mothers visited school only when their daughters failed examinations, it was then that such mothers would tend to become unruly and arrogant. However, the experience that some male teachers shared suggested that some parents would be such that they would resort to getting physical

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with teachers, but only in very rare cases. However, for some teachers parental arrogance and aggression was also due to their social class and their social, cultural and political connections, due to which some parents challenged teacher authority. The social positioning of teachers also led some teachers to share their experiences of how some parents could use their social class and status to belittle the teacher status and considered them inferior in terms of power relations.

However, generally teachers felt more dominant and confident because a majority of the parents were uneducated and the cultural desirability of the respects for the teacher. What this also meant is that the field dynamics of the school had a different set of logic and practice compared to the structure and function of the home due to which most parents experienced unequal power relations with teachers. Therefore, the social and cultural capital that the mostly working-class parents made use of in their interaction with teachers was probably not sufficient for the parents to comprehend the educational jargon and the field dynamics of school life that led to the perception of teachers feeling more confident and dominant in their power relations.

In addition, the cultural desirability of entrusting one's responsibilities of children's education to teachers meant that parents viewed teachers more powerful and their stances as obliging. In terms of power relations, there was also some evidence of handling dominant parents that seemed to have a middle-class background. In this regard, there was some evidence in the RGS that suggested that the institutional habitus created and developed by the principal seemed to have encouraged some (middle-class) mothers to question and demand an explanation for matters relating to the academic aspects of their daughters.

## **6.2 Perceptions of parental involvement**

This section explores teachers' perceptions of parental involvement and visits to school. Whilst the teachers differed in many ways in their experiences of parental interaction in school, the data reveals that for most teachers the concept of parental involvement or interaction was either not significant or at most centred around conduct, attendance, or failure issues of students. Clearly, the teachers' habitus and the field influence of the respective schools were important in structuring teachers' dispositions and experiences of parental involvement or un-involvement in the school. In this sense, most teachers appeared unanimous that parental involvement was not a

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structured component of the school activities. However, despite the unanimity of views and experiences, many teachers had differing perspectives about parental involvement or participation in the school, which throws some light on the respective role of teachers' habitus and the structuring role of the field influence of the school in teachers' practices.

### **6.2.1 No parental involvement: 'parents have never been invited to co-curricular activities'**

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the school and home clearly had a different logic of practice and operated on different continuums. It was the habitus of teachers and the corresponding field dynamics of schools that led most teachers to argue that their pedagogic practices were embedded in the constraints they faced and in the structural and functional limitations of the schools. The perception of parental involvement in the school activities of children therefore was improbable for many teachers:

No, parents have never been invited to co-curricular activities. We used to have a programme for the students with the name of *Bazm-e-Adab* [literary association or co-curricular activities], some three years back, in our last period at the school. This programme used to include some interesting activities [such as debates, dramas, poetry competition etc.,] which used to fully engage the students. But as this programme would be conducted at the end of all periods, sometimes when it would not be held, teachers would look for excuses to go early to their homes and therefore it was stopped by the principal. (Teacher RBS)

Whilst all the schools did have some forms of co-curricular activities organised for the students, which relied much on the interest of the principal and the teachers concerned, the perception of parental involvement or participation in such activities did not form a structured component of the school programme. In this sense, many teachers were critical of the role of parents in that they mostly saw parents as uninterested and least concerned about the education of their children. This was problematic, since it was the schools and teachers that felt constrained by the question of involving or inviting parents, both structurally and functionally. Most teachers therefore homogenised and portrayed parents as 'hard to reach' (Crozier & Davies 2007).

As might be evident from the excerpt above, parental participation did not feature in the institutional habitus of all the schools. The structure of practices of most teachers were preconditioned to some specific practices in which accommodating parental

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involvement required extension of structures and practices that rested on extending or adapting teachers' habitus and the related field structures of the schools. Therefore, the overall field influence of school had set for teachers a collective tone for the way they perceived parents, their social class, status and habitus. The fact that there were clearly some physical and functional constraints in schools, determined much of what and how the teachers thought about parents and their involvement patterns in school. This was made more complicated by the teacher habitus as for most of them parental involvement in school, although was a positive activity, working towards engaging and communicating with parents was not considered possible because of the various constraints the teachers said they faced in school. Therefore, the majority of them implicitly considered parental involvement beyond their purview.

### **6.2.2 Parental involvement in school: 'where there is a will there is a way'**

As I briefly introduced at the start of this section, some teachers shared differing views and experiences of parental involvement and participation in school. Defying all the odds, and working against the seemingly hostile forces of the field structures and practices, the individual and solitary experiences regarding some teachers' initiatives of parental involvement provides a surprising perspective and alternative to the already established notions of teachers' practices through which they visualised, experienced, and justified their experiences of parental un-involvement in the school. One teacher in the UBS in the FGD shared this aspect of personal initiative and reflection:

When I came to [join] this school, I initiated *Bazm-e-Adab* which used to include debates, *naat khwani*, skits, and dramas. All these [activities] used to be performed by students grade-wise. Parents, even councillors and members of other public offices used to attend these activities. We used to hold big gatherings. By participating in these programmes, parents used to have communication with the school. Then, a principal came [got transferred to this school] who being an old person, was very touchy. He was very critical of those [co-curricular] activities and said that these should be stopped because these fun and games are unbecoming with [us as] a school. He completely stopped all those activities while he was here (for 2½ years).  
(Teacher, FGD, UBS)

All the other teachers listening to the teacher in the discussion were expressing their approval of the teacher's experience and were testifying to what the teacher said. This personal initiative of the teacher clearly spelt out not only instituting a system and a programme of student activities that the teacher claimed proved successful in the

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seemingly difficult physical and functional constraints of the public schools, but also there was evidence of parental involvement and engagement in these activities in the school. Furthermore, to arrange such activities, the teacher would have invested considerable time and effort and as a result would have involved other teachers and a considerable number of students to plan, organise, and execute the various stages of mostly student-led programmes. These experiences and activities were on the one hand a source of change and adaptation of habitus for all those involved that included teachers, students and their parents. However, on the other hand, the teacher's description of the principal as 'old' and 'touchy' suggests that the principal, being resistant to change, had an inflexible habitus. This suggests that the principal may have seen the teacher-initiated student-led activities as a challenge to his authority and power. This therefore resulted in the stoppage of those student activities. For many teachers, this was true in the case of many 'old' principals who, they argued, were promoted to the principal's post after their modest start as untrained teachers in times when the teaching profession was mostly selected not as a 'choice' but rather by compulsion and 'chance.' Furthermore, my own experience of the field was that, compared to the more mature and 'traditional' teachers (as some teachers put it), most middle-aged and young teacher participants had more ideas, knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding parental involvement and interaction in school.

### **6.2.3 Benefits of parent involvement in school**

In extending the above argument and following on discussion, initiating co-curricular activities, and involving students and parents in school life, produced an array of practices that some teachers in the FGD at the UBS argued culminated positively, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, in the school. In qualitative terms, according to the teachers, these activities not only resulted in improved performance and quality of education for the students, but the students were also instrumental in inviting their fathers to the school. In quantitative terms, the parents by their involvement and engagement with the school, according to their capacities and skills, helped to provide various provisions and services in the school. This suggests that one teacher's initiated practices not only proved beneficial but also resulted in the change of habitus of all those involved:

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We used to have one contact with parents in the *Bazm-e-Adab* activities organised at three monthly, six monthly or at yearly intervals. Once, a member of a trade union had commented in our [school] hall “when I used to pass by this school, a lot of noise [of students] used to come from the classrooms. But now when I pass by, I do not hear any noise. So my assessment is that the standard of education here has improved.” Parental visits had another added advantage; their [fathers’] contact with school was a source of [generating] donations for the school. Due to these programmes, I remember that, one water cooler was installed, six ceiling fans were provided, a father painted the front entrance to the school and some people made banners. The students used to use their initiatives and we had made a [money] fund for this [such activities]. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

... the students used to tell their fathers to visit school that we have a such-and-such programme in school and you should come to participate. (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

As has been argued above, the institutional habitus resulted in instigating activities and practices that proved beneficial for both students and parents in many ways. The teachers demonstrated that the school transformed into a hub of activities for students, which led to the reduction in behaviour problems of students and an increase in education standards. This also establishes that parents, when properly and formally involved, can have a major role in resolving the various problems in the school. Moreover, this particular example counters or negates the homogenised notion of parents in which most teachers saw most parents as uninterested in the affairs of their children. Because of the participation of parents in the school, not only their knowledge of the school would have increased, but also the underlying structures of their habituses would have been shaped positively. However, as discussed in the previous section, the surprising thing here is that, instead of encouraging and supporting the activities at school that were both productive and participative for the students, teachers and parents, the principal’s role was described as highly critical and bureaucratic, which underpinned the traditional form of principalship.

#### **6.2.4 ‘Layers of influence’ of parents**

One of the themes that emerged from the teachers’ data about parental involvement or interaction with the school pertained to the way some teachers described it as having ‘layers of influence’ (Crozier 2000:49). However, most of this layered influence of parental engagement was rooted in and operating from the home rather than in school. For most teachers, such influence of parents was more complex for girls than for boys, as the culture and logic that underpinned parental habitus mapped more closely the sensitivities of issues around girls and their participation in various programmes in

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school. Accordingly, teachers had adjusted their habitus and practices that reflected the culture and practices of parents and their home and community contexts.

For most teachers in all the schools, though they did see and appreciate some parental role in the education of their children, the structure of their habitus and the field influence of the school had conditioned their responses in a way that they mostly contextualised parental influence only in the context of school interest, interaction, and participation:

They [*parents*] don't come. They altogether don't ask about such activities or take any interest therein. ... Parents [*usually fathers*] don't allow their daughters to participate in various activities such as games or activities organised by the Red Crescent. Parents don't allow their daughters ... (Teacher RGS)

Whilst most teachers widely agreed that parents had a diminished and deferent role in the affairs of their children's education, they mostly presented a homogenised image of parents in various issues and aspects of their children's education. This was problematic since, given that most teachers saw most parents as poor, working-class, less educated, and hence depicted them as less interested; the very act of sending their children to school could be interpreted as involvement, albeit indirectly through their children. Moreover, given the structure of their habitus and the field influence of both the community and school structures, parental habitus was influenced more by the prevailing structures of practices that had a dominant cultural influence, which had conditioned and constrained the forms or 'layers of parental influence' (Crozier 2000) as a home based phenomenon (see **Chapters Seven and Eight**). In other words, whilst most parents were not seen as directly involved in the affairs of their children's education, their involvement patterns had a dominant layered cultural influence that was deeply positioned in the home context rather than more actively engaging with the school. Some teachers were therefore better able to go beneath these structures and analyse the more intricate issues surrounding parental influence:

Parents do have a role in co-curricular activities of their children in the sense that they authorise their children's participation in these activities. It is an important issue, especially when it comes to participation of girls in various activities, which is an issue in our culture. Few girl students get permission from their homes for participation in the games or other related activities. Many parents may not be aware of the importance of participation of their daughters in such activities. However, I have seen here in this school that many students get permission from their parents. ... (Teacher RGS)

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As I briefly introduced in the beginning of this section and as has been highlighted in the above excerpt, parental influence was more dominant, intricate and complex for the girls as much of the practices of girls at home and at school were deeply ingrained in the cultural sensitivities that revolved around issues of honour and pride. Therefore, most female teachers were of the view that the resultant web of parental influence was more constraining for girls for their participation in various activities that would require them to go beyond their school premises. Most teachers also were of the view that parental influence in monitoring the day-to-day aspects of most girls was stricter compared to what it was in practice for boys. Therefore, as female teachers were well acquainted with the underlying structures of parental habitus and the issues and sensitivities that involved girl students, most female teachers had a more thorough approach and an understanding of the issues around parental approval and permission regarding their daughters' participation in games or some other related activities. Since the female teachers were equally aware of the intricacies of the social and cultural game that was being played outside the school in the various contexts, most of them would also make sure of the privacy and safety of their girl students in and outside the school. The following field note will help clarify this point further:

A senior teacher in the UGS shared an experience of a parent's influence in an issue that involved the participation of his daughter in a competition involving a mixed gathering of girls and boys schools and other concerned officials both male and female. The father of the girl, who was working in a university library, learning that his daughter was participating in an event where her voice was to be heard by other people (especially males), declined to give permission to his daughter and exchanged unpleasant words with the principal over the telephone on the matter. The senior teacher in charge of preparing the students for this event repeatedly had to convince and plead to the father for permission. After repeated requests, the parent gave permission to his daughter for participation in the event. However, the teacher further explained that, when the girl in question came first in the competition and brought a trophy home, the father's attitude changed dramatically and he was all in praise for his daughter. (Field notes 11/10/06)

This establishes on the one hand, the culturally dominant layered influence upon parental habitus that even for educated parents was difficult to change. On the other hand, it also establishes that the concern of the school and teachers in devoting time and effort for communicating with the parent resulted in positively moulding or changing the habitus of the parent.

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### 6.2.5 Section summary

In summary, parental involvement or engagement with the school appeared to have different meanings, evoked different experiences and had different implications for different teachers. The findings appear to suggest that the field dynamics of the schools underpinned by the teachers' habitus governed much of the pedagogic practices of the teachers that led most teachers to cite their school constraints as limiting them from involving parents in school. In other words, the structure of practices of most teachers were preconditioned to some specific practices in which accommodating parents and ensuring their involvement required extensions of structures and practices that rested on extending or adapting teachers' habitus and the related field structures of the schools. However, there were exceptions to such a general trend. Some teachers, claimed to have used their personal initiative to organise and conduct co-curricular activities for students through which parents' involvement and engagement in school was also ensured. My own experience of the fieldwork suggests that compared to the more mature or 'traditional' teachers, the majority of the middle aged and young teacher participants seemed to have more ideas, knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding parental participation and interaction in school. Through their experience, some teachers explained the benefits accrued to school whilst parents participated in co-curricular activities of students. They argued that the benefits to school were qualitative and quantitative. In qualitative terms, parental involvement appeared to influence a reduction in behaviour problems of students and an increase in their academic achievement. In quantitative terms, through donations and parental help and services, a number of physical improvements were made to school.

However, a number of female teachers shared that there was a strong cultural aspect of parental involvement that appeared to have layers of influence especially for girl students. These layers of parental influence were not so much in school, rather operated distantly from home. For most female teachers, such influence of the parents were more complex for the girls than for boys, as the culture and logic that underpinned parental habitus mapped more closely the sensitivities and issues around girls and their participation in various programmes in school or related venues outside school. In other words, whilst most parents were not seen as directly involved in their children's education, their involvement patterns had a dominant layered cultural

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influence that were deeply positioned in the home context rather than more actively engaging with the school. Concerning the sensitivities of issues around girl students, most female teachers had a more thorough approach and an understanding of the issues and concerns around parental approval and permission of their daughters' participation in co-curricular activities, which the teachers also directed towards a cultural understanding of privacy and safety of girls implicitly directed towards issues of honour and dignity.

### **6.3 Perceptions of barriers to parental involvement/visits**

Having considered the discussion in the above sections, one would expect that teachers would be unanimous in declaring the part that school and teachers generally play in not involving parents or acting as a barrier to their visits. However, surprisingly, the data reveals that most teachers apparently see no barriers to parental visits to school, except the parents themselves. Whilst there were some pertinent issues concerning the way parental habitus was organised around visits to their children's school (discussed fully in **Chapters Seven** and **Eight**), despite most teachers' insistence that there were no barriers to parental visits, many visible and invisible barriers seemed to have existed that appeared grounded in the teachers' habitus and field dynamics of the schools. However, many teachers did point out some issues and factors that seemed to contribute towards barriers to parents' visits to school. The issues identified as barriers concerned the structural and functional restrictions and limitations of the school, and issues concerning parents and their background. However, for many teachers the school culture was a major barrier to parental involvement, which indicates the important role that the field or institutional habitus plays in structuring teachers' thought and actions.

#### **6.3.1 No barriers: where is the missing link?**

One of the most common responses of most teachers to the question of barriers to parental visits was that they did not see any apparent barriers to the involvement or visits of parents to school. The general perception of most teachers was that since most parents were uneducated and belonged to a social class that gave low priority to education, their interest in visiting school and asking about their children's education and progress was therefore not a priority. Moreover, most teachers were also of the view that, because parents were preoccupied in earning their livelihood or were

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engaged in some similar tasks, they did not have the time to think about issues concerning their children's education in school. By implying that there were no barriers to parental visits to school, most teachers homogenised parents as if representing a single entity and most portrayed all parents as 'hard to reach' (Crozier & Davies 2007; Davies 1993) i.e. it was the parents who did not want to visit the school. Some teachers even went to such lengths in saying that:

... They [parents] would be very concerned about their livestock [goats and sheep]—about their well-being and their offspring etc.—but won't ask about their flower-like [innocent, tender] children... (Teacher, FGD, UBS)

This a powerful statement that seems to malign parents for their non-involvement in the matters of their children's education and exonerates the teachers and school for the responsibility they have in ensuring effective and productive communication with parents (as discussed in **Chapter Five, Sections 5.1 & 5.2**). However, most teachers were of the view that schools did not pose any barriers to parental visits:

There are no barriers [to parents] from the school side. They do not take interest in school visits. We want it that they come and hold discussion [with teachers]; [as a result] their children will improve [in education etc.]. (Teacher UGS)

Clearly, when most teachers were of the view that they contacted parents only (and very rarely) when 'their child was in trouble,' or had behaviour, conduct or 'academic problems' (Davies 1993:207), the issue of barriers to parental visits becomes more clear as in the structure and function of school parents were usually perceived as an outside entity. This demonstrates the importance of the role that the habitus and field plays in structuring and conditioning teachers' attitudes and practices that shaped their 'school view' of parental engagement with the school.

### **6.3.2 No barriers: 'it's the parents who don't come'**

In all the schools, all teachers were in favour of and showed their willingness and desire to parental involvement and visits to the school. However, the reality was that, apart from some very few school-initiated contacts with parents relating to conduct and other school related matters of children, there was literally no involvement of the parents in the schools. There were clearly issues in the schools, which most teachers argued required them to devote more time and energies to wrestle with, for example, overcrowded classrooms (of mostly working-class and poor students) and the need for the completion of the assigned course contents in the academic year. Yet, despite this,

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some teachers had demonstrated that they managed to initiate some activities in school that also ensured parental participation and helped the school in many other ways (see **Sections 6.2.2** and **6.2.3**). It meant that even though there were problems of various sorts in the school, when some teachers consciously made some effort, they managed to involve the perceived ‘uninvolved’ parents (Crozier 2000:80) in various school programmes. However, despite this, the general perception of most teachers was that parents were responsible for not visiting the school. Some teachers acceded to the role that some teachers played in acting as a barrier to parental visits, and in outlining what aspects or factors parents had the power to question or enquire if they visited the school:

There are no barriers from the school side. I would like them to visit school. There may be, there are a few teachers who may not want that parents visit school, but it does not mean that it is what the majority of teachers want. But if parents are interested and wish to visit [school], for example, they can check the notebooks of their children and ask questions about why a particular class has not been conducted for so many days and enquire about its reasons. Here months would pass by without some teachers attending the classes, but parents would not ask. Actually parents themselves don’t interact with their children, because of their lack of interest in the school. (Teacher RBS)

It was one thing that most teachers showed their enthusiasm and willingness to meet with parents, but actually engaging with them in school matters was a different thing, which in practice was not happening due to a number of factors, both in-school and that pertaining to parents. From the parents’ side, clearly, since most teachers described them as working-class and poor, naturally, there were issues of power and difference in the amount and quality of capital and habitus the parents possessed, which had implications for parents’ communication with the school (see **Chapter Eight**). However, from the teachers’ side, most teachers espoused a “deficit view” of parents that characterised “low-income families and their communities” as not valuing education highly, which meant that parents had “little to offer to the education of their children” (Davies 1993:208-209). This naturally had implications for the parents to consider the school structures as alien territories that had a logic and practice of its own, and probably because of this, most parents deferred to teachers’ authority and considered them as ‘*in loco parentis*’ (discussed fully in **Chapter Seven**).

Moreover, as has been indicated in the above excerpt, many teachers were also of the view that in public schools, a considerable number of teachers did not attend to their

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professional obligations properly (given the context and the school they were working in), which was seen as an instituted pattern that represented teachers of public schools in their ‘traditional’ roles. In their research on learning in public primary schools in Pakistan, Warwick and Reimers (1995) provide a vivid description of the underlying factors that structure the ‘traditional’ role of teachers in public schools. It implies that the field dynamics of the public schools had a particular culture that had a structured and structuring role over the teachers’ habitus and practices. This appeared so because many teachers did not share and discuss the hostile patterns of teacher interaction with parents that some research talks about in the context of Pakistan:

Teacher interaction with parents was minimal and hostile. In one case, poor parents said that they were invited to withdraw their children when they complained. Middle-class parents tended to receive more civil responses. (Khan 2003:369)

This resonates with the international literature. The pattern of interactions and relations of teachers vis-à-vis middle-class and working-class parents clearly vary along the social class fault lines and their underpinning related dynamics, which has different implications and experiences for the stakeholders (e.g. Crozier 1997, 2000; Lareau 1987, 1989; Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Reay 1998a, 1998b; Vincent 1996a).

### **6.3.3 ‘Time’ and ‘space’ as barriers**

Whilst most teachers were of the view that it was not the school but the parents who did not want to come to or engage with the school, because of their ‘deficit’ (Davies 1993), there were also many teachers who believed that some structural and functional issues of the school prevented parental involvement or engagement with the school. In the interviews and discussions, many teachers considered ‘time’ and ‘space’ as constraining factors to engage with or involve parents in school:

In my opinion, some of the issues about involving or engaging parents in the school are that we do not have any appropriate place [room] where we could sit with them and talk [on various issues concerning their child]. Secondly, we don’t have enough time [to meet with them]; [there is every likelihood that our daily] periods [classes] suffer. (Teacher UGS)

It might be evident from the above assertion that accommodating parents was more than a physical labour. Whilst the physical space was as an issue for accommodating parents in school, implicit in this constraint of the many teachers was the view that it required mental labouring to have to think about accommodating parents in school. In other words, by citing such constraints as obstacles or barriers to parental

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involvement, what the teachers implied was the difficulties of extending the already conditioned and established boundaries of their habitus, which were positioned strongly in the field structures of school.

Moreover, among the other constraints, for many teachers ‘time’ as a constraint in meeting parents was as an important factor within the schools, which was conditioned in such a way that accommodating parents was not generally seen as a viable option. A number of obstacles and barriers to parental involvement in schools have also been identified in the research literature, which were also echoed by many teachers in the interviews and discussions. These obstacles broadly include, “limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools” (Moles 1993:30-36). Other teachers also echoed some of these:

There are no such apparent barriers towards parental involvement in school. But from disciplinary aspects [school functionality], there are some barriers such as; firstly, teachers have not got extra time to give to parents and secondly, if all parents start coming to school then it would be difficult to cope with them. Our office and classrooms are all in one place, our school is not that spacious, and therefore when a father visits the school, he would call for his child to see him as well. So regarding this there are [potential] problems. A teacher cannot attend to 4 or 5 parents at a time and discuss with them their issues [concerning their children]. (Teacher UBS)

An almost identical argument identifying the constraints of ‘time’ and ‘space’ in meeting and greeting parents in school also runs through the above excerpt. This establishes an important point that I discussed above that stressed that the habitus and field influence has an important role in structuring teachers’ attitudes and practices. Since parental involvement or their visit to the school was not a structured or formal component of all the schools, the resultant perceptions and experiences of the teachers signified the constraints of the structures and practices in the schools, which they found difficult to extend beyond their normal routines. Clearly, given the number of students in the schools, the potential involvement of the parents was perceived as overburdening the workload of the teachers. However, this again indicates the role of habitus that had structured the teachers’ practices in ways that accommodating alternative or more open structures of practices were seen as fraught with problems.

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### 6.3.4 Culture of separation as a barrier

In extending some of the themes that I discussed in **Chapter Five (Section 5.3)** about the role of institutional habitus in the communication dynamics of teachers, some teachers highlighted the role that the school culture played in creating barriers to parental visits to the school. From the interview and FGD data of the teachers, it appeared that the school culture was an amalgam of factors. It was not only dominantly constructed and instituted through the role that teachers played in it, but also the socio-historical context of schools, as institutions and the students' social class and their conditioned role in it, formed an important part of the collective outlook that shaped and influenced the practices of all the stakeholders involved in it. The institutional habitus thus formed had a different set of logic and practice (from that of the home and community) that had an almost complete 'culture of separation' deeply entwined in the school culture, which was seen as producing 'suspicion' in both teachers and students for outside agents, such as parents. In this 'culture of separation,' students also blended in well, as their curiosity to find about the nature and purposes of parents' visits to school was described by some teachers as a deterrent for parental involvement in school:

If a girl's mother comes [to school], then it becomes a cause of concern for all students who become suspicious as to why the mother [of such and such girl] has come to school and is roaming around, and they [students] think that what possibly might have happened. It is also because of this reason that parents feel discouraged and do not want to come. They might think that, "what is the need for going after our daughters in school, let them continue their studies, [it does not matter] whether it [their education] is good or bad."  
(Teacher UGS)

This may have had some role in the way some, many or most students would have thought about the visits of parents and the implications of such visits that may have led to the students' gossiping, queries, apprehensions and in some cases taunting etc. The important point in the above excerpt is the indication or the presence of the culture of separation that was existing or prevailing in the field structures of the girls' schools, to which the students' habitus had accordingly been adapted, leading them to regard parents with 'concern' and 'suspicion.' Moreover, this also reveals the structured role of the habitus of the teachers that led them to describe the way practices were enacted in the school, which generally formed the institutional habitus. It was probably this enacted institutional habitus, and the underlying void in the

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structure of practices of relations with parents, which one teacher in the UGS articulated quite clearly in the following words:

Sometimes, some mothers would come and wander around in the school, not knowing where to go. For such mothers, there must be a person who could direct such parents to their respective areas or to teachers where they could be directed or told to wait for the respective teachers whom they want to meet with. There is also a lack of facilities as well [to support such functions in school]. People [students and teachers] become suspicious about a woman clad in a *chaddar* [burqa], who is wandering around in school, [and they think] what could be the reason behind this? There is a general perception that mothers are felt as being a disturbance to the normal functionality of the school and it is a collective thinking of all the people in school. Because we all feel, why has this woman come to school? A teacher on duty concerning maintaining discipline, or any other teacher or concerned person of school would ask “why such and such woman has come [to school]?” and the word would spread from mouth to mouth to all teachers and [among] students. (Teacher UGS)

The way the respondent has described the scenario, given its cultural underpinning, gives a vivid spatial representation of how mothers ‘wander’ in school. Due to cultural implications, visiting a girls’ school and a boys’ school are completely different experiences; the girls’ school in many ways is almost completely out of bounds for male visitors, compared to the relatively unhindered access to a boys’ school, thus raising questions of whether there are any structures at all for the boys’ schools. However, there were structures and mechanisms that were put in place, albeit differently in these schools i.e. of boys and girls, of meeting and greeting parents and resolving the problems of students, which involved the concerned teachers or the heads in the prevailing practices within the schools. Yet, all these practices depended heavily on the teachers, their contexts, and the institutional habitus of the schools, which determined the nature and quality of relations with parents. There is therefore a need to explore and illuminate a few important points in the context of the above quotation.

Firstly, since the structure and practices of the schools were different from the structure and practices of the home, most teachers, therefore saw incompatibilities in relations with parents that led the teachers to describe parents as intruders and as ‘a disturbance to the normal functionality’ of schools. Secondly, for most teachers, the incompatibilities in relations with parents were seen as a ‘general perception’ or as a ‘collective thinking’ that formed the institutional habitus or field dynamics of schools leading to the perception and understanding of the culture of separation, in which

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parents were seen as a ‘disturbance.’ Thirdly, all this meant that most teachers in the interviews and discussions felt, experienced and expressed a particular kind of void and gap that existed in the practices between them and the parents. Whilst most of them appeared eager to bridge the gap and to involve parents in school, they were constrained by a number of factors, some systemic and some perceived, that had not only conditioned their habitus, but also collectively shaped the field structure of schools.

### **6.3.5 It’s all about giving ‘importance’ to parents and ‘listening’ to them**

It became abundantly clear from the data that the interplay between institutional habitus and the habitus of teachers mostly espoused ‘autocratic’ structures in the schools that had varying shades and layers depending on the structure and contexts in which they operated, due to which it was less likely to maintain communication with parents (Hornby 2000; Oplatka 2004). Moreover, since most of the teachers demonstrated that parents’ visits to the school were an “exception” rather than a “rule” (Khan *et al.* 2005:208) that entailed some very pressing issues or problems of children, for many teachers the field structures of school and the practices within it therefore were not conducive to accommodating parents. Therefore, to negotiate these ‘autocratic’ school structures effectively, of those parents who visited school or operated indirectly or remotely, many of them had developed social networks with teachers or other personnel in school by using ‘credit slips’ (Coleman 1988:S102) as a form of social capital, to resolve the issues and concerns regarding their children. However, for many others who did not have ‘people’ or links within the school structures or who did not have enough power to assert their authority, the possibility of ‘listening’ to them (Atkin *et al.* 1988) and giving them importance was bleak:

May be—from the principal’s side or from teachers’ side—when parents ask about something they are not given much importance and are overlooked; one [teacher] would say [to a parent], go upstairs and some others would say go downstairs [for some matters related to their child]. The other day, I met an old man who was wandering around in school and wanted someone to guide him to the in-charge of admissions to hand in a certificate. He did not know the direction of the office to go to and I helped him by accompanying him to the said place. In the same manner, when you take care of parents, and they feel that teachers listen to them, then parents would come and visit school. But on the contrary, if one teacher says sit there and another teacher says sit somewhere else, and go there, a father would think “what sort of environment is this; what sort of teachers and school is this;” no one takes care in guiding and facilitating parents. And we [teachers] are like this; we are not helpful in

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providing proper guidance to fathers and are less understandable of their points of view. (Teacher UBS)

The way the teacher has described the interplay between the field structures and teachers' habitus that created an unwelcoming environment, in many different ways for the parents in school may be seen as one version of 'reality' that existed in practice. Yet, there are important points in this excerpt that most teachers shared both in the urban and rural schools. Firstly, for most teachers there was the element of class and status consciousness that operated very strongly both in the social structures outside the school and within the school domain. For instance, some of those parents who appeared middle-class from their dress and demeanour, and asserted their authority and social-connectedness, were more likely to be heard, given importance and their issues and concerns addressed promptly (see **Sections 6.1.3** and **6.1.5** for related discussion), compared to what it would have been for the parents from working-class or poor background. Secondly, at the micro-interactional level there is evidence to support the above assertion that the field dynamics of the school and teachers' habitus were not appropriately sensitised to incorporate those (working-class) parents who visited school as individuals and equal stakeholders in the process of education. Therefore, for such working-class parents the influence of the school 'environment' would result in unpleasant experiences, forming lasting impressions that act as a barrier or obstacle to their future visits (see **Chapter Eight, Sections 8.4.3** and **8.5.3**).

### **6.3.6 Section summary**

To recapitulate, for most teachers there were no apparent barriers to parental involvement or visits to school. Most of them were of the view that, since parents themselves were uneducated and had little interest in their children's education, they were least inclined to visit school. However, this appeared to suggest that most teachers homogenised parents as if representing a single entity and therefore portrayed them as 'hard to reach.' Moreover, as the majority of the teachers only and very rarely contacted parents when their child was in trouble or had behaviour, conduct or academic problems, it would appear that barriers to parental involvement were from within the school as in the structure and function of school, parents were usually perceived as an outside entity. However, the general perception of most teachers was that parents were responsible for not visiting school. Moreover, as most

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teachers espoused a ‘deficit view’ of the parents, this seemed to have implications for the parents to consider school structures as alien territories, that had a logic and practice of its own, which seemed to have created barriers for parental engagement with the school.

Alongside this, many teachers also believed that some structural and functional issues of the school prevented parental involvement and engagement with the school. The most mentioned of these were the time and space constraints that prevented engagement of the parents in school. Implicit in this constraint seemed to be the factor that it required mental labouring for the teachers to have to think about accommodating parents in school. By this, most teachers seemed to mean the difficulties of extending the already established and conditioned boundaries of their habitus that were strongly positioned in the field of school. Moreover, this also indicated the structured role of the teachers’ habitus and practices due to which accommodating alternative and more open structures of practices were seen as fraught with problems.

Some teachers, however, highlighted the more important issue of the ‘culture of separation’ as a barrier to parental involvement with the school or teachers. It would appear from the discussion that the culture of separation was dominantly constructed and instituted through the role that the teachers played in the school. Moreover, the socio-historical context of school and the students’ social class and their conditioned role in it, formed an important part of the collective outlook that shaped and influenced the practices of all the stakeholders involved in the school that created spaces of exclusions and separation for the parents. The feeling of separation between the school and home was also because of the huge disparities and incompatibilities between the structures of the habitus and practices of the teachers and parents in their respective spheres as well as with one another.

Consequently, some teachers argued that the autocratic structures that existed in school posed barriers to parental involvement in which parents felt less important and not being ‘listened’ to properly. The issue of giving importance to and listening to parents was compounded by at least two factors. For most teachers the class and status consciousness operated very strongly both within and outside the school structures, which according to some teachers posed barriers to parental visits. In addition, as a result, at the micro-interactional level, generally, the field dynamics of

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the schools and the teachers' habitus were not appropriately sensitised to incorporate working-class parents as individuals and equal partners, which, according to some teachers, resulted in unpleasant experiences for the parents who visited school and hence posed as barriers or obstacles to their future visits.

#### **6.4 Perceptions of the role of PTA**

Whilst the various educational policies and plans of Pakistan emphasise the importance of parents and their involvement in the education of children, it has been very recently that the Government of Pakistan made it mandatory for every school to have a PTA. Yet, most teachers questioned the functionality of the PTA in schools and described it only as a 'label.' Some teachers have thrown light on the structure of the PTA and the nature of responsibility it entails in school. Moreover, many teachers were of the view that the social and cultural aspects and related influences undermined the effectiveness of the PTA in public schools, which highlight the role that the habitus and field play in structuring practices of the agents. However, a careful analysis of the data revealed that the positions teachers hold in the field of school is one that underpins 'playing the game' (Bourdieu 1990a:63) by protecting one's stakes in a way that the projected 'reality' does not represent a clash between the interplay of the teachers' own habitus and the field structures of the school.

##### **6.4.1 The role of the PTA in school: policy provisions**

As I demonstrated in the discussion in the foregoing sections, in the structure and practices of the schools and teachers, parental involvement or visits to schools did not feature as a dominant or important aspect of the relations between teachers and parents. The major thrust of the teachers and schools was on the issues and concerns that most teachers saw as constraints of their work patterns in the school, which most of them claimed prevented them from engaging parents in the school or communicating with them at home. Moreover, for most teachers the responsibility of the non-involvement of parents in the school lay with the parents themselves, as most parents were perceived as uninterested and less involved in the school affairs of their children's education both at home and at school. In addition, most teachers described parents as less aware about their children's education and related issues because of their social class and working-class background and lack of education.

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There is a reason to believe here that many of the issues listed above indicate “the active presence of past experiences” (Bourdieu 1990b:54) and practices of both the teachers and parents that were “in accordance with the schemes engendered by history” (Bourdieu 1977:82). Hence, the practices of the teachers which as a “present past” tended “to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices” highlighted the importance of the role that the habitus and the field of school played in ensuring “the ‘correctness’ of [the teachers’] practices and their constancy over time” (Bourdieu 1990b:54). In other words, most of what most teachers shared as their practices indicated “the active presence of the whole past” (Bourdieu 1990b:56), probably due to very little change in the nature of their habitus and the overall field structures. This, could be traced back to, and was also spelt out very clearly, decades ago in a Conference in Peshawar (Khan 1956). The experiences of the teachers also mirrored in the findings of the Conference, highlighted and identified the reasons for the gulf that existed between the school and the home, and more specifically between the teachers and the parents:

- “Teachers are poorly paid. Hence their spare time is spent in supplementing their income through extra work. [This was widely agreed by the teachers, both male and female]
- Heads of schools tend to discourage teachers from freely contacting parents. [see **Sections 6.2.2** and **6.2.3** for relevant discussion]
- Teachers are not generally treated well by the parents. [see **Sections 6.1.3, 6.1.4** and **6.1.5** for relevant discussion]
- The Department of Education was said to be suspicious about such [parental involvement] activities.
- There is no organisation of the teaching profession, which was a pre-requisite to parent-teacher cooperation.
- The present heavy curriculum leaves no time for the teacher to devote himself [sic] to activities other than teaching.” [see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.1**] (Khan *et al.* 1956:89-90)

Given this backdrop, it may not come as a surprise that for most teachers there were issues around the role and effectiveness of the PTA in schools and of parental involvement in it. In Pakistan, parental involvement in the schools through a PTA as a mandatory component is a relatively new idea, introduced in the early 1990s. Yet, for a long time, various government policies, plans and other relevant educational documents have acknowledged and emphasised the importance of the role parents

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play in the education of children, albeit differently (GoP 1947, 1959, 1971, 1972, 1978, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006).

At the time, during and around the 1960s, when Western Europe was working “towards formal parental involvement in the management and control of schools” (Beattie 1978:41), a conference on the objectives of secondary education in Pakistan had also worked out in considerable detail issues around parent-teacher relations and the importance and establishment of the PTA in schools (Khan 1956). In addition to considering the various constraints and issues that were hindering parental involvement in the school, the conference suggested some practical activities for the schools for ensuring parental participation. The proposed suggestions were not only argued to benefit all the stakeholders and as a means of developing close home and school ties but the conference also argued that the effective functioning of the PTAs would also help accomplish the “educational objectives” (Khan *et al.* 1956:90-91). Yet, the findings of this document are relatively unknown and do not appear to have been taken up by the subsequent educational policies and documents. Consequently, the language and tone of the text used for parents in some of the later policy documents appears to be harsh, and the thrust seems to be mainly on considering parents solely responsible for the education of children:

... The people must accept the fact that since it is they and their children who benefit most from educational [sic], the sacrifices required must be borne primarily by them. Acceptance of this principle would create an identification of the community with the schools that does not now exist. Such an identification finds expression in a deepening concern for the nature and scope of the educational programme; a spirit of co-operation between parent and teacher; and a genuine recognition of the contribution of the school to the life of the community. (GoP 1959:9)

It is widely agreed, that it is the responsibility of the schools and teachers to contact parents, to involve them in the education of their children, and to develop strategies to connect home with school (Chavkin 1993). Yet, in the quotation above, the manner in which parents are cautioned, for the role they have to play in the education of their children and the ‘sacrifices’ they needed to make in this regard, depict a structure of thought deeply entrenched in autocratic and bureaucratic structures/fields that seems to disregard the importance and value of parents. Moreover, at another place in the Report, such aspects and issues overshadow the role of the PTA and parents that otherwise should stem or develop from the working of the PTA itself:

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No hierarchy of officials can itself give the schools the spirit and quality needed. The attainment of such aims requires the combined efforts of administrations, headquarters, teachers and the community. All efforts should be made to awaken the pride of the local communities in their schools by participation in school activities, attendance at school ceremonies, and the development of parent-teacher associations on a wide scale. (GoP 1959:143)

However, as I pointed out earlier in this section, it was only in the early 1990s that the Government of Pakistan made it mandatory for every public school to have a PTA. In 1993, the Government of NWFP was the first to introduce PTAs in public primary schools by forming around 17,000 PTAs until 2003 (GoP 2003c). In NWFP, recent figures for the number of PTAs in the public primary schools for the year 2006-2007 were 22281, with 1150 regarded as non-functional; the number of PTAs in the public middle and secondary schools for the same period was 4217, with 354 as non-functional (GoNWFP 2008).

The above figures regarding the functional PTAs might give an impression that all of these were active in involving parents in school and in arranging and executing various programmes and activities. However, the research data reveals that most teachers were critical of the existence and functionality of the PTA in school. Nevertheless, since the scope of my study was to explore the relations between parents and teachers in some specific schools, there would have been a number of successful PTAs amongst the number mentioned above. Yet, in the context of my study, when asked about the functionality of the PTA in school, most teachers described it as ‘non-existent,’ regarded it only as a ‘label’ or at most saw it as a spending body, disbursing a modest amount of funds on school maintenance. The experiences of the teachers seem to reflect the ‘reality’ on the ground and signify the role of the habitus and field as structuring forces of the behaviours and practices of the stakeholders. Similarly, in so doing, it also seems that most teachers were “disposed to turning their gaze on other people [i.e. parents]” (Webb *et al.* 2002:106) and on the conditions and situations that lay outside the schools. However, most of them were “much more reluctant to turn this gaze upon themselves” (Webb *et al.* 2002:106) and upon the field dynamics of school and the structure of their own practices. I discuss these issues and aspects in the sections that follow.

#### **6.4.2 Perceptions of the structure and funds of the PTA**

As can be clear from the discussion of the previous sections, a majority of the teachers described the school practices and their professional obligations as constraining

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factors, which they argued did not leave them any time to have contact with parents. There was some weight in the teachers' argument that in many ways the oversubscribed schools and overcrowded classrooms not only affected the 'school culture' but also had implications for maintaining a 'good relationship' and contact with parents (Salfi & Saeed 2007:614). Yet, some teachers demonstrated that despite many of these constraints, they claimed to manage successfully and hold various activities for the students in school that also ensured parental participation. Given this context, it is therefore necessary to reemphasise that the interplay between the teachers' habitus and the field dynamics of the schools (and the broader social fields) determined much of what most teachers discussed around the role of PTA and its structure and related aspects.

Given this backdrop, it may not come as a surprise that many respondents held and shared conflicting perspectives about the structure and composition of the PTA in school:

We have a PTA here, but no one gives time to us. PTA means that parents must be a part of this association and willing members to do various things. The structure of the association is such that out of eight members, six must be parents whose children are studying in the school and the principal acts as a secretary of the association whereas the *Nazim* [administrator] of the local area acts as its chairperson. A few teachers at the discretion of the principal could also be included in the association. (Teacher RBS)

... [The composition of the PTA is such that] there is a chairperson and a secretary who is the principal of the school; one member is a retired government employee and four parents are its members, selected by the chairperson. (Principal, RBS)

The difference in the accounts and perspectives of the respondents shows that the PTA as a body, having clearly defined contours and remits, was "yet to get a foothold in the rigid socio-cultural environment" (Usmani 2003), indicating the permanence and constancy of teachers' habitus and field structures within the public schools and broadly within social spheres. Moreover, there is some evidence here that by "turning their gaze" (Webb *et al.* 2002:106) on parents, it seemed that the majority of teachers wanted to protect their (field) positions and the associated stakes, and therefore to maintain their habitus "in a state of equilibrium" (Watts 2003:155). They wanted to justify the structured and structuring role of the school practices "as a natural fact or a given state of affairs ... [legitimated] by common tacit agreement" (Grenfell & James 1998:21). In the words of one principal, this was because "they

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[did not] want to expose themselves.” It was probably because of this that the majority of the “teachers [tacitly] viewed parents’ involvement via the PTA as a threat and an interference in their affairs” (Khan 2003:369). However, apart from this, one of the other issues regarding the composition of the PTA was that some participants were amazed to express that officially teachers did not become members of the PTA:

Surprisingly, there are no teachers as its members. As the name indicates, teachers should also have been part of the association. (Principal, RBS)

The evidence gleaned from the GoNWFP website reaffirms the above assertion that teachers did not figure as members of the PTA. The official composition of a PTA is such that out of the total eight members, five are parents (of whom one acts as its Chairperson) and the remaining three are the head of school (as Secretary), a retired government official and an elder of the community (GoNWFP 2001, online). However, whilst teachers officially were not represented on PTAs on paper, a number of empirical studies in the context of Pakistan and NWFP found that in many cases it was the teachers and their relations that dominated PTAs in schools:

... these organisations have never worked effectively on a large scale. Rural ... PTAs, in particular, are dominated by teachers rather than parents. (Tim *et al.* 2005:28)

In many cases, the committees were stacked with the head-teachers’ relatives, friends, and retired teachers, and they had no parents on them. (Khan 2003:369)

It also noteworthy to mention that whilst on the one hand many PTAs in boys’ schools were dominated by teachers, researchers also argue that the participation of women and mothers on PTAs in girls’ schools was also an issue, since it was the men who operated these associations:

In NWFP the PTAs ... for girls’ schools, included the husbands of female teachers and other male notables. (Khan 2003:372)

The underlying reason for this could be that the conservative culture and the dominant patriarchal traditions, especially in the rural areas, rarely had any space for the women to engage in activities and programmes that would involve interaction and communication outside the home in the school context and in the broader social spheres. Many teachers, especially female teachers, were of the view that this conservative culture (in many ways in the urban context and specifically in the rural areas) restricted women to actively participate and integrate in the various social

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spheres and to have a ‘voice’ of their own. My research also establishes this up to an extent as the chairperson of the PTA in the RGS was a male notable of the area. The principal argued that the chairperson of the PTA was better placed to address the issues of the students and teachers that required interaction and communication with people and offices outside the school, which in most cases were dominated by men.

Related to the structure and composition of the PTA was the theme of funds and their spending. Many respondents did not know much about the related aspects of PTA funds and the very few who did have some knowledge, held varying perspectives:

PTAs are only constituted for disbursing funds. (Teacher UBS)

This has recently been constituted a year ago. The thing is that, [regarding the PTA and its allied funds] no difference has been made between a school having two classrooms and another one having 30 or 40 classrooms. Naturally, in terms of the expenditure on daily consumables, the requirements of these schools vary tremendously. The total funds allocated to a PTA is Rs. 15000, out of which Rs. 3000 goes in paying [illegal] commissions and the rest of the amount (Rs. 12000) is not sufficient enough to do the needful. (Teacher RBS)

Whilst the secretary and chairperson jointly maintained the bank account of a PTA (Go NWFP 2001, online), one head of a school said that the performance of PTAs was far from ideal:

The secretary and the chairperson are joint signatories of the PTA bank account, and the remit of the PTA is to monitor and supervise school-based development projects as well as to have a check on teachers’ performance. However, the functioning of the PTA in schools is far from ideal. (Principal RBS)

Relatively recent research undertaken jointly by the ADB and DfID on ‘improving devolved social service delivery in NWFP and Punjab’ also provides empirical evidence to many of the aspects that constrain the functioning of PTAs and the issues of funds:

Very small funds are allocated to purchase resource materials for teachers ... this is exacerbated by low maintenance budgets, making it very difficult for schools ... to operate. Funds intended for ... parent teacher associations (PTAs) under the ... NWFP Education Sector Reform Programmes often fail to reach their targets. For example, although PTAs in NWFP were supposedly provided with PRs. 1,750 per classroom per year, few of the teachers interviewed were aware of this provision. (Tim *et al.* 2005:6)

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In addition to the lack of proper coordination in sending funds to schools and their spending by PTAs, research has also established that misuse and pilfering of funds was an issue as well:

The provincial department in NWFP reports that for the last 2 years, the bulk of these funds remained unused. In Abbottabad, there were complaints that the funds arrived so late in the fiscal year, and without any prior notice, that they had to be returned unspent. The district education office in Dera Ismail Khan indicated that each classroom was provided with PRs. 1,750 per annum for repair and maintenance, but that the teachers themselves appeared unaware of this funding. (Tim *et al.* 2005:19)

... Moreover, allocated non-salary budget funds, including PTA funds on instructional material, often do not reach the intended local school owing to leakages... (World Bank & GoNWFP 2005:80)

In some remote districts, the *chowkidars* [caretakers/guards] and their relatives are misusing the PTA funds. (Usmani 2003)

It is clear from the above quotations that the lack of liaison between the various segments of the government machinery not only hampered the delivery and monitoring mechanisms of the PTA funds but also the pilfering of funds at the various levels, especially at the end-user level, meant that the majority of the PTAs had no functional significance. However, whilst the role of funding was important for effective functioning of the PTA, some participants were of the view that more important was the willingness of the parents, teachers and community members to cooperate and work together for a common good, that signified a shared habitus as a generative basis for “orientating social practice” (Grenfell & James 1998:12):

The PTA is allocated around Rs. 12,000 per year, but if that amount is spent appropriately it can be a good thing. It is also one of the responsibilities of the PTA to generate more funds from various other means, but no one spares time for such things. However, there are some exceptions to this, especially outside the Peshawar region, which have generated funds of around Rs. 200,000 to Rs. 300,000 that were used in constructing classrooms etc. Here, I have also said to my teachers, that we need to look for some such people [parents/community members] who could help us in the school matters, and that people can donate some material things for effective school functioning. (Principal, RBS)

There has been enough empirical research evidence to support the above statement of the respondent. A number of studies, having a specific focus on the primary level of education, have shown and documented the potential and success of PTAs and schools through community engagement and involvement even in the most under-developed, backward and culturally conservative areas in various parts of Pakistan

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(e.g. Farah 1996; Jamil 2002; Khan 2003; Kim *et al.* 1998; Tahira & Braathe 2007). However, on a large scale, at local and national level, research is critical of the role of PTAs and question their effectiveness and functionality in school (Khan 2003; Robson 2004; Shah 2003; Tim *et al.* 2005; World Bank & GoNWFP 2005).

#### **6.4.3 Functionality of PTA: ‘limited to its name,’ ‘is just a label’**

In the preceding two sections, I discussed the background and structural aspects of the PTA in schools, which established that generally the role of the PTA was far from ideal. Therefore, apart from some successful cases where active school and community involvement resulted in enhanced learning opportunities for children and a better quality of education, a majority of the teachers were of the view that PTAs were not functional in schools. Since the PTAs were generally not regarded as active and functional bodies in schools, the data reveals that many teachers did not have enough knowledge about them and some teachers were not even aware of their existence and their role within the school. It therefore may not come as a surprise when some teachers made comments like:

I remember sometime back a PTA’s meeting was held in the school where I was working before. However, since then there has not been any interest towards this. No PTA meeting has ever happened here [in this school]. (Teacher UGS)

PTA ... in my understanding, it is just limited to its name and it has not played any of its roles in the affairs of the school, until now. A PTA’s role is restricted to the maintenance and physical aspects of school, and there is no concern towards the other functional aspects of school such as teaching quality, curriculum issues or parental involvement. (Teacher RBS)

A Parent-Teacher Association has been constituted but it is just a label and is not functional in any real sense. Until now, I have not seen any activity [meetings etc.] regarding this [PTA]. (Teacher RBS)

These statements, depicting the role and place of PTAs in the structure and practices of schools, signify the interplay between the habitus of the agents and field dynamics. There is also enough empirical research evidence that resonates with, supports and shares the perceptions and experiences of the respondents cited above. Moreover, these studies have thrown more light on some of the dimensions and aspects of PTAs and the related teacher and school processes that the majority of teachers as ‘stakeholders’ did not dwell upon in the interviews and discussions:

Also it was found that most Parent Teacher Associations were non-functional or were inactive. (Robson 2004:7)

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In most of the schools the SMCs [PTAs] have no functional role except for some involvement in school finance. Majority of the SMCs [PTAs] are not clear about their roles and responsibilities. Participation of SMCs [PTAs] in school management has been declined because of discouragement, lack of flexibility in utilization of funds, and lack of training. (Shah 2003:28)

Teacher recalcitrance was a major reason for the non-functioning of PTAs. However, other important factors included parental illiteracy ... poverty ... suspicion (that teachers were misappropriating ... funds), and lack of time (parents felt they had limited time and that education was the school's responsibility). (Khan 2003:369)

It is apparently common to find head teachers appointing parents to the committees themselves. This, combined with the lack of awareness among parents, the lack of direct funding for schools ... means that ... PTAs have little influence. (Tim *et al.* 2005:28)

The excerpts above have identified a number of important factors and processes which seemed to have worked both individually and reciprocally to render PTAs as ineffective, 'non-functional' and of 'little influence' in most schools. It is therefore important to understand and discuss the underlying dimensions of these structures and practices, both contextually and theoretically.

A theme that runs through the teachers' data, and the literature regarding the functionality of PTAs, underpins the significant roles of the habitus of the agents and the field influence of schools. Therefore, for the teachers and parents who had different 'stakes' and 'capital' to 'play the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), the interplay between the habitus and field in producing and reproducing a patterned and sustained structure of practices had "the effect of making the social world seem natural, and its practices 'taken for granted,' familiar, and common-sense" (Lingard *et al.* 2003:62). It was also due to the tacit understanding of protecting their 'stakes' and 'positions' that led most teachers to point the finger at the parents and on the conditions that lay outside the schools for the non-functioning or ineffectiveness of the PTAs. There was some truth in this; the broader social space and fields had considerable influence in structuring the practices of teachers within the field of school. Yet, the empirical evidence referred to above argues that predominantly it was the teachers and the conditions that lay inside the schools which resulted in PTAs having 'little influence' and being rendered inactive and non-functional.

#### **6.4.4 PTA functionality: where does the problem lie?**

Given the discussion in the previous section, the evidence suggests that the solution to the problem of effective functioning of PTAs lay with the teachers and schools.

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However, it was somewhat natural and expected that, given the way ‘reality’ operated for the teachers, and viewed and practiced individually and collectively in the powerful and structuring field influence of the schools, for the majority of the teachers it was a matter of naming and blaming individuals (parents) and factors/processes for the failure of PTAs in schools. There is some evidence that suggests that some parents may not have enough awareness about the importance of participation in their children’s school and complain of “lack of time” (Khan 2003:369). Moreover, research also suggests that “stakeholder groups at the local level may not understand or be able to articulate what they want from their schools” (Komatsu 2009:225-26, citing Chapman *et al.* 2002). Yet, for the majority of the teachers, it was a collective understanding that they visualised and presented parents as a homogenised entity, which suggests that it was due to the parents that the PTAs were not functioning:

Well, the thing is that parents always complain that they do not have time for such meetings, while teachers, principal and *nazim* [administrator] may be able to spare time for this. Very few parents, whose children are studying with us, would be able to say that they have some spare time for such things. (Teacher RBS)

... Once every year for the PTA’s meeting we send letters to some selected people, but they don’t come except those people who are the members of the PTA. Other people are not bothered. As I said earlier, our surrounding environment is such that people are not bothered about any school issues and they do not even give it a serious thought. (Teacher, FGD, RBS)

The above excerpts give an impression of the parents as uninterested in the affairs of schools and the PTA. However, the following comments from the principal of the RBS provide a contrasting dimension to what most of the teachers described as the ‘reality’ in practice:

The reason for this is that teachers complain that generally no one comes [to take part in the PTA]. But the reason for this is that teachers do not want themselves answerable to anyone. They don’t want to expose themselves. They want themselves cloaked, so these teachers pretend that as if parents are not interested in the PTA. (Principal, RBS)

As also discussed earlier, it seems apparent from the excerpt above that it was the teachers’ stakes and the associated field positions that they wanted to protect, and which were instrumental in forming their opinion and as the basis of their version of ‘reality.’ It also suggests that the teachers’ habitus was adapted and conditioned to the game in school that they had developed an “absolutely extraordinary feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990a:81), evidently communicated in the following quotation:

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Staff employed in the health and education systems is [sic] also reputed to be difficult and uncooperative. (Tim *et al.* 2005:4)

On the one hand, teachers seen as difficult and uncooperative had underlying implications for the quality of education and effective functioning of PTAs. On the other hand, many non-school elements that had a political bearing on the structure and functioning of schools had a disabling influence on the quality of school practices generally and specifically on the PTAs, which are captured effectively in the following extracts:

...I intend to reconstitute the PTA. I had met the chairperson of the [*existing*] PTA so that we worked for school improvement. Instead, he started meddling in school admission, for which I informed him in a telephonic conversation that admission of students will only be done through [*academic*] tests ... (Principal, RBS)

Political interference in the functioning of PTAs was quite common. (Khan 2003:368)

Given the above discussion, it seems evident that a number of both external and internal school factors contributed to the PTAs being regarded as non-functional and inactive in most schools in NWFP and in Pakistan. This implied that superficially various actors, factors, processes and practices were seen and considered to be contributing to the failure of an association that was envisioned not only to enhance the teaching quality and learning opportunities for pupils, but also to bring parents, communities and schools closer together. However, in fact it was the agents' habitus and the field dynamics that worked together to create and perpetuate a system of practices and conditions that were seen and criticised as being lacking and deficient in which PTAs had only a symbolic significance. One may therefore argue here that the implementation of PTAs required "not only the formation of a structure but also the development of a culture of community participation" (Farah 1997; cited by Fullan and Watson 2000:467).

#### **6.4.5 Section summary**

In summary, for most teachers there were issues around the role and effectiveness of the PTA in the schools and of parental involvement in it. However, whilst, the Government of Pakistan in 1991 made it mandatory for every school to have a PTA, it was in 1956 that a conference on the objectives of secondary education in Pakistan had worked out in considerable detail issues around parent-teacher relations and the importance of the PTA in schools. In the context of my study, however, for most

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teachers PTAs in schools were either non-existent, were seen as a ‘label’ or at the most regarded as a spending body that spent a modest amount of funds on school maintenance.

However, about the structure and composition of the PTA, many teachers held and shared conflicting perspectives. The evidence suggests that some participants were amazed to express that officially teachers did not form members of the PTA. However, surprisingly, whilst on the official documents teachers were not represented on the PTA, a number of empirical studies found that in many cases it was the teachers and their relations that dominated PTAs in schools in Pakistan. In addition, researchers have also noted that the participation of women and mothers on PTAs in girls’ schools was also an issue, since men and husbands of female teachers operated these associations.

In addition to the structure and composition of the PTA, there was also the issue of funds. Many respondents did not know much knowledge about the PTA funds, and the very few that have some knowledge, held varying perspectives. In this regard, research studies suggest that the lack of liaison between the various segments of the government machinery not only hampered the delivery and monitoring mechanisms of the PTA funds but also the pilferage of funds at the various levels, especially at the end-user level, meant that a majority of the PTAs had no functional significance. In the context of my study, a majority of the teachers were also of the view that PTAs were not functional in schools. The findings also suggest that many teachers did not have knowledge about the role and significance of the PTA in schools and some teachers were not even aware of their existence in their schools.

The empirical evidence I reviewed argued that predominantly it was the teachers and the conditions that lay inside the schools due to which PTAs had little influence and were rendered ineffective and non-functional. The findings suggest that since the majority of the teachers had a collective understanding of the parents as a homogenised entity, most of them therefore were of the view that it was because of the parents that the PTAs were not functioning. The findings seem to suggest that it was actually the teachers’ habitus and the field dynamics of the schools that created and perpetuated a system of practices and conditions in which PTAs had only symbolic significance.

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## 6.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have focused on teachers' perceptions and experiences of communication and interaction with parents. I have discussed the dynamics of teachers' communication with parents that were individually and collectively underpinned by the respective teachers' habitus and field influence of the schools. I have shown that the underlying influences and structures of teachers' habitus and field influence led most teachers to portray parents as uninterested in the school visits and presented them as homogenised. However, there were variations in the way different teachers shared their experiences, which established the role that the habitus played in the respective teachers' lives. The pattern that emerged from the teachers' experiences was that generally the schools did not have formalised and institutionalised procedures for contact with parents. However, communication with parents emerged as a complex, dynamic and patterned process that was far from random, which was not only engrained in the specific situations but was also underpinned by power and class dynamics of the stakeholders.

In the next chapter, I provide an introduction to parents, their background and their communication and interaction dynamics.

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## Chapter Seven — Knowing Parents: Exploring the Interplay of Capital, *Habitus* and *Field* in Parents' Lives

The first of two chapters on parents, this chapter serves two purposes: it provides an introduction to parents, their background and their communication and interaction dynamics; and thus will act as a base for chapter eight for effectively understanding parents' perceptions of their relations with schools and teachers. In so doing, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the variety and richness of parents' lives by examining the interplay between their habitus and the field influence that structures the realities and practices of parents.

The chapter consists of three sections. The first section introduces and discusses the difference and diversity of parental habitus and their perceptions and experiences about various practices. The section demonstrates that whilst parents differ individually in terms of their habitus, the role of culture and field implicitly determine, shape and inform parental practices and the realities around them. The second section is about parental habitus and the dynamics of field structures. In taking parental habitus as the underlying theme, the section argues that the use and appropriation of capital and the field influence provides a structuring structure that shapes and in some ways redefines parental habitus. The last section discusses parents' views on education. This section demonstrates that the interplay of parental habitus and the capital, field and class provide a deep, rich and complex structure of thought and practices of parents. This interplay results in a paradox for most parents, as on the one hand, they see no bounds in harnessing their ideals and potentials but on the other hand, they do not possess the right amount of structures to be able to realise these ideals.

### 7.1 'Different strokes from different folks': decoding parental habitus and communications practices

For better or worse, 'parents as the child's first teachers' (Perrone 2003) provide the socialisation processes at home that enable children to learn within the family environment "the dispositions, language, values, and cultural understandings" (Perrone 2003:xv), which children incorporate and appropriate for interaction and integration in the community and school environment. However, given the differences in the structure of parental habitus and the related aspects of social class, capital and

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field dynamics, the ‘socialising experiences’ that parents provide to children would be thoroughly socially and culturally grounded and individually determined. This section aims to decode some of these experiences of parents that would provide effective understanding of the practices and structures that shape and inform parents’ views about their own practices and their relations with the schools of their children.

### **7.1.1 The interplay of norms and values, and cultural conditioning**

The analysis of the parents’ data reveals that there were considerable differences in the way parents described their experiences about their interaction or relations with children. However, despite these differences, the experiences of the parents were not individualistic because they were influenced by the prevailing structures of practices and the field influences. This indicated the active presence of a collective and shared parental habitus, which the parents practiced and shared as such. Therefore, it was probably due to the situated subjectivities of parental habitus and the strong socially and culturally embedded field structures and physical structures due to which most parents’ structure of thought and discussion revolved around compliance to and instilling the norms and values and cultural images in their children. For Bourdieu this signifies “the double and obscure relation between habitus ... and fields” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:126). One parent manifested the normative dimension and adherence to cultural schemes in the following manner:

Well, always my guidance to them [children] is that [in social interactions] don’t ever tell a lie and your success is assured. Personally, I am against lying and expect the same from others. ... At home, I always keep on giving them [the children] a dose of these morals. It’s not that I have just said it once; it is always. If it is not on a daily basis, it would be on a weekly or a monthly basis. ... (Parent, UBS)

Whilst the normative dimension of parental interaction is clearly communicated and evident in the above quotation, the cultural dimension of adherence to or institution of the norms is implicitly expressed by giving the children ‘a dose of these morals.’ More implicit is the authoritarian style of parental habitus that is the cornerstone of the patriarchal family traditions in Pakistan, which is culturally deeply ingrained in the field structures. In this regard, Walters and Stinnett (1971:71) argue that the parents’ authoritarian interaction style negatively influences children’s self-concept, emotional and social development. Although the nature of these negative influences may not be evident here, evidence suggests that children exposed to an authoritarian

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environment at home and at school incorporate these negative influences (Baumrind 1966; Baumrind 1971; Kaufmann *et al.* 2000; Marion 1999; Walters & Stinnett 1971). These influences are likely to become strongly ingrained in the children's habitus that they are likely to practice and reproduce when they become adults.

As I discussed above, parents differed in the manner in which they spoke about their interactive practices with their children. However, in many ways they had similarities of understanding and experiences, signifying mediation of field structures with parental habitus. Most parents therefore whilst having had a strong desire that their children excel in every field of life, their ideals were strongly ingrained in their habitus and class, and cultural dynamics. The aspirations of most parents therefore circumvented nurturing their personal and normative values in their children and ensuring that their children conform to the societal values. One parent came across strongly along these lines:

When needed, I will reprimand my children, and will also provide guidance as things should be done. All this is for their good upbringing. My advice to them is not to do something, which is a matter of shame for you as well as a disgrace for us [as parents]: "therefore, you should not do anything which may make people point a finger at you. The purpose of educating you is that you become obedient, and respect elders and youngsters." Respecting all people whether related or not is very essential. It is also enshrined in the religion as well and from a worldly point of view, you need to respect elders as well. (Parent, UBS)

Two themes underpin the above excerpt: one pertains to the normative aspect and the other concerns cultural dimension. As indicated earlier, it became evident from the findings that at the heart of the communication between parents and their children lay the issue of conforming to the cultural values and guarding against the negative cultural practices. Since the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the cultural code demanded conformity to its rules, many parents were explicit in providing verbal advice to their children and being watchful of how their children interacted in the community environment. Notwithstanding the differences between the patterns of parental interaction with their children, most of them earnestly desired that their children do not fall into bad habits and conform to the normative ideals.

The norms that parents expounded for them were strongly rooted in the cultural codes that appeared to underpin their perceptions of the purposes of education. This seemed to have formed doxic understandings for many of the related dimensions of parental interaction. Many parents therefore had been reinforcing the collective agreed cultural

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understanding such as emphasising ‘obedience’ and ‘respect’ as the primary purposes of education. In this regard, in many ways, most fathers came across as authoritarian and “dominant” (Dereli 1967: cited by Walters & Stinnett 1971:100). It has been claimed that the influence of Islamic culture and patriarchal family customs perpetuates the dominance of the father, restricting self-reliance and autonomy among children, which has consequences for them when they become adults (Dereli 1967: cited by Walters & Stinnett 1971). However, in my experience certain traditions of the Pashtun culture—borrowed and adapted from other cultures or nurtured in its own culture over time—may have overshadowed the Islamic identity and culture. For instance, not wanting daughters, treating women and girls/daughters differently and suppressing or oppressing them is said to have been a practice in the Hindu culture and propounded by some of its religious scriptures (Derne 1994; Fenton 2004; Siegel *et al.* 1995), which may have infiltrated the Pashtun culture over time. Moreover, because the Pashtun culture is seen as emerging from the “culture of war” and reflecting a “patriarchal world view” (Drumbl 2004:132), some elements of its culture may obfuscate Islamic identity, especially in the rural and conservative communities (Barfield 2007; Drumbl 2004; Jacinto 2006). The Pashtun culture is based on some unwritten rules or laws, commonly known as *Pashtunwali*—an ancient tribal code or customary law that regulates the lives of Pashtun ethnic groups, which can be “popularly misconceived as a conduit for Islamic law” (Jacinto 2006:10). In this regard, some of the interviewees who spoke conservatively about educating their daughters also shared how over time their attitudes changed towards daughters’ education (see **Section 7.2.4**). This indicated how over time due to change in the dynamics of field parental habitus transposed or readjusted to reflect the contemporary field structures.

Whilst most parents undoubtedly wished their children well and had high aspirations, for the majority of them the structure of their discussion and most specifically their habitus had a sense of a master-subject continuum with their children. This implicitly ingrained and unconsciously explicitly communicated feeling came across strongly in many of the parents’ views, which seemed to suggest having the notion of dissonance and distance between the parents and their children:

When they [sons] have any problem or need something, they *can* come and talk to me. When there is nothing important, we don’t blather. ... My advice to them is “... have good company and keep good friends” ... “If a child is

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good, his morals are good and is knowledgeable and can teach you something—keep his company” ... “if the environment of a place is not good—bad things are done there, cigarettes [are] smoked there—always keep away from such places.” (Parent, UBS)

As might be evident from the above excerpt, whilst the father argues successfully along the normative dimension of his interaction with children, the underlying tone of the text and the culturally contextualised manner in which the parent assumes authority and authoritarian stance suggests that the father is the pivot around which and from which all power structures emanates. However, some other parents seemingly were cognisant of the role that fathering entailed and sought to find a middle ground in terms of interaction with their children:

... I am neither too lenient nor too harsh with my children; I try to seek the middle ground. If, I were too harsh they [the children] would not be able to do any work. (Parent, RBS)

This may have been the case that some or many parents would have tried to strike a balance between their interaction and practices with their children to countervail the negative influences of the dominant patriarchal and authoritarian stances, and to neutralise their stances by showing affection and empathy to maintain some equilibrium between their relations with the children. Yet, due to social conditioning of the field structures, the majority of the parents had little room to manoeuvre. Many of them though were seemingly aware of this, but were constrained to follow the habitus. For the majority of such parents, there was a sense of a structural lag in their habitus on which the field dynamics had a strong structuring influence, which I refer to next in the following section.

### **7.1.2 Parental interaction: ambivalent and distanced?**

The findings reveal that a particular pattern of interaction of fathers emerged from the fathers’ data in which many of them appeared to interact distantly or ambivalently in their homes, especially with their children. The underlying reasons of this seemed to be that the specific social and cultural dynamics had a dominant role in structuring parental habitus and their interaction patterns at home. This also had a reciprocal and sustained relationship with the field structures that had structured or conditioned interaction patterns of fathers:

There is not much interaction between us at home; each person has their own routine and things to do. Some [children] would have eaten, others would be

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sleeping and if there were anything important to discuss, they [children] would approach me and ask about things. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

An important aspect that emerged from the parents' data was that due to the strong patriarchal family traditions the father as the sole authority had a final say in most matters and in most cases determined the structure and quality of interaction at home. As the above excerpt illustrates, many fathers were therefore culturally constrained to maintain some distance between themselves and their children, apart from some issues or problems when children were in need of help and guidance. This naturally had consequences for not only the quality of interaction between the parents and their children but also most importantly for the socialisation of children that relied much on the amount and quality of social and cultural capital transmitted to children. In other words, it was because of the lack of appropriate structures of "thinking tools" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:160) which many of the parents (though they were aware of) could not deploy to structure their interaction with their children effectively. It was also due to this that many such parents when asked about the reasons of non-interaction with their children cited their preoccupation with work as the excuse.

However, the important point here is that a considerable number of parents acknowledged the fact that their home environment was different and indicated the permissibility of adopting interactive practices. Most of these parents mentioned that they were constrained to do so because this is how they were used to doing things and engaging in practices, indicating the relationship between parental habitus and their field influence. Furthermore, this also indicated the relative constancy and permanency of parental habitus which, given the prevailing structure of practices and field, were likely to flow inter-generationally from parents to children relatively unchanged.

An added dimension to some parents' ambivalent interaction at home seemed to be their inability of penetrating deeply into the structure of their own practices, and to come up with a detailed and vivid representation of the dynamics of their conversation and communication with their children. This indicated the importance and influence of and the interplay between the habitus, capital and field that had structured parental dispositions and practices uniquely, given their specific field positions. The following excerpt illustrates the above point:

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- Parent: Of course, you need to have a chat at home that children do-this and do-that [work].
- MS: What usually is that about?
- Parent: Its usually about the raw foodstuff [chick peas, kidney beans for selling/business purposes], that [children] clean-this and wash-that.
- MS: Do they [the children] present you with some of their own problems?
- Parent: There are no problems, my daughters will clean and wash the foodstuff.
- MS: Don't they have any problems?
- Parent: They have no problems; I tell them to leave the work they are doing to offer prayers and be punctual in prayers. (Parent, RBS)

My intention here is not to generalise or pathologise parents for what they talked about and shared as their experiences, as in the introduction to this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis I have argued that there were differences between the individual parents, indicating their own field positions underpinned by their habitus, capital etc. However, as all of them shared a common culture, there were also considerable similarities in their structure of thought and practices. Further, since most of the parents were from a working-class and poor background (see **Appendix H**) their reflections and experiences in many ways mirrored their own background. The experiences of these working-class parents also resonate with the research literature on parents documented extensively in Australia, the UK and the USA (e.g. Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Crozier & Reay 2005a, 2005b; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Plummer 2000; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a).

Considering the conversation in the above excerpt, some related themes emerged from the many such similar interviews of parents. These pertained to the practices of the parents with children and some related aspects of parental habitus and the respective role of culture in it. As might be evident from the above quotation, one striking resemblance in many parents' structure of practices was that their deliberation on their interaction with children was mostly structured around the material and physical aspects and transactions of their lives. This signified that given the parents' class and capital, their responses and practices were preconditioned to and reflected their habitus. It was also clear from the parents' data that in their interaction with children, most parents described the children's role and position as neutral and mechanical, and their field positions as without power. This determined and in many ways dictated the specific roles and practices of the agents within their field positions, and showed that fathers exercised all powers within the various situations at home.

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The parents' ambivalent interaction with children had an added cultural dimension to it. The findings reveal that in contrast to the father's authoritarian role, which was positioned strongly in their (field/positional) distance from children, the role of mothers with children emerged as more interactive and empathetic in the day-to-day relationships. Strictly from the cultural dimension, the situated position of the mothers was that they acted as a buffer zone, as an intermediary and as a watershed between the children and father:

It is basically my wife who interacts more with the children. For instance, when I return home tired after the day's work then at the most, I would have my dinner and offer prayers. After prayers, the environment cannot be created in which you sit together and have a chat [with children]. Our people's [home] environment is very different; one [person] goes in one direction and others [family members] in other directions [in home]. (Parent, UBS)

This is not to say that all parents had strained and hostile relations within their homes. The purpose of highlighting and emphasising these and such structures of relations and practices of parents is to give some understanding into how these practices might be viewed and related within the context of parents' perspectives and relations with their children's school. Furthermore, in decoding the micro-interactional processes and practices of parents the role of culture becomes more conspicuous, as it is through the lens of culture that we begin to understand the nuances and stratification, of how the role of mothers and fathers are positioned differently and how this influences their habitus.

### **7.1.3 The use of 'force' as a structured structure?**

The findings reveal that most fathers viewed the desirability and permissibility of physical punishment of children as acceptable and as a reformatory tool, which was thoroughly ingrained in their habitus and practices. As I discussed in the above sections, the dominant and authoritarian stance of the fathers meant that they possessed culturally and socially sanctioned power, which they appropriated in their practices and interactions in their homes with their children:

Well, I reprimand the child and my every effort is not to let them talk or speak in any way. It is not a good thing, because when one is aware [educated] of the issues then one can handle things well but when you are not [educated], things get out of hand [by losing temper] and the environment becomes unpleasant. (Parent UBS)

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As the above excerpt shows, the interesting aspect of many parents' practices was that their habitus was predisposed and culturally constrained to adopt physical means as the 'language' of communication through which they would resolve day-to-day issues of their children. However, most of such parents were equally aware of their limitations due to which they could not 'handle things' properly. Of these limitations, as has been indicated in the above excerpt, education was a recurrent theme that signified for most parents an ability to have an awareness and control over their matters and practices that they otherwise could not deal with properly. This was important from the theoretical standpoint, as in practice many of them would have been successful in many ways in executing their professional tasks and other affairs of life. However, since education in its institutionalised and embodied form did not form part of their habitus and cultural capital, most of such parents were equally aware that it was due to their lack of education that they would lose their temper or avoid interaction with their children. In other words, they did not have "the code making it possible [for them] to decipher" (Bourdieu 1973:73) the practices or interactions.

Some parents had even likened punishment to the analogy of growth of trees:

... I also want to share another matter with you. Despite the fact that I have no worthwhile education, a father's slap for every child is like watering fields or trees. However, the nature of punishment should not be such that you go to extremes. The punishment should be mild so that the child pays attention to the path or future, which you have chosen for him. (Parent, FGD, RBS)

The analogy used here is interesting which resonated with a number of other fathers in the research interviews and discussions, which signified the parents' sense of place and the structure of their habitus and related dynamics. The parent's use of the expression here is that as one waters trees, and cuts and prunes them, the result of this careful tending enables the trees to flourish and grow efficiently. In the same manner, many fathers were of the view that taking care of children by intermittent use of punishment would help them conform to societal and parental norms, which they considered important for all round development. The analogy suggests that on the one hand, this established connections between the respective working-class backgrounds of the fathers, who at times would be involved in gardening or tending to their fields. On the other hand, it established a strong connection between the parents' habitus and the field influence of the culture due to which the parents replicated and reciprocated through their habitus and mental structures in similarly structured social situations.

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Whilst most parents also favoured a moderate approach towards interacting or dealing with their children, getting physical was an open option for many of them as a way of getting the children to behave and conform to the family and cultural norms. Many fathers therefore viewed punishment as a necessary part of their interaction with children, for avoiding children indulging in social evils and for the benefit of their future, determined in an authoritarian manner by the fathers themselves:

With children you need to interact on certain principles; sometimes [you need to be] sweet [lenient], sometimes [by becoming] angry, sometimes [you need to] slap them. If you don't do this, then children tend to get spoiled. (Parent, RBS)

Parent: With my children ... my behaviour is different. I keep them under pressure [suppressed].

MS: What do you mean by that?

Parent: It means that they submit to my authority and don't speak over me. Whatever I say and do is for their future benefit and I show them a straight path. For instance, you don't expect that a teacher would misguide his students, and since they are my own children, they are not expected to overturn [or challenge] my decisions about their future.

MS: So it means ...

Parent: No Sir, if I am not strict with them, the environment around in the village is such they would get spoiled by indulging in various [social] evils. (Parent, FGD, RBS)

It seems evident from the above two quotations that the fathers' authoritarian stance as the linchpin of the patriarchal family system derived strength from the culturally constructed and socially situated powerful figure of the dominant father. The fathers therefore being the breadwinner and commanding authority had the final say in all matters of children. Such a parental approach undoubtedly would have implications for the children's habitus, resulting in issues around their self-confidence and independent decision making in various matters of their lives. Moreover, since following the parents, the majority of the teachers also had the same authoritarian stance (Baumrind 1966; Baumrind 1971; Kaufmann *et al.* 2000) and most teachers were therefore of the view that their students remained inhibited and less participative in classrooms.

Alongside this, there was the issue of the parents' apprehension about the socially undesirable influences on children. Whilst there were variations between the parents to countervail these harmful influences, the majority of them favoured a harsh attitude

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and preferred punishment as a way of containing and restricting their children. The important point to highlight here is that since most parents were in favour of punishment of children, the structure of punishment was cognitively hardwired in the habitus and culture of the parents (especially fathers). This not only had implications for the fathers' relations with children but also, and most importantly, most parents viewed and interpreted through the same lenses the resultant treatment of their children in school. Hence, in many ways they were deferent to teacher authority and forgiving and even were complacent with the teachers in their children's punishment. However, some parents differed with the dominant held view of parents regarding punishment of children and argued about alternative approaches, which I discuss in detail in the section that follows.

#### **7.1.4 Differences in perspectives or situated subjectivities?**

The discussion in the above section dealt with the perspectives and experiences of those parents who were mostly in favour of or were employing physical punishment as a means of reforming children and protecting them from various evils and unsocial activities. The data also revealed that some parents were against suppressing children and argued for adopting child-centred strategies in interaction with children:

In my opinion, a child should not be mentally suppressed to the extent that he may not be able to stand-up and speak [or make his point] in front of the teacher or other people. This has happened to me personally [when I was in school]—all of my family is well educated—at home my eldest brother was harsh whereas at the school Master Siraj was strict. This made me become a truant and I left school when I was in the Class 7. ... Unnecessary harshness spoils a child's life. With children, you need to have friendship as well as mentally control them. (Parent, FGD, RBS)

In some cases, like the instance in the above excerpt, some parents through their own experience had developed a greater understanding of the implications of suppressing children, which according to them affected children's self-confidence and self-esteem. Having experienced a harsh treatment both at home and at school during their childhood that resulted in them dropping out of school, these parents had a different understanding of the harmful influences of the children's suppression and punishment. They therefore favoured child-centred approaches based on friendship and understanding of children. One important implication of this change of attitude and parental habitus was that these parents mentioned the use of adopting alternative

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strategies and practices by incorporating a dispositional stance different from the ones in practice.

In a similar thread, one other parent shared the following perspective:

We have a friendly environment at home. We do not ridicule our children, which some people do. This has a very bad influence on children and adult alike ... (Parent, FGD, UBS)

The indication here of a friendly environment at home implies a reasonable approach towards children and appears to be in contrast with the habitus of other parents discussed earlier and hence a change in perspective. This changed perspective of some of these parents could be attributed to the differences in and the use of the social and cultural capital. Moreover, the changed perspectives of these parents regarding the treatment of children signified relative differences of their social class position compared to those parents who favoured physically punishing children. However, for some other parents, the specific experiences that shaped their habitus within their specific field positions carried important implications for the way they thought about treating children.

However, most of those parents who held restricted views and were harsh with their children were equally aware about their differences and hence mostly attributed it to the difference in “educated habitus” (Nash 2002:43) that for them was at the crux of the difference in a change of stances and appropriation of alternative dispositional structures:

The major reason for this is that I am uneducated and my wife is also uneducated. As the saying goes, if you sit more [with your children] and have a longer chat, then things can go wrong; and therefore there is no environment for talking and no procedure for it. (Parent, UBS)

For most of the uneducated parents, there was a realisation and understanding of the importance of education and for its underlying structure of habitus, which one could appropriate in varying and diverse social and professional situations. For these parents, education and awareness were closely connected due to which people could resolve issues effectively in a manner that these parents saw as hassle free:

It is because of a lack of awareness and education; no other reason except this. Those people who are wise [knowledgeable] and educated know about these issues and all their matters are right [proper]. (Parent, UBS)

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For most of these parents, this realisation came at a time when they had spent many years in a socially interactive and competitive work environment, meeting and interacting with a variety of people—uneducated and educated alike—that these parents clearly understood and acknowledged the consequences of not being educated. For instance, they did not feel at ease communicating with educated people on equal terms and preferred the company of those people with whom they shared similar characteristics. This feeling formed the undercurrent of all the answers they gave in the interviews and in the focus group discussions. Whilst the lack of education would have been an important issue in interaction, the cultural environment also seemed to have conditioned some stereotypes about the way a parent would go about communicating with children.

Yet, apart from this, the role of mothers emerged as important since, besides being the negotiators of many things and in integrating and coordinating activities and expenses of children and home, in the absence of their husbands they were the sole authority of the home matters. However, in many cases they were answerable to their husbands.

#### **7.1.5 Mothers and the dynamics of home structures**

It became clear from the data analysis and also through my personal experience of the fieldwork that since the patriarchal family traditions underpinned the socially and culturally conditioned image of the women, the responsibility of home affairs, household chores and other related menial tasks was mostly seen as the domain of the females. In this sense, the mothers' role was considered and conditioned to one of housekeeping and being a housewife. As such, the mothers' universe was their home, in which they would exercise their culturally sanctioned powers, though not without limitations and being answerable to their husbands. In this regard, some interviewees boasted about the authority their wives possessed at home, though determined by the husbands' authoritarian stance, their habitus and the cultural dynamics:

So far as the problems of children are concerned, they tend to lookup to their mother. As the PRESIDENT of the house, she is the sole authority and must take good care of the home issues. My stress is more on controlling issues outside the home. So in this connection, it's basically between the children and my wife that they make demands regarding asking for money etc.  
(Parent, UBS)

As the above excerpt also shows, whilst most fathers' maintained and exemplified an authoritarian attitude, the majority of them interacted with their children through the

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fringes and peripheries within their homes. Due to this, mothers had a deeper contact and association with children, who relied on them for most of their usual material and physical needs. In this regard, one mother expressed the following views:

In academic matters, the children tend to ask their father for help. Whereas regarding their everyday aspects, the children tend to approach me, which they cannot ask from their father. (Parent, UGS)

As I also discussed above, fathers being in the authority position in the majority of the cases maintained some social distance from their children. The children could approach their fathers in instances when they would need to ask about something important or when they would get stuck in some academic or other problems, which the mothers were not be able to solve for them. Since the mothers were uneducated, they were mainly not able to provide any academic help to their children, but had developed their habitus in ways that they would monitor their children's academic progress. However, their important role was that the mothers provided help and guidance in the children's everyday matters. Moreover, as has also been indicated in the above quotation, mothers also played another important role in the homes. They would at times be acting as an intermediary between the children and their father to communicate any requests or demands that the children may not be able to ask their father directly, thus suggesting distance and in many ways fear of the fathers.

However, some mothers despite being uneducated had a more elaborate and 'educated' approach to the question of interaction with children at home:

When they [children] come home after school, they spend about two hours with their tutor and finish their homework. After that they spend time with us [parents] chatting, in a pleasant environment. My children tell us all what happens in school, which is worth mentioning. My advice to my children is that they should not hide anything from us, so that they may not get into some trouble or problem. Whatever the matter may be, whether it is on the way to school or in school pertaining to interaction with peers, or relations with other girls, I keep a close watch over these things. (Parent, UGS)

Crozier (2009), Crozier *et al.* (2003, 2005), and Crozier and Davies (2005, 2006, 2007) have also empirically documented similar findings in the British context on Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents. For instance, Crozier *et al.* (2005) found that there was a strong concern amongst parents for "protecting their daughters ... and ... [their] moral development" (Crozier *et al.* 2005:6) and therefore the "journey between home and school [was seen by many parents] as potentially dangerous" (Crozier & Davies 2006:687). There is also a sense here that the mother appears more knowledgeable

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and articulate about her interaction with children. The underlying reason of this could be that the husband's education had enhanced the mother's social and cultural capital, which helped in changing and expanding her habitus. This change in habitus of the mother resulted in change in practices and perspectives about the children's education.

#### **7.1.6 Section summary**

Despite the differences in interaction of or relations with children, the prevailing structures of practices and the field influences had underpinned the collective structure of habitus of most parents. It was probably because of this collective influence that most parents emphasised the normative and cultural values to instil in their children. The parents' data also revealed that many parents (especially fathers) were ambivalent in their interaction with children, which indicated the structured role of the habitus of parents and the reciprocal influence of the field. However, when it came to exploring parental perspectives around punishment of children, most fathers viewed physical punishment of children as desirable and permissible and considered it as a reformatory tool. The findings revealed that these structures of thought were thoroughly ingrained in the parental habitus and practices. Yet, the data analysis also revealed that some parents differed with the dominant held views of parents about punishment and authoritarian stance with children. These parents were against suppressing children and argued for adopting child-centred strategies in interaction with children. The mothers' role also emerged as an important one. Although uneducated, mothers provided help and guidance to their children in everyday matters. Moreover, one important aspect of the findings was that mothers also acted as an intermediary between the children and their father to communicate the children's requests or demands that they were not able to ask their father directly.

#### **7.2 Parents and the dynamics of field structures**

In this section, I situate and analyse the interplay between parental habitus and practices and field structures. In so doing, I want to highlight how contact with the broader social structures influences parental habitus and parental attitudes about norms and values. I discuss that parental interaction and experience within their respective social and professional fields structures their habitus and communication patterns with their children. I then explore the influence of the cultural pull on

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parental habitus, which as mandatory and compulsive forces of the neighbourhood and community fields, condition and pressure some parents to remain in contact with the field structures outside the home. I also demonstrate that for many parents change in field means readjusting their habitus and thinking about incorporating alternative patterns of practices, relating to one's own self and concerning one's children. Finally, I discuss the relationship of culture and social class on parental practices and argue that given their specific field positions and habitus, despite a realisation of alternative practices, many parents follow and replicate their habitus within their fields.

### **7.2.1 The interplay between norms and field**

The findings reveal that many parents through their social and professional contact within their respective fields had internalised the norms and values that they argued one must keep in check regarding one's children. However, since parents differed in terms of their social field positions, their perceptions and experiences were individualistic but which also reflected the broader social influence:

I see the world [social interaction/people] here, and see different people, I am in the market place and compared to many other people I have experience [of social life]. I have seen children of many people that what they do, how they move on from their childhood to adulthood and the things they do. And I see the results as well. [A father might be unaware that his] son roams about in the market place in a manner which is unbecoming of him. His father might have kept him unchecked to do whatever he wishes to do. (Parent, UBS)

The above excerpt provides some understanding into how the interplay between parental habitus and field dynamics structures one's attitude, through observing and interacting with people and the behaviours and activities of children. The underlying implication of this seems to be that fathers need to keep themselves informed of what their children do and guard against those influences that would otherwise be socially undesirable. Some parents therefore were cognisant of this role and appeared to have structured their practices along the same lines to avoid these pitfalls:

The type of environment one gets in has a strong influence on the personality of a child. So therefore, I keep a check on my child about the type of friends he has. I keep a regular check on him so that he may not get into any trouble such as drugs, or other bad things. I would warn him not to have a company with someone who appears to me that they are misguided. I would not let my children go out in the evening and I have been very particular about this. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

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As the above quotation illustrates, for protecting children from the negative influences of the society many parents exercised considerable control over the actions of their children. To achieve these aims, the parents clearly communicated a strong sense of parental ‘surveillance’ and ‘authority’ over their children. In this regard, Stattin and Kerr argue that given the temptations adolescents are exposed to and their susceptibility to harmful influences and antisocial behaviour, parents may be constrained “to use a firm hand and actively control their children’s behaviour and associations” (2000:1073). Moreover, the surveillance of children’s mobility is a measure for their protection (Fotel & Thomsen 2004) and “parents’ awareness of their children’s activities is certainly important for preventing negative behaviour” (Stattin & Kerr 2000:1084). The findings suggest that most parents’ surveillance and their authoritarian stance was deeply ingrained in their culture and social class structures signifying the influence of the practices within the field on parental habitus.

### **7.2.2 Field influence and communication dynamics of parents**

The findings suggest that many parents had structured their practices in the light of their experience within their respective social and professional fields. Many of them therefore were unequivocal in guarding their children from unwanted social practices and to instil in their children the norms and values they espoused. To achieve these aims, whilst many parents were particular in monitoring their children’s activities, some parents claimed to have a more structured approach, emphasising their role and the dynamics of their interaction with children:

I have kept my children within limits. If they feel that they have some spare time, they can meet with their friends, but with my permission. I have six sons; I am aware at all times where they are at their respective times. I always think after seeing a child that why is he roaming about [in the market]; is his father not aware of his whereabouts. My children [sons] after school hours, go to their respective works [jobs], meant for learning a skill. In the evening, they come here, meet me, take the groceries and stuff home ... (Parent, UBS)

The structure of parental habitus was such that the dominant and authoritarian approach of parents was evident in many parents’ description of how they managed and supervised their children. On the one hand, such an approach was due to the interplay between parental habitus and the field dynamics. On the other hand, for many of the parents this approach was needed because they wanted their children to conform to the social structures and practices. It was primarily because of these reasons that led some parents to describe keeping their children within their ‘sight’:

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When my son gets back from school, after having his lunch, rest and offering afternoon prayers, he would come to join me at my pharmacy. This keeps him within my sight and at the same time, he is trained about medicine and customer services. He also brings his books to do some schoolwork, while he is at the pharmacy. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

The social field had a powerful influence over parental habitus as given the respective age of their children parents had to guard against a number of issues. Understandably, there were individual differences between parents in terms of how they managed their children and kept them within their 'sight.' However, the underlying structure and pattern of many parents' interaction with their children was that besides protection against the 'social evils' the engagement of their sons in various skills and jobs was also a source of some economic support.

### **7.2.3 Cultural pull and field dynamics**

The analysis of the data reveals that for some parents the interplay between the field and culture had structured their habitus in a manner that had the influence of a cultural pull to the issues and practices of one's neighbourhood environment. Most of such parents were from a village environment, indicating the dominant and conditioning influence of the prevailing structures of the culture and field:

The reasons are that the village environment is such that you need to have contact with people and if you don't give time to and interact with people in your neighbourhood then you are out of the circle of happenings and tend to get disconnected from people. If you restrict yourself to home, you do not get to know about the events in the village. We don't sit together in the home environment. (Parent, UBS)

Since most of these parents were under the dominant cultural influence of the village environment, for many of them close communication and interaction with their children at home was not a norm but rather an exception. The specific culture and field therefore were powerful influences in determining and influencing such parents' habitus and actions, "by shaping [their] repertoire of 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which [they constructed] 'strategies of action'" (Swindler 1986:273). Here, the important factor was that the cultural pull had a more powerful influence on parental habitus in a way that they prioritised giving time to the 'happenings' of the neighbourhood compared to the factors and processes within their homes. Some other parents compared the influence of and differences between the sub-cultural patterns of village and urban life in these words:

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Some people's [parents] interaction is [only] need-based at home [with their family members]. As I have said that [the surrounding social and cultural] environment has a lot of influence on a family. I live and work in a place, which is at the heart of the city, the environment here is different from others such as a village environment. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

The dominant cultural influence of the village life was an important element in patterning the way some or many parents conceptualised their roles within the community and home environment. Here, various factors seemed to contribute to such a patterning of culture. Whilst social class was an important factor towards cultural patterning, other factors appeared to include: less access to and provisions of education and literacy levels; relative distance from the urban life and associated 'privileges;' less variability in social networking, meaning less diversity in human exchanges; and cultural codes demanding adherence to the 'rules of the game.'

#### **7.2.4 Change in field structures as a means for adapting parental habitus**

One noteworthy finding concerning most of those parents who were uneducated or had less education was that their reflection on their past and experiences indicated a shift or change of habitus with the subsequent changes in their field dynamics. For such parents, the change in the structure of habitus meant that they reflected on and analysed the dynamics of their own field structures, highlighting its pros and cons in relation to their own historical contexts. In addition, due to the change in their habitus, these parents also talked about incorporating and adopting those practices and attitudes for which initially, or in earlier times, they did not have any provision or space in their habitus. In this connection, for some parents the influence of the 'cultural pull' (allegiance to the neighbourhood and community life of the village/locality) was so powerful and pervasive that a realisation of providing a 'permissible environment' for their children's education and the related dynamics of it came at a very later stage in their life:

...I have now begun to understand that for [the education of] my children I should have left my village for good and should have moved to an urban dwelling. I should have rented a house and provided a favourable and permissible environment to my children for a good education. They have done their education despite being in the village environment, where there is every type of person from milkmen, farmers, wayfarers to junk collectors. So everything is dependent on and associated to the [social] environment. So the kind of jobs you do have a strong surrounding influence around in your neighbourhood. Many people in our village even now have not been to schools [or do not give importance to schooling]. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

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As the above excerpt shows, many of the uneducated parents were reflective about their experiences and about what they should have done for their children. This difference in perspective and experience of the parents formed an important part of their habitus. This was rooted historically in a sustained and diverse engagement of these parents within their various social and professional fields. In other words, since these parents having observed, interacted and exchanged views with numerous educated and uneducated people at their work place and in other social interactions, the parents developed an appreciation for an alternative or diverse set of practices and relations within one's family and public life. These experiences therefore formed an important part of their habitus, and hence resulted in changing their perception towards some of their already established patterns of dispositions.

Another related aspect that was discussed by some other parents and which has also been identified in the above quotation pertains to the way some parents described living in a specific social environment, with a specific 'class' of people, which they described as having implications for people both socially and culturally. Many of these parents, whilst having an awareness about the consequences of living in such 'environments' for their children, could not materialise their desires for upward social mobility or changing their field structures because of the gaps in their habitus and social and cultural capital. However, there were some exceptions, as some parents who could 'afford' it (indicating the combination of various capitals) to migrate, specifically left the village environment to provide better education for their children (see **Section 7.3.7**).

One other important and interesting finding was that most of the uneducated parents revealed in the interviews and discussions that they did not send their eldest daughters to school, due to a number of constraining factors such as, due to their own lack of awareness, or because of cultural issues or the surrounding influence of the village environment. For most of them, it was only in the recent past that they started sending their young daughters to school. On the one hand, this collective change in attitude and practices of these parents meant a collective change in and flexibility of parental habitus towards the daughters' education. On the other hand, changes in the structures of the field dynamics over time meant that these parents tended to have flexibility in their habitus for accepting and adopting the possibilities of educating their daughters

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in school. Therefore, because of the change in social attitude towards the education of daughters, some parents acknowledged that it transformed their perception:

Parent: All [of my] children are studying except my eldest daughter, who has been engaged. She has not been to school but has had some Quranic education at home.

MS: Was it due to her lack of interest in education or were you not interested in educating her?

Parent: She did not have an interest in school as well as we were also not interested in her education.

MS: What was the reason for this?

Parent: We did not want her to go to school, but I have realised only recently that education is a good thing. Previously, in our Pashtun culture, we did not let daughters seek education in schools; whereas sons were encouraged to get education ... (Parent, RBS)

One other parent shared the following perspectives:

MS: Are your daughters studying?

Parent: No, they only read Quranic education, and I have not sent them to school. Only my youngest daughter [youngest in all the siblings] goes to school, along with my two sons.

MS: Why you did not let your other daughters go to school?

Parent: It was because, in those times there was no provision, at that time there were no private schools, it's been only in the last four or five years that private schools have opened in our village.

MS: Why did you not educate your eldest daughters, and what were the reasons behind this?

Parent: Well, sir, you know about the environment of our village. There was no school in our vicinity and the village environment was such that when daughters would go out of their house, there would be loose talks and stuff.

MS: Do you send your [eldest] daughters to a *madrassa*?

Parent: No, one of them [daughters] is taught at our house by one of my aunts who lives near our house. My other daughter goes to one of our neighbour's house and is taught Qur'an lessons by our neighbour's wife. (Parent, RBS)

As the above excerpts illustrate, the restrictive forces embedded in the structures of the culture were positioned so strongly in the parents' habitus that access of daughters to seek education in school remained restricted. For most of such parents, the eldest daughters stayed at home and learned to read the Qur'an from their mothers or from some other female in their neighbourhood, whereas some of them were sent to the local *madrassas* for religious education. For such parents, the field dynamics and their habitus was structured in a way that by living in rural or conservative communities they were less likely to have an informed, open, and participatory attitude towards the participation of girls and women in education and public life. This was so, both

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personally out of their own conviction and collectively due to the constraining social and cultural environment. However, for most of them change in the field structures brought about changes in their habitus and thus these parents started to appreciate and acknowledge the change in their awareness and the importance of the girls' education.

### **7.2.5 Section summary**

In summary, the interplay between parental habitus and practices and field structures highlighted how contact with the broader social structures influenced parental habitus and therefore informed and conditioned most parents' attitudes towards norms and values about children. I also discussed that parental interaction and experience within their respective social and professional fields had structured their habitus and communication patterns with their children. In addition to this, I considered the influence of cultural pull on parental habitus. The cultural pull as a mandatory and compulsive force of the neighbourhood and community fields had conditioned some parents to remain in contact with the field structures outside the home. For such parents, contact and interaction with children at home therefore was minimal because of the cultural dynamics and field structures that prevailed outside the home. I also demonstrated that for many parents change in field entailed readjusting parental habitus and incorporating alternative patterns of practices. In this regard, I discussed that whilst most of the uneducated parents had not sent their eldest daughters to schools, over time change in the field structures changed their habitus due to which they had started sending their youngest daughters to school.

### **7.3 The interplay between parental habitus and education**

In this section, I discuss parents' views on education and explore its interplay between parental habitus and field structures. The focus of the section therefore is to highlight how the interplay between parental habitus and education shape and inform parents' perspective about norms and values that they want to inculcate in children. I then throw some light on situating the role of education in the context of the parents' social class dynamics and demonstrate that working-class parents see strong connections between acquiring education and upward social mobility as economic dividends. I then present and discuss parental metaphors about education and analyse the various themes by positioning parental habitus in the light of the respective field structures. Thereafter, I explore the theme of 'education as capital' that many of the parents see

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as a liberating force and as an ability to make effective sense of one's field structures. In this section, I also throw some light on the perspectives of mothers and fathers on the education of daughters and discuss the differences in their perspectives to highlight the constrained habitus of many fathers on their daughters' education. Finally, I discuss the dynamics of parental habitus and field avoidance to highlight how for some parents the constraining field structures of the village environment instigate them to move to urban areas for providing a better education to children.

### **7.3.1 The interplay of norms, values and education**

In previous sections (7.1.1 and 7.2.1), I discussed that parental emphasis on norms and values was structured along their habitus and the prevailing structure of practices and culture within the field. Similarly, the same emphasis underpinned the perspectives of parents when they discussed the purposes of educating their children. Therefore, for most parents one of the primary purposes of educating their children was the inculcation of norms and values that they espoused. In this regard, one of the most common responses of many parents was that they wanted that through education their children are able to differentiate between the good and bad:

The purpose of education is that one must be able to differentiate between the good and bad. Apart from this, thinking of an educated person is different and more refined from a person who is uneducated. (Parent, UBS)

Education itself is very important. Education shows us every way, of every respect. It shows about the good and bad, about the right and wrong. (Parent, UGS)

Whilst parents differed individually in terms of the "educational knowledge and awareness" (Crozier 1996), the manner in which many parents shared their views about the norms and values they wanted their children to follow also signified their will and desire to appropriate and enhance their cultural capital. In this regard, many parents therefore often compared uneducated and educated people given the underlying differences in their 'thinking,' which is also mentioned in one of the excerpts above. This difference in 'thinking' of educated people could be interpreted as the difference in the amount and quality of habitus and the related complexity and quality of the structure of their dispositions. Given this understanding, naturally, for such parents negotiating access to the school and comprehending the structure of the habitus and practices of teachers that required a different set of 'thinking' would have been a daunting experience for the parents. Most parents therefore saw education as

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capital, as it signified an ability and capacity by following which a person not only could differentiate between the ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ but also the mental structures acquired/attained through education itself were seen as more enabling.

For some other parents, the purpose of education signified deportment:

Education gives you many things. Education gives manners, tells about the procedures of meeting with youngsters and elders, of meeting and greeting people, of sitting and standing [in a specific environment]. (Parent, UGS)

Education enables you to know about mannerisms, of how to speak with [people] and sit in the company of people. (Guardian, RBS)

One might argue here that it is through the socialisation and cultural frames of reference that we learn and acquire the behaviour patterns and manners that one uses to interact and communicate with others in society. However, the points in the above excerpts concern something deep and cognitively hardwired than mere indication of one’s socialisation. The purpose of education here is not just about speaking, meeting, sitting and talking to people; it has more to do with the structures and quality of those manners that one acquires by investing their time and energy in that pursuit. The implication here seems to be that seeking education not only makes a difference to one’s own values and manners, it also has a ripple effect for others in the broader social field.

In a similar vein, for some other parents, besides wanting that their children become better individuals, the purpose of educating their children also underpinned their own desire to compensate for their low levels of education:

I: What is the purpose behind educating your daughter?

Parent: That she may become a better human being. I have not been educated, so I earnestly desired that my daughter gets a good education and that she may proceed to higher education. (Parent, UGS)

Whilst the normative dynamics had significantly underpinned parental habitus concerning the purposes of education, most parents desired that their children do well in education so that the children may avoid the void of education that the parents themselves felt in their lives. This understanding was deeply embedded in most parents’ habitus as their own experience of life had informed them about the gaps in some of the structures of their norms and values, which required higher order and complex structures to make more effective sense in particular situations. Moreover,

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associated with this void or gap in education was the parents' inability or inadequacy of appropriating the associated complexity of the structure of language in their interactions with other people that relied much on one's educational background and related structures.

The point I want to make here is that parental perspectives on the norms and values from the dimension of education was just one aspect of their habitus and the role that the field played was reciprocal and multidimensional. This determined the parents' desire to reinforce their perceptions about the norms they deeply held dear, but also to reflect on their own experience and to construct according to their habitus an image of education for their children, which they themselves could not achieve. In this sense, parental perspectives on education were also deeply embedded in their social class position, which I now discuss in the section that follows.

### **7.3.2 The dynamics of social class and education**

The findings suggest that for parents the dynamics of their social class and education were deeply intertwined. Most parents therefore saw education as a means of upward social mobility, for improvement in their SES and as a tool for fulfilling the utilitarian aims. However, given the differences in their respective habitus, experience and background, the perspectives of the individual parents emerged as having various layers and shades. Therefore, for some parents, as a source of social recognition and difference, the significance and application of education in everyday life was quite compelling in the way they shared their experiences:

When children seek education, they won't be lifting big carpet rolls in our shop. [Those who have not done education] are reminded [in the shop] the times when they used to play truant and avoided going to school and thus now find lifting the carpet rolls difficult. I tell my children: "seek education, education is a good thing. It is a good thing because you will make use of the pen and earn your living. You won't do the donkey-work like I do: get underneath it [the carpets], lift it up, put it down." My life has already been spoiled. (Parent, RBS)

There are many benefits of education, it gives you comfort in life; it helps you in avoiding working under the sun, of avoiding drudgery, and of avoiding undesirable and wasteful habits. (Parent, RBS)

According to my understanding, the purpose of education for a poor parent is that his child gets a job, become an officer [to earn a decent living]. Whereas for an affluent parent, with good [civic] thinking, [it] may mean that his children become good citizens, be of benefit to other people and play their role in the development of the country. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

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The importance of education was evidently clear to most parents, especially to the ones that were uneducated, as they had firsthand experience of what it entailed to be a person without education. This experience interpreted as their habitus had informed and ‘educated’ the parents through which they could compare and contrast the social class consequences of not being educated. These parents were therefore better placed to articulate effectively what they had learned from their experience and from the hard realities of life that formed the basis of their habitus. As the above quotations show, the difference of social class and parental aspirations for education that makes a difference to one’s quality of life comes across quite strongly through the parents’ reflection.

It became apparent from the findings that the majority of the parents desired upward social class mobility. In order to do this, most of them desired a better and different future for their children and did not want that their children follow the work and life they themselves had been going through:

In my opinion, I think that the way I have spent my life, my children should not follow my footsteps and they must have a good [decent] life. No matter which direction they go [in their life] and I don’t understand what is good and beneficial, but I wish that their standard of living is raised. (Parent, UBS)

I don’t want that my children end up doing the work I am doing now. (Parent, UBS)

We [parents] say [discuss] that we have an impoverished and miserable life, and think that our children’s future be somewhat brighter by seeking worldly or religious education, at least up to the matriculation level so that they may be able to read something. (Parent, RBS)

Clearly, there is a sense of deprivation in the parents’ assertion above, which exemplified their social class standings. It was probably because of their experiences within the various social and professional fields that the parents could see a strong connection between education, class structures and dynamics and the inherent logic of reproduction within the society due to which the parents emphasised the purposes of education in utilitarian terms and as a way of upward social mobility. Understandably, given the limitation in terms of the quality and amount of the habitus and capital, these parents were equally aware that they were limited to their specific/lower rungs of the society. Moreover, since education in its institutionalised and embodied form did not form an important part of the cultural capital and habitus of many parents, they knew that they did not have the ‘code’ to ‘decipher’ (Bourdieu 1973:73) the

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complex and higher order structures of dispositions and practices to seek and appropriate social, cultural and economic benefits for themselves. Most parents therefore desired and aspired that what they themselves could not achieve in life, their children might be able to do so through education.

One other important finding concerning the interplay between parental habitus and education and their social class dynamics was that the majority of the uneducated parents had an understanding that their children seek education at the most up to secondary education, as has also been indicated in one of the excerpts given above. A view also shared by most teachers in the schools (see **Chapters Five and Six**), most of the uneducated parents considered secondary education as the threshold for their children, beyond which they did not see much scope and significance. For such parents, this seemed to indicate differences in the structure of their habitus and the influence of their social class and the constraining influence of the respective structure and trends of the field.

In a similar vein, the findings also suggest that the restricted or limited approach of most of these (uneducated) parents towards the children's education was also due to economic and cultural reasons. From the economic point of view, the fact that most parents had a working-class or poor background and had large families meant that affording their children's education beyond secondary education was not possible. Most of them therefore wanted that their son(s) get a job in the public or private sectors, or otherwise employed in some other trade or work. However, from the cultural point of view, whilst many parents wished and aspired that their sons(s) go beyond secondary education (although for many this was unlikely because of their SES, stratified and hierarchical social systems, and the overall social inequalities), a good number of uneducated parents deemed it inappropriate for the daughters to go to a college or a university. For such parents, both in the rural and urban areas, where there were conservative cultural practices and low literacy levels, sending daughters to a university for education was a taboo and a stereotype, which indicated the constraining factors of culture and field inhibiting the habitus of the parents (see **Section 7.3.6**).

The findings also reveal that those parents who had left school either at the primary, middle or secondary levels, whilst they had high aspirations for the education of their children, they also did not want their children to follow their life and work patterns:

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Education is a good thing. Had I acquired a good education I would not have been doing the peon's job. I don't want that my children end up doing the work I am doing now. I want that they get good places (jobs) which other ordinary people get. I want and wish that they get good positions and lead a good life; my effort is towards this. I don't know about the future but this is what I wish. (Parent, UBS)

It might be evident here that the pattern of thought running in the above excerpt suggests some difference and depth of parental habitus compared to those of the uneducated parents. This difference of parental habitus also indicates difference, variation and appropriation of the underlying social and cultural capital that helped such parents to compare and contrast their (field) positions with that of 'others' by expressing their desire for 'good places' for their children that 'other ordinary people get.' In other words, these parents had limited or low levels of "educational habitus" (Fowler 1997:27). However, having observed, interacted within their social and professional spheres and having developed networks with a number of people holding various statuses and positions, the parents had acquired an understanding and appreciation for a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu 1988:782) as they could see the difference education had made to the lives of 'ordinary people.'

The dynamics of social class and education for the parents also had a manifestation and association in terms of one's stock of economic capital. For some parents, having not been in the possession of material and physical resources meant consequences for one's social class and difference to one's quality of life:

Apart from this, people can do their own business. People having land [landowners] use their [economic] resources and lead a good life. For us, the poor, we at all the times need to do these kinds of jobs and nothing else. I don't have material resources such as piece of land and other things, just this drudgery. It is quite understandable that when you are uneducated you are bound to do ancillary work (kiln work etc.). (Parent, UBS)

The above quotation suggests that economic capital seemed an important predictor and element in making or providing a head start to one's children using which one could appropriate and build on their already established levels of social and cultural capital. However, more important here are some of such parents' reflections on their own educational habitus and the resultant and related consequences of their social class due to which they could not appropriate what other people possessing various capitals could do. However, for most parents whilst education and class were intricately connected in terms of social mobility, some parents also reflected on the

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benefits accrued through education for their class in terms of its symbolic significance:

Their [brothers] education will give many benefits ... The most important benefit to our family would be that of education in an uneducated and illiterate family; he [father] did not consider education worthwhile [anything important]. ... By this I mean that [for instance], when they [brothers] become teachers many people would benefit [through their teaching]. Education would bring a good name to our family ... and people would say that although their father was illiterate his children did well in education. (Guardian, RBS)

As the quotation above suggests, seeking social approval and recognition leading to one's family pride also underpinned the purposes of education in one's family. Here, whilst for many parents education was an important contributing factor in enhancing one's educational status, it was primarily the economic returns through education exhibited in material and monetary terms that many parents considered would improve their social class standing in their community.

However, not all parents agreed with the material gains or benefits of education seen and advocated by many other parents. It seemed that some parents were sceptical of the benefits accrued through education, and did not see much worth of the educational credentials in the actual job market:

In my opinion, these days, learning a skill is better than doing education; what would you do by doing education (obtaining certificates or degrees)? Would you lick it? Would you eat it? [Meaning hereby that education is worthless in terms of jobs] (Parent, RBS)

Although most parents spoke highly of education and its importance in one's life, for some parents their personal day-to-day experience of seeing young people with education without jobs were glaring examples of educational inflation and joblessness. These parents were therefore critical of and sceptical towards the perceived benefits of education in the job market and indicated gaps in the quality of public school education. Many parents (and most teachers also) therefore blamed the mainstream public education for its poor quality output.

### **7.3.3 Metaphorically speaking: 'education is like light, it takes you towards the path of light'**

One of the interesting findings of the parents' data was the parents' use of metaphors and analogies to describe or visualise education and its various dimensions. For many parents the use of 'light' as a metaphor came across very strongly, which exemplified

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and manifested their underlying patterns of habitus that were structured around their immediate and intimate experiences of life. Some other parents made use of the analogies of ‘sight,’ ‘language’ and cognition to describe the significance of education in everyday aspects of their lives. They seemed to point to differences between the underlying structures of cognition and habitus of individuals in which language(s) play an important and significant role, which people use to appropriate and decode structures and practices in various social settings. Thus, these powerful analogies and metaphors that the parents used seemed to have a physical as well as a personal dimension.

‘Light’ in the physical sense has an enabling entity or power, which is external in nature but helps people realise and appropriate their individual potentials to obtain benefits of various sorts in their varying contexts. Likewise, ‘light’ as a personal dimension of the parents pertains not only to the use of one’s inherited and acquired capacities (i.e. ones habitus) but also signifies the reciprocal nature of the long lasting interaction with the social and physical world, which gives people the ‘visual’ and ‘physical’ freedom with which they derive benefits in their own unique ways. Simply put, for some parents the ‘light’ of education was as a source of power and enlightenment, and an ability to make a difference to one’s life, by avoiding ‘darkness’ and following or benefitting from light:

Parent: Education is like, when you enter a house at night time with a light [bulb] switched on in which you see everything. So education is like when a light [bulb] is on. An uneducated person is like when you enter a room with pitch darkness and no light. (Parent, RBS)

MS: What is the purpose of ‘light’ (as education)?

Parent: The purpose of light is that when you enter a room, it enables you to see everything from wardrobes, chairs, to beds so that you may not tumble upon these things. An uneducated person is like, when you enter a room, there is pitch darkness, you stretch your hands and fear that you may tumble against the wardrobe or are injured by a chair— an uneducated person is like this. (Parent, RBS)

Seeking education is very important. It brings people out of darkness into light. ... (Parent, UGS)

... Education is like [the difference between] darkness and light; like day and night. An uneducated person is like night, with pitch darkness you tumble on things, and see nothing ... (Guardian, RBS)

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For some other parents, the purpose of education as light signified a constant and never-ending struggle and an endeavour to capture and appropriate the riches that it contained in terms of one's improvement at personal, material, and symbolic levels:

The purpose of education is that ... I myself have got some education but the situation at that time was such that I could not continue my studies further and learned a skill for some earning. So, education is like a light. My advice to my sons is that "it [education] is like a light; the further you can go in that go ahead and if there are any obstacles down the line, then one can think about alternatives." (Parent, UBS)

Education is like light, it takes you towards the path of light. (Guardian, RBS)

As the above excerpts suggest, 'light' in its physical sense provide an ability and more specifically visibility that one appropriates to do innumerable tasks according to their own potential and desire. The suggestion here is progress and development in that the further one goes through light the more light they can gather, the more places they can see and the more detail they can internalise. In this manner, education equips people with structures and mechanisms that serve as a decoding process, of making sense of one's own sense and place in a specific social field and of appropriating the same structures to make effective sense of the countless and multidimensional externalities that lie outside one's self.

For some other parents, the analogy that they used concerned the immediate senses of sight, touch and cognition/language, which necessarily are the pathways and the go-between the people's internal worlds and as tools for effective appropriation of the externalities of the outside world:

Education is important for all aspects of life. People having eyes are blind if they are uneducated, [they may] have a tongue and would talk but are dumb if they are uneducated. [It is because] English [language] these days is very much in common use, and Urdu [language] is in common use, and you meet with such people [who speak these languages]. (Parent, UGS)

Education is a very good thing. It opens your eyes, it enlightens you ... You tend to know about things, about reading and writing, which is comforting. (Parent, RBS)

The 'blindness' and 'dumbness' of people without education are powerful descriptors that separate, situate and identify the complexities of the underlying coding and decoding of the structures, patterns and processes that signifies the various mediums of transactions and the structures of appropriation in one's fields of reference. The parental emphasis on the power of languages as descriptors of dominance and ability

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provides some understanding into how constrained people might feel if/when the structure of practices incorporating language and the related structures of transactions is beyond one's reach and understanding. From such a parental perspective, education and its appropriation in life was therefore regarded as one that 'enlightened' people's lives and opened one's eyes, through which people could seek various 'comforts.'

### **7.3.4 Education as capital, as a liberating force**

The findings suggest that for most parents, education and being educated signified having an ability and capital that many parents saw as a liberating force. Given their respective habitus and social and professional field positions, many parents extended the use of the 'light' metaphor to describe and interpret the significance and value that education had in their personal and social lives. For some parents, education therefore signified access, movement, and liberty:

By light, I mean knowledge whereby one can see things. [With] the level of knowledge you have you can see things around you. Without knowledge, you cannot see anything. ... One can see the world; one can go everywhere. An illiterate man cannot go to any place. An illiterate man is just restricted to his job, to his home and the locality he lives in and can only see things in these places. When the sun rises, you can see everything but when there is pitch darkness, you cannot see anything. (Parent, UBS)

As the above excerpt suggests, for a number of parents, speaking about education triggered responses and experiences mirroring their own personal lives. In negotiating text-based symbols, complex language structures and the related structures and practices had a constraining and limiting influence on these parents' sense of movement and effective use of the social world. Such parents envisioned education as a vehicle for access and freedom and the lack of it as a restriction. Seen from the perspective of negotiating access to school and making sense of and appropriating effectively the structure of practices of teachers was a daunting experience for such parents (see **Chapter Eight**). This implied that they did not feel confident that they possessed the appropriate or comparable amount and quality of habitus to that of the teachers.

In a similar vein, for some other parents, the significance of education was evident in interpreting messages and decoding the structures of the written word and the underlying logic of it:

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For one who is educated, wherever you go, one can read signboards that this is Dr. so-and-so or this is a such-and-such place, this is Hayatabad [a town], or this is Board [a place] or this is a medical ward in hospital, or this is a so-and-so shopkeeper, or go to a such-and-such pharmacy and bring such-and-such medicine. So when that person is educated, he would go, read the [sign] board, enter [the shop] and take it [medicine]. So everything is dependent on education. Is it [everything] dependent [on education] or not? (Parent, RBS)

... I see myself that I am uneducated ... [For instance] when I take my child to hospital, I would stand next to the doctor's room but would ask [people] where such-and-such [doctor] is based ... (Parent, UGS)

Apart from this, when you go out of your house, or go to hospital for a doctor's appointment—for all these things, education is very important. (Parent, UGS)

[For instance] when they [children] go to a street or to some place, they would at least know which way to follow. As I have not been educated, I don't understand; I will get lost if I go to a place some distance from here, because I don't understand [as being uneducated]. (Parent, RBS)

These personal reflections of the parents might give some insight into how these and such parents visualised education as capital and power that is empowering, giving a sense of liberty, freedom and the ability to effectively appropriate structures and practices to one's own advantage. However, as the majority of the parents did not possess comparable levels of education to that of the teachers, it therefore had implications for their relations with teachers (see **Chapter Eight**). For some other parents, the importance of education was evident in the way they wanted to manage and maintain their daily expenditure:

The benefit is that when you bring some groceries, you know [about numeracy], that how much you have spent, that you have bought this item for [Rs.] 10 and the other for [Rs.] 20, and this one for [Rs.] 15. This will give you a better idea of how much you need to spend each day. (Parent, RBS)

Likewise, the lack of education clearly had constrained parental sense of efficacy concerning their children's schoolwork:

Well, I don't understand [much about this]. But, I wish I could have done it. [At home] I would ask my youngest daughter to sit with me and take out her schoolwork and to memorise her homework. I would then think that I should ask her what has she memorised. She would say that she has memorised the work. I would not know whether this is the case or not, unless my eldest son comes and confirms this. For this [asking children about their schoolwork] education is important. (Parent, UGS)

As the above excerpt shows, many parents wished and desired to have had enough education that would have helped them in the various issues, aspects and problems

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that they experienced in their personal and social lives. However, since many of them did not have in due proportion the required and appropriate capital, which included the material and the ideational social products of thoughts, actions, objects, as the currency of the social intercourse (Grenfell & James 1998:18), they found themselves ill equipped and unable to engage and make sense of the structure of practices in various social situations. Nevertheless, for some parents, despite considering themselves as educationally handicapped, they seemed to have adapted their habitus to engage more deeply with their children's education at home:

I myself being illiterate [uneducated] understandably, don't know much. But I do know to the extent that when my children come home [after school], I check their copies [notebooks] to see that they have been given a 'good' at one place and a 'star' at other; and [I] check their marks that out of 20 how much marks they have obtained in tests. I understand up to this level, even though I have no education. I have a very keen interest in education. So when you have an interest in something you strive towards that. I check their copies [notebooks]. I know to the extent that I check their writing for neatness and clarity. I always tell my daughter to take proper care of neatness when writing [in the notebooks]. (Parent, UGS)

This suggests that underpinning the above excerpt is a reference to the inculcation or appropriation of secondary habitus (Reed-Danahay 2005:155). The mother may have acquired these 'skills' or 'capital' over time in the home context through the socialisation processes of engaging with her children about their school matters and in some ways learning from them what it entailed to be given a 'good' and a 'star' etc. The benefit of such an engagement of the mother with children could not only be seen as monitoring her children's progress but also as a reassurance for the children of the importance of education and learning.

### **7.3.5 Fathers on daughters education: how constrained is the habitus?**

The findings reveal that whilst most parents highlighted the significance and importance of education for their children, it became apparent from the fathers' data that many fathers held restricted views about the education of daughters. Moreover, it was evidently clear from the data that the majority of the parents treated their sons and daughters differently, by giving preference to sons in education and everyday aspects of life. This consequently on a broader local and national level seemed to have implications for gender disparities in education for girls, documented extensively in the context of Pakistan (e.g. Aslam & Kingdon 2008; Shami & Hussain 2005b; Winkvist & Akhtar 2000).

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In this connection, educational literature reports two broad explanations for gender gaps that persist in Pakistan: one body of knowledge details the demand-side explanations and the other pertains to the supply-side of the issue (Aslam 2006). Of particular importance to this study is the fact that “strong cultural norms of *purdah* and restrictions on female mobility, empowerment and decision-making ... undermine [girls’] access to schooling when of school-going-age” (Aslam 2006:13-14), especially in the rural parts of the NWFP and Pakistan. Many parents therefore held restrictive views on educating their daughters due to cultural and economic reasons, and treated their sons differently and favourably in academic and everyday matters. One father expressed the following views about the education of his daughters:

Parent: In my view, when girls have some basic education, then that should be sufficient for them.

MS: What are its benefits?

Parent: The benefits are that when daughters seek education up to middle or secondary education, that should be sufficient for them, which will help them know about finding their way easily, that where to go and how to find some information. Beyond secondary education, I cannot afford to educate my daughters.

MS: How would that benefit you ...?

Parent: The benefit would be that when they go to their husband’s house, they would be able to educate their children. (Parent, RBS)

Like the instance in the above excerpt with the parent, some fathers’ views on daughters’ education seemed to have been influenced by at least two factors. The most important of these was the cultural influence, which determined the many decisions parents took about their daughters’ future life. Although these fathers had been educating their youngest daughters in public schools, most of them did not educate their eldest daughters, indicating restrictions of the field and inhibition of their habitus that existed in the past. However, for many of these fathers there were still culturally conditioned parental reservations for educating daughters beyond primary or secondary level, which is also evident in the excerpt above. The other important factor pertains to credit constraints of educating one’s daughter, which seems to be the point also indicated in the quotation above. Evidence suggests that credit constraints negatively affect female children in Pakistan, and as sons are future breadwinners, they receive preferential treatment resulting in gender disparity for girls (Aslam 2006). Naturally, the pattern underpinning this structure of parental habitus

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would have implications for parental perceptions of communication with the children's schools.

In a similar vein, one father shared the following opinion about daughters' education:

Parent: I think they [daughters] should be sent [to school] but not beyond a specific stage [middle school]. They should be educated to the extent that they can write their name, put their signature, or write a letter. They should not study beyond that.

MS: What harm lies in it? Wouldn't it be better if she becomes a doctor? (A passerby/customer asks)

Parent: Not really. I think that daughters should be allowed to read [study] up to class 7 and 8. After that, they should stay home, she is better off at home. She does not belong outside home.

MS: What do you think about religious education?

Parent: The more you can let her study religious education, the better it is. I have admitted one of my daughters to a *madrassa*. Religious education is the gain and advantage of the mother and father. (Parent, RBS)

Whilst many fathers were primarily driven by their habitus to make decisions about their daughters' education, in many ways their habitus was constrained by the dominant and contextually specific field structures that dictated to these parents the social and cultural notions of educating girl children up to a specific level. Apart from the culturally constraining trajectories, the parents' own SES and educational levels also largely determined many of their decisions for girls.

Moreover, by saying that 'she [daughters] does not belong outside home' many fathers wanted to align themselves with the field structures not only to influence decisions about their daughters' education, to determine their future life trajectories but also in so doing, evidence suggests that sons are given preference over daughters in various matters. Aslam (2006:76) found strong "evidence of a pro-male bias in educational budget share allocations" in the age group of 10-19 years, much of which she argues is manifested in rural areas.

### **7.3.6 Maternal habitus and education: the dynamics of field avoidance**

The findings show that whilst most parents aspired and desired that their children do well in education and have a better life in future, they did not have the means (economic and symbolic) to have made phenomenal changes to their work and life patterns only for the education of their children. The data suggests that some parents

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due to economic or cultural reasons or the combination of both had specifically left their village to enhance their capital and status and to provide better learning opportunities and environment for their children. One mother shared her perspective as such:

I don't discriminate between sons and daughters. I try my best that my daughters do well in their studies and for me there is no difference between boys and girls. For the education of our children, we have migrated from our village, only for their education. Although there are primary schools in our village, for secondary school education girls cannot go to Hangu city, because of the stereotypical environment of villages. So therefore, I came here—and we left everything back there, all our belongings and lands—so that my children get an education. I have a keen interest in education. (Parent, UGS)

One visible difference that I came across of the parents who had migrated from town and villages to the city was that they demonstrated flexibility in their habitus to the many issues of their children and their education, especially to the education of their daughters. Such parents emphasised that they treated their children equally without any discrimination between sons and daughters, as has also been cited in the above excerpt. Like the instance in the above excerpt, for some parents, the change in habitus and perception regarding their children and education seemed to have also been due to their SES and the education of the spouses. Moreover, since these and such families migrated specifically for their children's education, both the husband and wife would have made conscious decisions about the education and future of their children. Thus, given the dominant cultural influence that in many ways was discriminatory towards daughters, these parents would have been less so, compared with the experiences and perspectives of other parents.

The above excerpt also illustrates another important point. This pertains to the stereotypical gender sensitive attitude of people in rural settings towards girls' education. For many families leaving behind their belongings, possessions and well developed and maintained structure of social and cultural networks, migration to the urban dwelling was one way of avoiding conservative and constrained structures and fields dynamics that challenged and stigmatised one's children's education, especially that of the education of girls, as highlighted very clearly in the above excerpt.

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### **7.3.7 Section summary**

There was a strong desire among all parents that their children do well in education, become better human beings and are protected from bad influences of the society. However, for most parents the purposes of education signified social mobility by seeing their children secure good jobs and positions in public and private sector institutions. To this end, social class featured prominently in the parents' data, with most parents therefore desiring that their children do not end up doing the work they were doing and wanted something better for them. Many parents described education metaphorically, which highlighted the role of habitus in structuring parental habitus and experiences of their respective personal and social worlds. Finally, many fathers had restrictive views on the education of daughters, predominantly because of cultural reasons as well as due to economic constraints.

### **7.4 Chapter summary**

The focus of this chapter was on parents and their communication and interaction practices, which had a dominant cultural dimension. I have shown that much of the practices of the parents were shaped not only by the respective culture but also by the habitus and capital of the parents. The resultant experiences of the parents were shown to have influenced their perceptions about norms and values they wanted to instill in their children, which were equally shaped and structured by the field structures, albeit differently, according to the respective field positions of the individual parents. Furthermore, in exploring parental perception about the various aspects of education, I have shown that culture, class, capital and habitus played a significant role in structuring parents' views about how they viewed education in their own life and the varying and diverse perspectives they held about the education of their children. An understanding of these perspectives and backgrounds of the parents was therefore essential to help us understand the dynamics of their communication, practices and relationship with the schools of their children, to which I now turn in the following chapter.

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## **Chapter Eight — Parents and their Children’s School: Perceptions of Relations with School and Teachers**

In this chapter, the focus is on parental perception of interaction and communication with teachers and school. The chapter consists of five sections. The first section is about communication dynamics of parents, which explores diversity and dimensions of parental perception and experience of communication with teachers. The next section builds on and extends the discussion by analysing and discussing communication uncertainties, inhibitions or stereotypes of parents with teachers that underpinned parental habitus. The third section considers parental perception of power relations with teachers. This section discusses the issue of class, status, and capital that formed the basis of the dynamics of parental perception of power relations with the teachers and school. The fourth section explores parental perception of communication barriers with teachers. The section analyses various parental perceptions and experiences of obstacles to their communication with school, which as a barrier, issues of time and work constraints and teacher attitude, authority and lack of accountability as barriers. The fifth section explores parental perception of institutional habitus and culture and its relationship with the communication dynamics of parents. The section focuses on the role of structural discontinuities, the dynamics of power relations and class, the issue of giving importance to and valuing parents and parental perception of the ‘field’ culture of school.

### **8.1 Communication dynamics of parents: diversity and dimensions of parental habitus**

The focus of this section is on communication dynamics of parents with teachers. The section comprises of five sections. The first section discusses how some parents mobilise social and cultural capital as an advantage for communication and contact with teachers. The second section considers the use of ‘credit slips’ as a communication strategy that parents use to resolve/solve any issue or matter their children face in school. The next section throws some light on mothers’ perception of communication with teachers and school. It discusses that mothers rarely visit their daughters’ school and considers the implicit aspects of communication of mothers with their daughters’ school. The fourth section discusses that most parents are aware and willing to communicate with teachers but are reluctant and distanced from

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schools and therefore literally have no contact with teachers. The fifth section discusses that most parents are willing to communicate with teachers; many parents are of the view that the initiative needs to come from school and teachers.

### **8.1.1 Invoking and mobilising social and cultural capital**

The findings suggest that whilst most parents did not communicate with teachers or visit school, some parents appeared to have some links and contact with some teachers. These parents seemed more informed and knowledgeable about the structural dynamics of the school and about the enquiries they needed to make from the teachers about their children. The data analysis suggests that, to keep themselves informed of their children's progress and related issues, the parents seemed to have deployed and were using their social links and cultural capital to gain access to school and teachers. Such parental contact with school therefore was structured directly (physically) and indirectly (by proxy through teachers). The direct parental communication meant personal visits to school and meeting the teachers or principal. This also entailed that these parents had foresight in extending and strengthening their social network to have mobile phone numbers of teachers for urgent contact when the parents could not visit the school personally. Given the individual variations between parents, one parent described the process and importance of communication and contact with teachers and school in the following words:

... in the last year I have paid three or four visits [to school]. My visits have mostly been focused around enquiring about the [academic] status of my child. Besides, I have been in contact with [some] teachers, I have got their [mobile] phone numbers and when I am busy I would just call and discuss issues regarding my child. The principal [a childhood schoolfellow] knows that my child is studying here and I contact him regarding his progress as well. It is very important that a father enquires about the progress of his son and a mother enquires about the progress of her daughter. When parents are in contact with teachers, children are then conscious about their studies and academic standing in the class; thus children are somewhat concerned [worried] when present in school. (Parent, UBS)

In a similar thread, one other parent expressed the following views regarding communication with teachers and visits to school:

I visit school when I am invited by teachers and I also visit school on my own to check whether my son is attending school regularly or not. ... After every two or three months [I will visit school]. I also used to contact one of the form masters, Mr. Majeed, here, who was known to me. I used to call him and he would give me information about my son and about his [academic] performance. He would keep an eye on him [the child]. (Parent, UBS)

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As the quotations above show, in many ways the initiative of communication with teachers and school appeared to come from the parents themselves rather than due to a concerted and structured approach from the school administration. The important thing to reiterate here is that through longstanding relations, contact and acquaintance with some of the staff at school, these and such other parents had enhanced their social and cultural capital which they appropriated to make the system (field) work for them. In other words, unlike the research literature on the class dynamics of parent-teacher relations (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a), the difference or gap between the class structure relations of the perceived middle-class teachers and working-class parents did not appear as a constraint for the parents who knew teachers beforehand, so long as the parents could mobilise and instigate their social and cultural connections. This is an important point, which a number of parents seemed to make in both the urban and rural boys' school for communication with some teachers and structuring their visits to school, if and when, they needed to.

Moreover, as also discussed in Chapters Five and Six, school-to-parent and teacher-to-parent communication did not appear to have a well-defined structure, unless it was some chronic conduct, moral or issues of attendance and academic weakness of students. Therefore, in the majority of cases of parent communication with school, it appeared that it was the parents themselves who took the initiative and had formed informal connections with teachers by appropriating their social and cultural capital and resources, and therefore to successfully manoeuvre through the otherwise uninviting and impenetrable field structures of school. Moreover, due to such alliances and understandings, reinforced by the cultural conditioning and dynamics, many parents were not only deferent to teacher authority but also saw them as *in loco parentis*. For many parents, this not only meant 'having an eye' on the conduct of the child but it also implied that teachers expected and instituted the culturally desired appropriate form of behaviour of children.

Alongside the above pattern of parental communication, the evidence gleaned from the data also suggests that some parents appeared to communicate indirectly or through proxy by having acquaintances or networks with some teachers in their respective spheres of professional and social life, even though not visiting school at all. Given the prevailing field environment of school and the corresponding culture

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outside school, some parents therefore did not feel any need to visit school, as they appeared to keep themselves informed of their children's issues and concerns through their connections with teachers:

I have never felt any need for it. Because I have shown a way to my child that this is the procedure [for doing things in school]. I am in the market place doing my job, and meet with and see different people; I see teachers [as well], who are known to me and therefore they know about my son in the school.  
(Parent, UBS)

As the above quotation might reveal, in order to compensate himself for the weak structural links with school, the parent seemed to have adapted himself at least in two manners. Firstly, the parent appeared to have enough knowledge of what parents need to know about their children in school and although the parent did not visit school personally, there is some indication that through conversation at home the parent kept himself informed and guided his child about the school matters. Secondly, the parent's representation or communication with school through an indirect or a proxy link was due to the teachers who were either known to him because of his job, or because the teachers themselves were involved in the same business in the same market. This pattern of communication seemed to be one of the reasons due to which some parents did not feel any need to visit school. In some ways, in such and similar parent-teacher communication, there was also a strong sense of the use of 'credit-slips,' which I discuss below in detail.

### **8.1.2 The dynamics of using 'credit slips'**

For Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) the way people use and maintain their relationships and associations, with other people within a group or in community, position them to accrue profits or credits from their connections, individually and collectively. The evidence from the parents' data also suggests that for some parents communication with teachers seemed to involve building personal relationships underpinned by the give and take of credit and favours of a reciprocal nature, for which Coleman uses the term 'credit slip.' For some parents therefore a favour done for them by some teachers in some ways implied that they owed a 'credit slip' to be repaid in whatever kind they were capable of, when the 'credit slip' was called for. Moreover, and more importantly, the credit slips teachers hold would assume to have double power because of the culturally reinforced status and position of the public school teachers and school vis-à-vis the working-class parents. The

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following excerpt might provide some understanding into how a perceived favour can become a credit slip for later use:

Guardian: Well, I have visited [my brothers' school], occasionally, but not many times, just once.

MS: When was that?

Guardian: It was the issue of transfer [admission] of my brothers from the primary to the secondary school. Although there were no places for more students, Mr. MT [teacher at the school] was kind enough to admit my brothers to the school. (Guardian, RBS)

Whilst the guardian claimed to have paid only one visit to school, the 'favour' done by the concerned teacher for admitting his brothers to school meant that there was an expectation of an 'obligation' on the part of the guardian to repay the 'credit slip' or reciprocate according to his potential. Due to the complexity of the dynamics of parental interaction and communication and of what one might be willing to share, to pin down and explore such a pattern of communication or relation of parents with teachers was an arduous task. It therefore required a thorough understanding and appreciation of the cultural sensitivities and intricacies of relations, and of the dynamics of how people deploy their associations and relationships to seek profits or credits from their connections, which I argue might mean thinking with/through parental habitus. There was therefore a need for me as a researcher and as an insider to explore the leads, which initially parents may not have considered exhaustively. To reciprocate for a credit slip one owes therefore becomes evident when one considers the following conversation:

Guardian: ... Whenever, I need to talk to my brothers about something urgent, then I go to school.

MS: But you have only visited the school once!

Guardian: Well, sometimes ... I had visited [school] one more time as well. But that visit was just casual, and I met the teacher.

MS: Which teacher was that?

Guardian: It was Mr MT. There was some [masonry] work to be done in his home, and he wanted me to prepare an estimate for the work he wanted to do. I did the estimate and then came back. They [brothers] had apprised the teacher of my profession. (Guardian, RBS)

As discussed in **Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.4)**, many teachers expressed their views that it was not uncommon for some teachers to locate such students in the classroom or

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school whose fathers could help solve their personal problems or matters. For many parents, especially in the rural context, the use of such ‘credit slips’ meant culturally sanctioned honour to help teachers in their matters and problems. For some parents it seemed to mean that developing such a bond and relationship with teachers implied that the teachers would give more attention to their children in school and help them personally in their numerous personal, social and academic issues and concerns.

### **8.1.3 Mothers and communication practices**

The findings suggest that most mothers generally did not communicate with the school on their own. The picture that emerges from the data shows that as the patriarchal family values underpinned the socially and culturally situated role of women in public life, especially in the rural cultures, mothers rarely had any proactive role in the community life. Therefore, it may not come as a surprise that most mothers rarely visited school:

Parent: Occasionally [I will visit my daughter’s school], whenever her teacher asks for a visit. I don’t visit [school] on my own.

I: For what purpose have you visited your daughter’s school until now?

Parent: The purpose of my first visit to the school was to admit my daughter. Then I went to enquire about which type of [text] books were needed in the class [that were to be provided free by the school]. Since the books were not to be available for two weeks, my husband then bought those from the market. (Parent, UGS)

Like most fathers, communication of the mothers with the school seemed to fit a pattern in which the mothers would accompany their daughters to school when admitting them and mostly would not revisit the school unless there was a major concern, an issue or a problem with their daughter:

Parent: We used to regularly visit my daughter’s primary school, or would send someone else [from relatives] to enquire about school matters. However, I have visited the secondary school [of my daughter] a couple of times [in around five years].

I: When did you last visit your daughter’s school?

Parent: I paid a visit to the school when we were admitting my daughter in 6<sup>th</sup> class. Since then, as there has not been any major issue with her or with her education, I have not visited the school. (Parent, UGS)

As the above excerpt also indicates, research suggests that parents are generally more involved in their children’s primary school (e.g. Crozier 2000; Crozier & Reay 2005a,

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2005b; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a; Wolfendale 1992) and tend to communicate less frequently with the secondary school of their children (e.g. Crozier 2000; Crozier & Davies 2007; Connell *et al.* 1982). The findings suggest that mothers “rarely intervened [or communicated with teachers] and tended to do so only within the non-academic spheres” [and therefore] “tended to be reactive rather than proactive” (Crozier 1997:192); most of the female teachers were also of this view (see **Chapter Five** and **Six**). Moreover, implicit in the communication dynamics of mothers with the school of their daughters was that in many of the matters it was the fathers or some other male relation who tended to “play a more ‘front of stage role’” (Crozier & Davies 2006:680-81). However, in most cases the fathers’ visits were described as ‘reactive’ which involved conduct or academic issues of their daughters or in some cases to confront principal and teachers, a view shared and experienced by many teachers (see **Chapters Five** and **Six**).

#### **8.1.4 Parents are ‘aware,’ ‘willing,’ but reluctant and distanced**

Although very few parents appeared to show that they actually had some contact with some teachers and visited school intermittently, the data analysis indicates that when asked about communicating with teachers and visiting school, most parents had a clearer understanding and awareness of the nature of enquiries they needed to make about their children. Moreover, whilst there were some differences amongst the parents between the need of a visit to school, all parents were unequivocal in their support for school and many parents were willing to communicate with school at all times, and were even willing to sacrifice their time and resources for this matter. However, in practice, most parents were distant from the actual life of school and many parents were reluctant to visit school due to a number of reasons, such as a lack of confidence in their abilities, lack of communication, culture etc. It was probably for such reasons that most parents seemed to have developed their respective strategies and procedures of school enquiries from their children at home. Many of them though were aware of the nature and purposes of communication or visit to school, they seemed to gloss over their distance or gap from school, by saying that:

According to need, [one should go to school]. Parents must be aware of their children that how their child behaves in school; how he interacts in school and what his academic performance is. I always ask about issues of school (education etc.) from my son. (Parent, UBS)

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Whilst most parents were aware about the importance and significance of visits to school and about the nature and frequency of these visits, most of them did not structure their visits to schools in the manner they expressed about it. It became clear that what they meant did not mean what they actually did; hence, there were differences in their accounts:

Parent: Actually, a father must visit his child's school whether it is on a monthly, quarterly or on an annual basis, [to] meet with teachers [and] to exchange information about one's child.

MS: How many times have you met with the teachers of your child?

Parent: Since my child's promotion to this [secondary] school from the middle school, I have not visited the school or teachers [in around two years or so].

MS: But you are saying that one should visit school frequently.

Parent: I used to come to school and would leave my child at the [school] gate, and would go for my work. Therefore, I did not know, which teachers from our locality were teaching here. So, when you don't enter the school, you don't get to know about the teachers and school.

MS: Does it mean that you were not aware of whether you should have accessed school beyond the school gates?

Parent: Exactly, I was not aware about this. Now, occasionally I will visit my child's school and meet with teachers, when I am off from my work or when I don't find any work... (Parent, RBS)

This suggests that parents had a clear understanding of the nature of their visits to school, but in practice, parental habitus and teacher (institutional) habitus were generally structured in a way that neither of them took the initiative to engage at a deeper level 'beyond the school gates.' Indeed, there were understandably issues around teacher power and visible and invisible impediments of schools, which seemed to have structured parental perception of the separate roles of home and school. However, for some parents (as detailed above) the research experience itself seemed to have changed their perception about changing their practice of visiting school and to make enquiries from teachers about their children.

### **8.1.5 Parental communication: the initiative needs to come from school**

It was evident from the data analysis that despite their many issues, problems and preoccupations, most parents were willing to communicate with school and wanted the best for their children by being supportive of teachers and school. Many of them were even prepared to offer any help according to their capacities and potentials. However, despite all this, the only concern of many parents was that the school needed to take the lead and initiative in communicating with parents:

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No, I don't know anything about this [PTA]. To date I have not been involved in anything like this, but I am willing to co-operate and participate in activities and programmes [in school] if my presence is needed. But the question is that I am approached for this. As you [MS] requested for participation [in research], I responded positively. (Parent, UBS)

One other parent commented:

It is the same as you asked us to come to school and we came [to attend this FGD]. So in the same manner, if a teacher asks our children for a visit to school, I would be more than happy to come and discuss issues of my child. However, to date, I have not been asked to visit school, neither do I know which teachers are teaching my child at school. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

For others visiting school was a matter of priority and necessity:

... When my presence was needed today, I was told [by my son] that teachers have called for your visit to school, I came [here] and left [did not go to] my work. I considered this as a necessity and more important than my work [job] today. (Parent, RBS)

Whilst many parents had showed their willingness for school visits and participation in school activities, the actual processes of communication were more complex and overlapping in a number of ways, involving the dynamics of both home and school life. Although, teachers had a major role in the way communication practices were structured with parents, the quality of school life seemed to determine whether the involvement of parents was considered worthwhile in school and in what manner. Furthermore, since the schools operated as a microcosm within the social system (Joseph 1996), mirroring the 'real life,' the external social and community influences largely determined and in many ways dictated the nature of communication practices within school and with the stakeholders (i.e. with parents). Most parents though did not visit school personally and seemed to implicate teachers for their non-involvement; they did so because they had a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990b), due to which their habitus and practices were structured accordingly. Therefore, parents as active members of this 'game' knew how and in what circumstances they needed to communicate with the school, such as when there was a brawl, or conduct or moral issue involving their children.

### **8.1.6 Section summary**

To summarise, most parents appreciated and acknowledged the importance of parental visits to school and had a clear understanding of the specifics of what and how they needed to enquire about their children from teachers. However, very few parents ever visited school. The ones who claimed to have been communicating with

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teachers were those parents who seemed to have been deploying their social and cultural capital to gain access to the school. There was also some evidence of parent-teacher contact using ‘credit slips,’ which seemed to have diverse meaning and usage. For some parents (and some teachers) whilst it meant ‘out of the way’ favours reciprocally, for others it meant delegating some or most of their parental responsibilities of their children to teachers because of their social/clan connections or solidarities. In the case of mothers, like fathers, they had either not paid any visit to school or visited their daughters’ school only a few times, mostly at the time of admitting them to school. There were also those parents who wanted to visit school but due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the school structures and dynamics, did not feel confident. The findings also suggest that whilst most parents were willing to visit school, they really wanted that the school should initiate contact with them. In the section that follows, I discuss and explore parental communication issues and concerns with school and teachers.

## **8.2 Communication incongruence or structural discordance? decoding communication dynamics**

This section builds on the discussion of the previous section and, as the heading indicates, aims to decipher parental perception of communication incongruence and related constructs. The section consists of three sections. The first section considers parental perception of the incompatibility of communication with the school and teachers and discusses that whilst parents have sufficient understanding and experience of the dynamics of human interaction, most parents with less stock of cultural capital do not feel confident to interact with teachers on equal terms. The next section explores parental perception of the dynamics of need-based communication with school and explains that whilst most parents consider visiting school important, their emphasis on ‘need’ as a basis of a visit to school means glossing over the perceived and actual inadequacies of communication gaps with the school. Section three discusses the theme of parental perception of deference to teacher authority and school and argues that for most parents home and school operate as separate ‘fields’ and thereby for parents the responsibility of the education of children lie with teachers and school.

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### 8.2.1 'I feel inferior wherever I go': 'incompatibility of communication' as a stereotype?

The findings suggest that most parents were wary of their communication incoherence with teachers, which many of them attributed to their difference in or lack of appropriate education. Therefore, the perception of not properly communicating with teachers seemed deeply embedded in the structure of the habitus of most parents, which resonated with their views and experiences that they shared in the interviews and discussions. Thus, for most parents communication with the school was riddled with power relations, which for many parents consequently led to the feeling of incompatibility of communication and a sense of being inferior, when they compared themselves with teachers:

I did not have much time to go to school and as a result, since being uneducated, cannot sit in the company of educated people; I feel inferior wherever I go. I don't want to go to a place where I don't find people like me, where I feel incompatibility of communication. For instance, an educated person would talk to an educated person [on their respective mental levels] and a skilled worker would talk to a skilled worker on the same lines. So every person keeps to one's own society [company]. (Parent, UBS)

There is a clear evidence here that suggests that such parents' habitus constructed, shaped and structured through their past and historical contexts had a manifestation for and influenced their engagement patterns with teachers. This is not to suggest that these parents did not know about the dynamics of relations and interactions of various spheres. Rather they had years of experience behind them through which they reflected on and analysed the reasons that lay in the way of their effective communication with teachers. For these parents, therefore, it was the matter of the difference of medium or field, the logic of practice of which was rooted in education, language structures and the related structural dynamics. More specifically, whilst they had an appreciation for a 'feel for the game,' most of the parents were aware that they did not possess the right tools to appropriate the structure and practices of the 'game' to their advantage. This inadequacy of communication and the respective role of the parents within the communication dynamics led some parents to question the very purpose of visiting school:

... When I am not aware of things [means unable to talk and communicate about issues of education], what I would say [converse] to the teachers then. (Parent, UBS)

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There was the issue of the institutional habitus that in many ways operated in isolation from parents, due to which in most cases there was the lack of communication culture between parents and teachers (see **Chapters Five and Six**). However, the fact that most parents' education was not comparable with that of the teachers meant that differences in cultural capital for the parents had strong implications for their communication incoherence and structural dissimilarities with the teachers and schools.

### **8.2.2 'When there is no need, one should not visit [school]': the dynamics of 'need-based' communication**

The data analysis reveals a contradictory picture of parental perception of a visit to school. As discussed in Section 8.1, whilst most parents had a clear understanding of the specifics of what they needed to know or ask about their children from teachers, most of them did not have a structure and process in place for visiting school, or to make enquiries about their children from teachers. When asked about a school visit, most of the parents would respond that when they felt any 'need' then they would visit the school or contact teachers. Many parents therefore, did not delve into the processes and procedures of their visits and instead relied on the generic use of 'need' as the prerequisite for their visits. The nature of this narrative posed some questions.

This meant on the one hand a deliberate attempt on the part of the many parents to gloss over the gaps in their contact with school, as in most cases most parents did not communicate with school. On the other hand, it meant that the parents provided 'need' as a justification and evidence that since they did not have any issues, they did not feel any 'need' to visit school and to have a contact with teachers. Moreover, for many of the parents, it was their first (and probably their only) chance to have come across such an (research) experience in which they were required to think about things they would not have given any serious thought, and hence had to come up with an appropriate answer to justify their position. For the many such parents, the consideration of 'need' as the basis of their contact with the school therefore seemed a suitable proposition and a catch phrase.

As one might imagine, given the differences in their habitus and (field) positions, parental responses varied to the question of a school visit as 'need-based' criteria. For some parents, however, the issue of parental contact with school was a matter of

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student numbers, which they justified from the school-side as problematic in practice, and therefore argued and suggested a ‘need’ based approach or contact with school:

Well, I think that given the number of students in a class which is usually around 100 plus, if on a daily basis around 10-15 fathers visit school, then teachers would say “who they should give time to: teach the students or spend time with fathers.” If the visit is regarding some pressing need [related to students], then it is ok. Otherwise, out of the fathers of 100 students, at least 10-12 would be visiting per day, which would mean that teachers would not be able to take their classes. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

Given that the overcrowded classrooms were mostly an issue in the urban schools and not so in the rural context, the parent seemed to have made a valid point here about the frequency of parental visits to school, if and when they all started thinking of having regular contact with the school. However, the important point here is that it was not the parents’ job to think and argue from the school’s perspective; rather the parents should have been focusing on how best they could positively contribute towards the effective learning experiences for their children. Moreover, it should have been the school administration to have come up with a plan of inviting and involving parents in the school on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis, and accommodating any number of parents. Given this background of school knowledge and issues of overcrowded classrooms, many parents therefore emphasised their visits to school on the ‘need’ that seemed to imply extenuating circumstances.

As I also indicated in the introductory paragraphs of this section, for many parents since taking part in the research was the first experience to think and consider their role and position about communication with school, it appeared that the parents had to think in real-time to justify their views concerning ‘need’ as the basis of their visit to school:

MS: How many times have you considered this (visit to school) as a necessity, meaning how many times have you visited school?

Parent: Me? [Reluctance and judging what to say] [...] Many [...] I come to school, when it is time, and there is some message, I come straight away.

MS: Do teachers call you to visit or ...?

Parent: It can be teachers or my children will tell me to go with them to school, then I visit school. There is no need [for a visit usually] as they go and study [at school], I enquire from them at home, [and tell them] to study at home in the afternoon, so that you [the children] may learn something. (Parent, RBS)

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In a similar vein, many parents were also of the view that communication with the school of their children was important only when a visit to school was inevitable such as when there were some conduct or attendance problems with children, though in practice they did not visit. Most parents therefore were entirely content and satisfied with the daily school routine of their children, which they perceived as the children's academic and personal progress. Therefore, for many parents since their own children were not having any problems for which they said one would need to visit school, they argued that there was no point of visiting school:

Parent: Certainly, when the [circumstances] necessitate, then you will need to visit school. Definitely, you need to ask about your child, there are many teachers here.

MS: So, what sort of questions need to be asked about the child?

Parent: The enquiries, which need to be made, are: whether the child is coming to school or not or playing truant. I ask him whether he is regular in going to school. Apart from this, I will ask his class-fellows about his regularity; they would say that he was at school. When there is no need, one should not visit [school]. (Parent, RBS)

Others clarified this point further in more detail:

Parent: As I [usually] don't go [to school] how would I get to know about teachers, when I don't have anything to do in school?

MS: Is visiting school not important?

Parent: When there is no problem with your child, then what's the point of visiting school. However, when the child is ill or when there are examination times, then one can go and ask about the situation [of your child], that what was the matter. For that [examination related affairs] itself, I have not visited school, it is usually his cousin who would accompany him, and ask about why my child was given less marks or why his marks were allotted to other students. (Parent, RBS)

As might also be clear from the above excerpt, the findings suggest that most parents had adopted a 'hands off' approach in communication matters with the school and teachers. For many parents therefore their visit to school was preconditioned to only those instances when their children faced problems, and that itself only occurred in very rare cases.

Moreover, as has also been mentioned in the quotation above, the findings also reveal that for many parents the 'need' as the basis of visit to school had an added meaning and context, i.e. when examinations were conducted and in issues regarding the

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promotion of their children to the next class. This was an issue, which a number of teachers also shared and experienced when parents communicated with or visited them (see **Chapters Five and Six**). The data analysis and my own experience of the field suggests that parental habitus and field dynamics were structured in a particular fashion in that for many parents promotion of their children to the next class, at times through their ‘connections’ and probably through ‘any’ or ‘various’ means, was the benchmark of their children’s progress. Many teachers therefore mentioned this particular aspect of parental communication, that near to or around examination time a good number of parents were more inclined to visit them and to plead for their children’s promotion, either by making personal requests or using their social links of the people the parents and teachers knew mutually (see **Chapters Five and Six**).

### **8.2.3 Its just like ‘herding the sheep towards the barn’: is it a matter of ‘trust,’ ‘faith’ and deference?**

There was much evidence in the parents’ data that supported that the majority of the parents perceived home and school as having separate roles and responsibilities and therefore many parents considered the education of their children to be the responsibility of teachers and school. However, it was far from such a simplistic representation, as a number of factors and processes seemed to have structured parental perceptions about communication with teachers, such as parents’ educational background, their class dynamics and the related role of culture in it. Whilst many parents overtly considered that they had an equal share and responsibility for what the school did for their children, in practice they did not engage in the way they described what their relationship with school entailed. However, since most parents could not do what they desired to do, most of them therefore considered their responsibility as providing for the various material resources (given their respective abilities and means) and sending their children to school, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

Parent: Well, even if Mr. TK [teacher] pleads incessantly [to come to school], I will not give him time [by visiting school]; he himself is responsible [for teaching, and problems of students].

MS: Of what?

Parent: We don’t give time; we send our children to them because we know that they are good [people] as we personally know him and his family through generations. The other thing is that we have a complete faith in teachers that they are not bad people; they get their salaries for this

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[teaching], so they will not teach bad things to any child. ... I have trust in all teachers that they would teach responsibly.

MS: How did you build this trust?

Parent: This trust has been made because this place [school] is not a place of bad people; this is a place of training and education, where teachers enlighten the lives or future of children. ... [Another evidence of trust in teachers is that] My son who has reached the 10<sup>th</sup> class, since starting this school has never failed any class. This also gives me an indication that teachers are working hard with our children. ... The majority of our children's interaction is with teachers; their [children's] only purpose at home is just to spend night [to sleep] and get involved in other household tasks. Our responsibility of sending the children [to school] is like herding the sheep towards the barn. (Parent, FGD, RBS)

The parent's expression of sending children to school just like 'herding the sheep towards the barn' says it all. The findings suggest that a number of factors and processes seemed to have shaped and structured such a perception of the parents about their contact with teachers. Some of these factors pertained to the perceived position of teachers and school vis-à-vis the predominantly working-class parents in their respective social context. These involved differences in and appropriation of the habitus and capital, and the related differences of power relations between the parents and teachers.

Most of these factors seemed strongly embedded in the parents' habitus, and their class and social contexts. Since the findings suggest that for most parents there were huge differences between their habitus and that of the teachers, there were therefore strong indications that the related social conditioning and contexts had structured parental perceptions in a way that they mostly saw teachers as responsible for most of the pedagogic issues of children. Since these parents did not have the appropriate tools to delve into the processes and factors that structured the lives of school and of the teachers within it, most of them appeared detached from the school affairs. Moreover, they therefore considered it natural to be deferent to teachers and to have 'trust' and 'faith' in whatever the teachers did in school, which resonates strongly with similar findings reported in research in the British context on Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents (Crozier & Davies 2007:309). It may therefore be no wonder that many of the parents considered the criteria of their child's progress as progression into the next class(es), by which they also implied that the teachers were working hard, which was just what they needed.

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#### **8.2.4 Section summary**

This section has argued that parental communication with teachers was strongly influenced by their class and relative social and cultural capital standing, which shaped and informed parental habitus accordingly. In other words, the economic status of parents and their educational levels appeared to have important implications for parental communication with teachers. Due to their seemingly educational disadvantaged position, many parents did not find it comfortable and easy to visit school and converse with teachers on an equal basis about aspects of school life. Many parents were also of the view that communication with school was required only when they felt a pressing need or when their child had some conduct or attendance problem. Similarly, most parents were also of the view that if their children were attending schools regularly then it meant that they were making good academic and personal progress. Moreover, many parents expressed their dependency on teachers in school matters, showing a desire to delegate many and in some cases most of the responsibilities of their children's upbringing to the teachers and school, and were more inclined towards deference to teacher authority. In addition to the above, most parents perceived power dynamics as an important issue in their communication with teachers, which I now discuss in the section that follows.

#### **8.3 Perceptions of power dynamics**

The focus of this section is on parents' perception of power relations with teachers and school. Writers argue that power is implicit in and central to any human interaction (Das 2007). Bourdieu's (1996) main contention is that the interplay between people's interaction is a matter of power relations, which depends on the relative field positions of the agents, the amount of capital (power) they possess and their ability of appropriating the structure and practices within the field, to maintain and enhance their respective social positions. Since 'power' entails the ability of a person to apply sanctions, both in negative and positive terms (Dodson 1962), the social conditions and the perception of the positioning and use of power would largely determine the quality of interaction between various agents (such as between parents and teachers) within a given social setting. Therefore, like other social spaces, schools are places where power relations are manifested in varying forms in social interactions between people (Das 2007). In school, teachers generally wield power as a group and professionals, who have "the capacity to make [their] interests felt ... in

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communal decision making processes” (Dodson 1962:203). It implies that being in a powerful position, it is the responsibility of teachers to contact and involve parents in school in matters relating to their children (Gestwicki 2000; Hanhan 2003). However, there is considerable research to suggest that generally for the working-class parents, teacher power pose many problems. There is longstanding research evidence to support that working-class parents (since socially, economically and educationally are at a disadvantage), as a group do not have enough ‘voice.’ This has implications of powerlessness at an individual and at a collective level for parents (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a). Some parents therefore shared their views as follows:

Whom I can enquire from? Who will listen to a lone parent’s voice? [It could only be when] fathers get together and raise their concern with an elder or with the principal that what has been happening here, our children come to school, what have they learned? ... (Parent, UBS)

This section, therefore, maps the issues of power from the parents’ perspectives into three sections. The first section considers the role of class and capital in power relations. It teases out how being dispossessed by the perceptions of these, reinforced by the structural dynamics of the various social fields, creates the feelings of being ‘low’ (in distance and status terms) and a sense of being inferior and hence powerlessness in working-class parents. The second section looks into the field position of school and its related cultural implication and significance, which for the majority of parents acts as a unique power bastion that they see difficult to surmount. The third section explores the theme of how even those parents who have some understanding of the dynamics of power relations with teachers, given their constraints and the related cultural conditions, cannot overcome the imbalance in power relations.

### **8.3.1 ‘I am a poor man ... I have nothing except dirt’: status, class and capital in power relations**

The findings reveal that for most parents power dynamics with teachers had deep-seated status, class and cultural capital implications. For most parents, therefore, their social class and education were recurrent themes that underpinned their perception of imbalance in power relations with teachers, which led many parents to see their relations with teachers fraught with problems and concerns. Thus, for most parents, school was a place of power, where the perception of power was deeply embedded in

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the teachers' position and authority, due to their perceived social and educational advantage. Moreover, for most parents, in most cases teacher power appeared strongly institutionalised in schools; teacher power in schools resides in a bureaucratic 'top-down' hierarchy, at the bottom of which are students and parents (Oplatka 2004; Simkins *et al.* 1998; Simkins *et al.* 2003). What it implied in Bourdieu's (1996:263-99) language is that the carefully orchestrated 'game,' did not appear as a 'level playing field' for all (especially parents), had important stakes for people with power i.e. teachers, who seemed to protect their 'position,' maintain their 'equilibrium,' and retain their 'dominance.' Although most parents did not visit school or had contact with teachers, since they were a part and had a role in the 'game,' many of them therefore felt and experienced difference in power relations and a feeling of inferiority:

I regard my status as inferior [submissive] to teachers. (Parent, UBS)

I feel myself as inferior, in terms of my education as well as my status and the post [I work in]. They [teachers] have got good education and knowledge and have been guiding people [students] in their lives. (Parent, UBS)

I see myself as a destitute, poor person. After all, they are teachers, I am a poor man, they have education, and I have nothing except dirt. (Parent, RBS)

Most parents were cognisant of the structure and dynamics of the 'game' of power in which one's status and capital made a huge difference to one's relative position in the power continuum. Whilst most parents did not have any personal or direct contact with teachers and school, their difference of status and capital, underpinned by the cultural notions of deference and submission to teachers meant that, the dynamics of power was deeply entrenched in their habitus. It is worth pointing here that although in some cases there were not huge differences between the parents and teachers, at least in social class terms, some parents considered their status and role below that of teachers. It therefore meant that the difference between educational levels of parents and teachers did seem to contribute to parental perception of differences in the amount and appropriation of cultural capital (education or power). Moreover, the socially, culturally and in some ways religiously reinforced image and status of the teacher also seemed to have contributed to the working-class parents' perception of power difference.

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In addition to the above metaphors that the parents used to sketch and portray their power relations with teachers, for others the perception of power dynamics with teachers was a matter of difference of height and strength:

I would see myself at a low level [compared to teachers]. Because they are teachers, and because they are teachers of our children, I would see myself as a weak person. Because teachers have knowledge [education], we need to respect them. (Parent, RBS)

In a similar vein, for other respondents it was not just about sitting face-to-face or talking to teachers; it was more of a difference between capital and habitus, implying investment of time and resources, which created a difference of power and status between teachers and parents:

Parent: I don't consider myself equal to them [teachers].

MS: Why?

Parent: I am below their level, because they are teachers, they know [have knowledge]. I don't know to the extent to which you [me as teacher/researcher] know.

MS: But we are [equal by] sitting in front of each other.

Parent: [Although] we are sitting face-to-face to one another, I cannot match your brain, your thinking and I cannot reach/attain your status; I am lying deep-down at zero level.

MS: What do you mean; can you explain this more?

Parent: Although, we are sitting in front of each other I cannot reach to your status. Every person has their own status and position—the more you go up the stairs, the higher you go [in status].

MS: How?

Parent: The analogy of education is like you are high [in status]. It means that we need to be respectful [to teachers]. As they are teachers, they have considerable rights because they teach your child. (Parent, RBS)

For many parents, there was therefore a deeply embedded and continuous cyclic process of comparing and contrasting differences of their status, class and education that seemed to have reinforced and conditioned the parents' difference of power with teachers, which consequently reinforced parental perception of the limits and abilities about the power they could exercise in the field of school. Moreover, whilst the parents did not feel that they had the appropriate tools to make a difference to the power continuum with teachers, they seemed to have an effective understanding and appreciation of how power was used and appropriated in the various social settings. In other words, parental understanding of the working of the school and the use of power in it mirrored their everyday life experiences in which class and capital were the descriptors of status, power and honour. Therefore, alongside the dynamics of class

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and education, the role of culture had been important as in many ways the prevailing structure of culture powerfully reinforced parental perception of their difference of power structures with teachers.

The findings also show that, whilst the parents who talked about their perception of power relations with teachers used an array of metaphors to describe how they viewed the difference in power between themselves and teachers, for some other respondents the imbalance in power was because of not being able to appropriate the required structure of language:

I tell them [teachers/educated people] that I am illiterate and don't know much. I am apologetic of saying something, which may not be according to the decorum. An uneducated person compared to an educated person is like a person at a very low level, beneath that level you don't expect that someone would fall [*lie*]. [...] Whenever I interact with educated people, I feel like a duffer. I would think that had I done education, at least my conversation with them would be right. (Guardian, RBS)

Many of the parents tended to acknowledge and show that they did not know much about the school practices because of their experiences and the related difference of class and capital. Yet they had considerable insight and understanding of the structure and dynamics of the social and historical processes (or in other words their *habitus*) through which they compared and contrasted the factors that contributed to the imbalance in power relations. For instance, at its basic level language is an important tool of communication. Yet the perception of it changes to domination and power when it is used as a vehicle for enhancing ones position. This is what some of the participants seemed to imply that resonated with the reflections of the interviewee in the above excerpt.

### **8.3.2 'I cannot make them work on my terms, because they are serving our children': powerlessness in power relations**

The parents' data spoke volumes of how power was deeply implicit in the parents' perception and experience of imbalance in power relations with teachers, even for those parents who claimed to have some contact with teachers within school. The data analysis makes clear that for most parents their class and capital were instrumental in and played a huge role in the power dynamics that structured their communication with teachers. Moreover, the role of culture was also important in that it reinforced parental perception of their difference between position and status to that of teachers:

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Absolutely, I am ready at all times for a weekly visit. All the school needs is to inform me and tell me the time. I cannot make them [school/teachers] work on my terms, because they are serving our children; we [fathers/parents] would work on their [school's] terms. They would give us time and we would adjust our circumstances accordingly. (Parent, UBS)

As might be evident from the above excerpt, many parents were of the view that since the teachers were 'serving their children,' they could not see themselves equal in power to them. For most parents the perception of teacher power was so deeply ingrained in their habitus that to secede from their notions of deference and authority of teachers and to approach them as equals seemed an improbable task. Moreover, whilst some parents appeared to have some understanding of the dynamics of school structures and function, it seemed that to gloss over their lack of power, they seemed to argue in teachers' favour and to follow their suggestions verbatim:

... [in my opinion] they have got limited time. In that [time], would they [teachers] attend their classes or would they work on our suggestions. Each class accommodates at least 50 students, so they cannot work on the suggestions of 50 fathers. Fifty people should work according to their suggestions, and I consider this to be feasible. (Parent, UBS)

It appears interesting that although for most parents power dynamics was mostly skewed in favour of teachers, most of them appeared to show considerable willingness and eagerness to have been involved in school and be in contact with teachers, provided they were approached for the purpose. Understandably, a number of issues seemed to have hampered the work of teachers, which also had implications for the overall institutional habitus in the schools, especially in the urban ones. However, there was evidence in teachers' data that when some teachers and principals (of the rural schools) wanted to engage with parents, they managed to do so successfully. In this manner, the cultural deference to teacher authority seemed to imply that teachers could exercise power positively in involving parents and working with them to improve learning experiences for children.

### **8.3.3 Grappling with teacher power: the interplay between parental habitus and culture**

Whilst most parents did not appear to have a direct and close experience of power relations with teachers, for some parents being in contact with some teachers in school meant that they were more aware of and understood the dynamics of school life, and therefore were better placed to have varying experiences of power relations in school. Therefore, despite relegating to teacher authority, parents were aware of the

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individual differences between teachers in terms of the use of power in their mutual interaction. It meant that some parents had more understanding of what it entailed to interact with teachers and how to evaluate the subtleties in power relations:

It's up to them [teachers] as to how they deal with us. There are individual differences among them. Some of them would look down upon you and there are some who would give you a lot of respect. Not only that you can judge people by the way they talk to you but also by mere looking at their foreheads [face] you can read [guess] what they are up to [means what they have got in their minds]. (Parent, UBS)

There was much evidence in the data to support the claim made in the above excerpt that for most parents the onus of their treatment rests with teachers. This was also so because, due to their social and class standing, most parents were unequivocal in saying that teachers retained and exercised full control of the dynamics of communication and transactions, and hence were equally deferent to teacher power in most matters.

However, for some parents, who claimed to have visited school, it was not only a matter of power play, it was a process of playing the 'game' by applying its logic, practice and rules to negotiate the uneven school terrain. For this, some parents appeared to show that they were conversant with the structure of the game by deploying their social and cultural capital to make the system (field) work for them seamlessly (see **Section 8.1**). For others who did not have those links, they had learned to play down or tackle power play by avoiding confrontation with teachers and hence to appear to be deferent to teacher power to resolve their children's matters or issues, if there were any. There was therefore a strong cultural underpinning to the nature of power relations when parents engaged with teachers in school.

#### **8.3.4 Section summary**

In this section, I discussed that parents predominantly saw teachers as powerful and high in status. Moreover, as teachers were described as knowledgeable and teaching their children, most parents appeared culturally conditioned to respect teachers and to defer to their authority. Furthermore, since most parents had a working-class background (were most socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged), as a group they did not have a voice and therefore individually and collectively felt powerless. Whilst, many parents were aware about individual differences between teachers in terms of the use of power in their mutual interaction, they had a clear

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understanding of what it entailed to interact with teachers and how to evaluate the subtleties in power relations. Moreover, since most parents saw themselves and teachers differently, the field structure and culture had conditioned and reinforced parental perception of power relations, which had implications for the way parents conceptualised and structured their practices with teachers in schools. The next section considers parental perception of communication barriers.

#### **8.4 Perceptions of communication barriers**

Having considered parent perceptions on power relations with teachers, this section considers parental perception of communication barriers with teachers and school. In his work on schools and disadvantaged parents, Moles (1993) argues that whilst parents have a keen interest to be involved in their children's education and schools, three factors might account for their low rates of contact and collaboration with school. These are "limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration; restricted opportunities for interaction; and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools" (Moles 1993:30). Similarly, in considering barriers to school involvement of the minority parents, Bauch (1993:132-33) tested parental involvement motivations by asking parents to respond to items that represented five types of 'barriers,' which included, conflict with working hours; delegation beliefs; lack of transportation; child care; and attitude/language differences. Moreover, Bermúdez (1993:179) identified five reasons that posed as barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse parents in the US, which include, work interference; lack of confidence; lack of English language skills, lack of understanding of the home-school partnership; and insensitivity and hostility on the part of school personnel. Whilst the context of my research might appear different and distant from the ones cited above, the data analysis suggest that many/most of the factors identified above resonate with the perceptions and experiences of the majority of parents.

This section is organised into three sections. The first section explores parental perception of their 'unawareness' as a barrier, due to which many parents feel that they could not communicate with teachers. Section two looks into parent perception of work engagement as a constraint for visiting school. The third section analyses parents' perception of teacher attitude and authority as a barrier to their communication with the school. It also considers that the lack of teacher

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accountability is also perceived by the parents as one of the obstacles to their communication with the school.

#### **8.4.1 Being ‘unaware’ as a barrier**

The findings suggest that there were a number of perceived and actual barriers to the communication of parents with school, relating both to parent and teacher (discussed later in the section), which in many ways were inter-mutually linked. However, for many parents one of the primary obstacles to their communication with school was their lack of faith in their own abilities (knowledge). They thought that they were not ‘aware’ enough to be able to communicate with and talk to teachers. Davies (1993:209) has also reported similar findings that many low-income parents have low assessment of themselves about their involvement in school and express feelings such as ‘I don’t know much about school’ or ‘I’m not very smart.’ What this implies is that in the absence of the required ‘educational knowledge’ and ‘skills’ the parents were unsure of their role in the school (Crozier 1997:195).

This should not come as a surprise (as also discussed in the previous section on power relations) since a whole range of factors seemed to have underpinned such an approach of the parents, which not only included their social class standing, education and capital, but also the dynamics of social spaces seemed to have reinforced such a parental stance. This is not to suggest that the parents did not know anything, rather they were analytical in many ways. Their perceptions and experiences therefore were deeply rooted in their historical contexts and habitus and in the dynamics of the social ‘game’ that in many ways was a game of stakes, dominance, power, and of a struggle for appropriation of these. Thus, the dynamics of power was deeply embedded in the dynamics of communication, which was succinctly put by one parent using an example to help illustrate ‘unawareness’ as a communication barrier:

Let me quote here an example. A person saw a mark or an impression on his way to somewhere. He was thinking that what it could be. He thought that it’s best to consult some elder on the issue. So, when an elder came and saw the mark, he first cried and then laughed. Upon enquiry as to this, the elder replied, “I laughed because until when I will be alive [to tell you about things] and I cried because I myself do not know what this mark is about.” So, when you yourself don’t know about a thing, how can you make another [educated] person understand [about the things you don’t know]? (Parent, FGD, UBS)

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This culturally situated and reflective experience of the respondent, although might seem basic, provides a powerful metaphor of the way culture and power are intertwined that created spaces of exclusions for many parents. Therefore, many parents did not seem to have enough capital and related amount and quality of habitus to make their presence felt by challenging the status quo. They, therefore, could not think of disrupting the logic of practice in school, to overturn or at least question what they thought they could ask and discuss with teachers. For many parents therefore there was a sense of unease in communication in situations where their interactions were primarily determined and judged by the kind and amount of knowledge they possessed and their social class. In the Pakistan's highly socially stratified system (Ahmad 1970; Barth 1960; Lafrance 2004), such parents did not seem to have access to or given the opportunity of effectively interacting in social situations, where the 'others' were valued and given the 'social space' of what they had to say.

#### **8.4.2 'I am sitting here, but I am worried about my work': job as a barrier**

The findings show that most parents showed a keen interest in the education of their children and appeared willing and motivated to whatever sacrifices they could make to be of help in their children's future. Yet, the dynamics of this was far more complicated, as parental aspirations and ideals, and their actual practices and conditions seemed poles apart. In other words, whilst most parents showed their willingness to visit school, most of them rarely had any contact with the school or teachers, which indicated that the interplay of culture, habitus and field had an important role in forming and informing their practices (as discussed in the previous three sections). However, upon asking what obstacles lay in their way for visiting school, most of them cited their work engagement patterns and earning a livelihood for their children as the main barriers:

There are no barriers from the school side. I cannot come because I go early for my job, which makes it difficult for me to come to school and spend, lets say, 20 minutes with teachers. (Parent, RBS)

There are no barriers from the school to my visit. However, my only problem is that of my preoccupation in my job due to which I cannot come to school. (Guardian, RBS)

There are no such barriers [from the school side]. If you want to visit, you can, but from their [school's] side there is no restriction. Their doors are open; they want us to visit any time. But every parent cannot come because of their problems and constraints [preoccupation with jobs]. I am sitting here, but I am worried about my work. (Parent, RBS)

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In the United States, Bauch (1993:132-34) in her research on ‘school choice and parental involvement’ of parent ethnic minorities in secondary schools found that of the five types of ‘barriers’ to parental involvement, for most parents (White 64.2%, Black 68.5% & Hispanic 51.7%), ‘conflict with working hours’ prevented them from visiting school. Similarly, in my research, as the above excerpts also tell, for most parents preoccupation with work and time constraints were the barriers that they regarded as holding them back from a visit to school. Whilst the present findings and Bauch’s findings may have some relevance insofar as the theme is concerned, work commitment as a barrier to parental involvement may not appear even remotely connected between the two studies because of the social, cultural and economic differences and the related differences of habitus of the agents and the practices of the field(s).

The fact that most parents did not have a contact with the school and teachers meant that the field dynamics of both the home and school had their respective logic and practice, that operated mostly in isolation from one another with very few communications and even those were on the peripheries. This is where for some parents some aspects of teachers appeared as hindering their visit, which I now discuss.

#### **8.4.3 Attitude, Authority and Accountability: the three A’s of teacher as barriers**

The data analysis reveals that whilst the majority of the parents were deferent to teacher authority, and felt culturally and religiously obliged to respect teachers and have ‘trust’ and ‘faith’ in their teaching, some parents came out of the closet and argued how they perceived some aspects of teachers as hindering their communication with school. For some parents therefore, teacher attitude was one of the barriers that they thought was in the way of their communication with school:

... We think that, well, our children have gone to school and they will be learning there. And if I just go by my own and ask a teacher [about my child], he would respond that your child is learning well and there are no problems, so why this hassle of visiting school then. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

Since the perception of teacher attitude was very much grounded in the power structures of school and in the social spaces outside school, some parents therefore anticipated and were wary of the teacher attitude and the way teachers might treat them in school. Moreover, given that a majority of the parents perceived that there

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were differences of status, class, and capital between themselves and teachers, for some parents the perception of social transactions with teachers involved a feeling of neglect and difference.

The findings also suggest that for some parents, in addition to teacher attitude, teacher authority was a barrier to their communication with school:

... there are issues surrounding the authority of a teacher, which I feel cannot be challenged by students or by parents. It is so because if a student objects to something in the classroom, he would not be able to progress effectively because of the personal grudges of the teacher concerned. You cannot question [teachers]. Some teachers are sincere in their work and discharge their duties well, and keep in view the future of their students. There are, however, those teachers as well who would think that whether they teach or not, it is not going to make any difference to their salaries and therefore they pay no heed whatsoever to the problems their students face as a result. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

This demonstrates that, although a majority of the parents may not have had direct contact with teachers and school, it seemed that, primarily through their children and also through their own experience of the various social spaces, many parents were equally aware of the issues, processes and practices that had structured teacher authority in school. In many ways, what it entailed is that parental habitus was adapted to the power structures within the school and therefore teacher authority was understood as unquestionable, and since it was very difficult to challenge, it was seen as a communication barrier with school.

In addition to considering teacher attitude and authority as obstacles for communication with the school, the lack of teacher accountability of their teaching and performance was the more important and related issue that seemed to have implications for parental communication with the school. It was not only the parents, but also some teachers and one principal was of the view that since the inspection and evaluation of teachers and schools had limited functionality and significance, teachers could get away with anything. This resonates with the research evidence done on school supervision in the context of Pakistan (Ali 1998, 2000). This, therefore, had implications for student teaching and learning, and also for the parents who felt powerless:

The major weakness is that when a teacher is not teaching properly, there is no accountability or evaluation of his performance. For instance, my sons used to tell me that such-and-such teacher was not teaching well and they could not do anything because, had they lodged any complaint about this,

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then they would have got cornered and penalised for this by deliberately failing them in their exams. Upon just a query, the response would be that the students should have private tuition to cover [academic] deficiencies. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

As the above excerpt also suggests, many parents had some understanding of the politics and dynamics of how the school functioned and clearly had a good grasp of the factors and processes that impinged upon the school life and the various aspects of their children's learning. Yet, they could not do anything or could not intervene on their children's behalf, probably because of their social class position, or because they knew that they did not have enough power to make any difference to the status quo or because they had come to terms with 'this is how things worked in school.' Moreover, whilst the parents may have awareness about these issues, they could not give these a second thought because they would have been so preoccupied in their other aspects of life (such as earning a living, doing other similar things or even doing nothing) that it did not feature as an important task in their day-to-day activities.

#### **8.4.4 Section summary**

In this section, I focused on three aspects that seemed to have formed communication barriers for the parents. Two of these pertained directly with parents and one concerned the role of teacher in the school as a communication barrier. I discussed the role that parental perception of being 'unaware' had as a communication barrier with school. Many parents therefore considered that since they were not 'aware' enough, they would not be able to talk to or communicate with teachers. There was also the issue of parental preoccupation in work as a barrier. Most parents, although showing keen interest in the education of their children and appearing willing and motivated to visit school, rarely had any contact with the school or teachers. For most of them, their work engagement patterns and earning a livelihood were the main barriers to their communication with the school. From the school side, the findings suggest that for some parents teacher attitude and authority were the important barriers to their visit to school, which they also see as closely linked to the lack of accountability of teachers in school. This leads us to the last section of the chapter, which pertains to parent perception of institutional habitus and culture.

#### **8.5 Perceptions of institutional habitus and 'culture'**

This section discusses parents' perception of institutional habitus and culture and explores the dynamics of how it influences or affects parental perception of

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communication with teachers. Like the previous sections, this section consists of three sections. The first section explores parental perception of the role of structural discontinuities of school that are based on parental apprehensions of school culture. It discusses that whilst there are structures and procedures in place in schools to resolve the issues and concerns of parents, for some it is the micro-interactional practices that they see as unnerving, making them point to the hostile terrain, they are likely to get involved in, and the related structural discontinuities. The second section explores the interplay of institutional habitus and parental perceptions of the dynamics of power relations and class. This section examines how for some parents class and power is played out at institutional level in relations or interactions with school personnel to create feeling of powerlessness and ‘inferiority complex.’ In section three, the discussion moves on to parental perception of the consideration of how when being ‘valued,’ ‘respected’ and given ‘importance’ are the primary descriptors through which parents are happy to visit school and have contact with teachers.

#### **8.5.1 Perceptions of the role of structural discontinuities**

As also discussed in the above sections, many parents were wary of their communication with school and some parents even questioned whether there was any need for them to have a contact with school. There was therefore sufficient evidence in both the teachers’ and parents’ data that indicated that home and school operated as ‘separate spheres’ with an implicit understanding of their separate roles and responsibilities towards children. There was also sufficient evidence in the data in which most teachers and many parents considered public schools as catering to the needs of a specific class of people i.e. the working-class and poor parents. Consequently, since class, culture and power underpinned the way schools were structured, and related practices organised and appropriated, the resultant institutional habitus thus seemed to pose a variety of issues, challenges and problems for many parents, such as the feeling of being inferior, deference to teachers, and barriers to visits and communication. Therefore, whilst most parents may not have visited school, or had any communication with teachers, being stakeholders in the ‘game’ they seemed to have ‘a feel for the game’ but not much control over the ‘game’ itself, as the following excerpt also reveals:

These days in our society and in schools the culture is such that, even if I visit my son at school after a month or so, first the *chowkidar* [gatekeeper] would

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welcome me with a humiliating smile. He would think this is a mad person [that why he is visiting school]. So, when you enter the school, who from you should ask about your child. No one would know about your child. Need—when the need was felt, we then came here to attend this programme [focus group discussion]. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

The important point here is that the way some parents shared and talked about their experience of school ‘culture’ indicated the presence of structural discontinuities in school for parents. In other words, what it implied is that these parents were aware and wary of the logic and practice of the institutional habitus that they felt that they were or would be ‘received’ differently by the various agents in school. Whilst there were clearly some structures and procedures in place in all the schools, albeit differently, through which various mutual issues, concerns, and problems relating to students or parents were looked into, dealt with and resolved. Yet, what the parents seemed to highlight was that for them the micro-interactional processes and practices with various agents in the school were disconcerting. More specifically, what it meant is that since the institutional habitus developed within the school seemed to operate, alongside other things, along the hierarchies of power, starting from the head, down to the gatekeeper, the parents seemed to imply that they being at the receiving end found it difficult to negotiate and navigate through the bureaucratic power structures.

As also indicated in the above excerpt, further evidence of structural discontinuities in/with school of parents seemed to involve the way many parents emphasised ‘need’ as the basis of their communication with teachers. By mentioning ‘need’ as the basis of their contact, what the parents implied is that they wanted the teachers or school to make a concerted effort to communicate with them. More specifically what many of them meant is that as I had been contacting them through various means (their children and telephone contact) for the purpose of my research, they therefore felt that their presence was ‘needed’ in school and therefore spared some of their time to participate in the research.

### **8.5.2 Perceptions of power relations and class**

Following on from the above discussion, the findings suggest that the way some parents shared their perceptions of school ‘culture’ indicated how strongly for parents the dynamics of power relations and class were deeply ingrained in the interpersonal relations with teachers and in the institutional habitus generally. Whilst such feelings or experiences were not so explicit in the parents of the RBS meant that the parents

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there either did not see that as an issue or could not articulate it in the manner some parents at the UBS did. Moreover, this may also suggest that since there were some differences in their contexts and field structures, parental habitus therefore may have differed for some parents in the urban schools. It was probably because of this that parents in the focus group at the UBS were more open, critical and reflective of their experiences pertaining to their relations with teachers or principal in the school that underpinned power and class dynamics:

You cannot ask about it from anyone. For this, there are no resources to help support [the process]. Even if you come to school [to enquire about your child], the principal in a sarcastic manner will console you that it's ok that I have visited [him] and that they are taking good care of my child; and in a compelling way, he would send me back. He [the principal] would not bother to know [about me]. ... (Parent, FGD, UBS)

So, when you go and visit the principal, you would find him talking on his mobile [phone] or on his telephone and you would be made to wait until he finishes. So, when you say something about your child, then in return you would feel a sort of inferiority complex and this would make you question your intention that 'why have I been asking or enquiring about my child?,' that this is a sort of inconvenience for the principal and other staff of the school. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

What is important here is the representation of how class dynamics unfold in power relations for parents, due to which many parents viewed themselves as weak and perceived their status as inferior. Also important here is the parents' reference to the subtlety of micro interactional issues in the structure of practices within the institutional habitus, in which parents see themselves at the receiving end. This is important since this tells about the structure of power relations that are enacted between teachers/principal (as possessing more power) and parents (perceiving themselves as weak). The parents not only felt the imbalance in power relations by the way they were 'treated' but also the parents' depiction of the bodily habitus of the principal or teachers gives an indication that attending telephone or doing any other activity meant relegating the importance and presence of parents in school.

Another important point, which I construe from the above quotations, is that whilst many of the parents may not have directly experienced or encountered such situations in the school environment, what they seemed to suggest is that this is how they expected that they would be treated when and if they happened to visit school and enquired about their children. This is an important dimension of the findings in that being active members of the various fields within the overall social space, the parents

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had a ‘feel for the game’ and therefore, given their respective field positions and class dynamics, were in a position to predict and interpret the various positional strategies and practices enacted in various situations.

### 8.5.3 It’s all about giving ‘importance’ to and ‘valuing’ parents

The findings in this and the previous chapter demonstrate that most parents were deferent to teacher authority and seemed to relegate many of their children’s responsibilities to teachers. However, some parents had a clear understanding of the role of culture that was prevalent in school, which they perceived as uninviting and not valuing parents:

... when I feel that my presence is needed [at school] and I am respected and they [teachers] feel happy at my visits when I enquire about my child, then I would be happy to visit school at all times. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

Implicit in the above quotation is the need for a reconsideration of the school environment that did not seem to have much place for parental involvement. As discussed in the chapters on teachers, a majority of the teachers perceived parental lack of interest in their children’s education as the reason for their lack of involvement with school. However, this was not the case as the analysis of the parents’ data reveals that most parents wanted that their children do well in education and many were willing to do whatever they could do to be of help in this regard. However, the institutional habitus seemed to have a logic that kept most “parents at arm’s length” (Lambert *et al.* 2002:81), partly because of the culture and parental working-class background and mostly because schools were inward looking as there was no reciprocity in terms of “interaction and exchange of ideas and concerns” (Lambert *et al.* 2002:81). The experiences shared by some of the parents therefore seemed directed to the void in the school culture that did not give much importance to them:

So when I visit school and I am not given the importance as to which type of person has come, so I would be constrained not to visit school the next time. I would feel very awkward in such situations, where there is neglect and a feeling of being inferior. (Parent, FGD, UBS)

Similar feelings were also echoed by some teachers in the parents’ support such as when they are not given ‘much importance and are overlooked,’ parents were not likely to visit school (see **Section 6.3.5**). It is worth reiterating here that whilst many parents may not have had much direct contact with school or teachers, they were clear about the factors that would lead to a feeling of alienation from school. In other

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words, the parent seemed to suggest that the school culture disregarded parental position and status, which not only created an imbalance in power dynamics with teachers but which also led to barriers to their involvement or visit to school.

#### **8.5.4 Section summary**

This section considered parental perception of institutional habitus and culture. For some parents the institutional habitus posed structural discontinuities due to which they felt they were ‘received’ differently by the various agents in school. This meant that apart from highlighting the micro-interactional processes and practices with various agents in school, for parents the institutional habitus operated along the hierarchies of power and bureaucratic structures, which they found difficult to negotiate and navigate through. The findings also suggest that the parents’ perception of school ‘culture’ indicated how the dynamics of power relations and class were deeply ingrained in their interpersonal relations with teachers. Resultantly, many parents felt ‘weak’ and being ‘inferior’ in comparison to teachers and school, which also implied that when parents were not given importance and valued they were not likely to visit school.

#### **8.6 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have shown that whilst most parents did not communicate with the school of their children, they had an effective understanding of the dynamics of their relations with school. I have also demonstrated that whilst very few claimed that they had some contact with the school of their children, for the majority of the parents there were issues around class and culture and their own habitus due to which communication with teachers was not a norm rather than exception. It was this implicit understanding that led most parents to see home and school as having ‘separate spheres of influence.’ The separate roles of home and school were also underpinned by parental perceptions of the role that power dynamics played in their relations with teachers and schools, which shed light on the issues of social class and capital and the associated positions the parents held in the field, that created an imbalance in the perceptions of power for most parents. Resultantly, whilst most parents did not communicate with school, they could clearly see and articulate the various barriers to their participation in and relations with teachers and schools, some pertaining to their own selves others relating more to the dynamics of school and

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teachers. This in collectivity formed the way some parents saw the role of institutional habitus and culture in their relations with school, which was underpinned by their class and capital and the role of structural discontinuities within the school atmosphere that the parents saw as not valuing and giving them importance.

With this in mind, I now move on to the last chapter, the conclusions to the thesis.

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## Chapter Nine — Conclusions

This final chapter draws on the findings of the previous four chapters and provides the key conclusions to the thesis. I present the ways through which parents and teachers perceived and experienced their relations with one another and how they acted and interacted within the contexts of home and school. In presenting a summary of findings and conclusions, the main research questions and subsidiary research questions act as a guide. I then consider the implications of the study, before considering limitations of the research study. I also discuss recommendations from the study designed specifically for teachers and parents, and policy makers. Towards the end of the chapter, I provide a discussion of the originality of the research and justify its contribution to knowledge, which is followed by suggestions for further research and my reflections on the research experience.

### **9.1 Summary of findings and conclusions: the dynamics and dimensions of parent-teacher relations**

This section provides a summary of findings and conclusions in the light of the research questions that I set out to explore in Chapter One. As the preceding four chapters on teachers and parents demonstrate, the findings provide a sociological and cultural portrait of parent-teacher relations, addressing a number of key elements and issues that influence the dynamics and dimensions of home-school relations in Peshawar. The main thrust of the section is on the discussion around the two main research questions: “*how do parents and teachers interact and communicate in public secondary schools in Peshawar?*” and “*how do their relations become structured and influenced in the respective environments of home and school?*” However, I also draw on the subsidiary research questions (see **Chapter One**) to discuss institutional habitus and communication practices, perceptions of power relations, perceptions of parental involvement in school, parental perceptions of educating their children, perceptions of communication barriers, and perceptions of the role of PTA in school.

#### **9.1.1 The nature of communication and interaction between parents and teachers**

In decoding the communication and interaction experiences of the teachers and parents, I found diverse patterns of relations between the school and home that were structured rather disparately; in essence in most cases with no direct links with parents. From the teachers’ data and perspective, I found that whilst most teachers

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appeared to have an effective understanding of and professional consensus towards the various means of communication with parents, in some ways they held contrasting and restricted views about these communication experiences (see **Chapter Five**). In looking at what restricted teachers from engaging with parents, most cited that various work constraints (such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources) and related responsibilities at school hampered their communication with parents. In this sense, the communication of teachers with parents seemed deeply embedded in the institutional habitus and in the structure of social transactions that the teachers had embodied in their habitus from the broader social settings outside the school. What this means is that the teachers' habitus, institutional habitus, and the overall field influence of the schools had an important role in structuring the individual teachers' communication and practices with parents.

It also appeared that due to the interplay between teacher habitus and institutional habitus, most teachers rarely communicated with parents, except in very rare cases of some chronic academic, behavioural or conduct problems with pupils. Moreover, whilst most teachers initiated little contact with parents about very specific issues of children, it also became apparent that the communication of teachers was individualistic and not organised along institutional lines, i.e., it depended on the individual personalities of teachers in what manner and form they communicated with parents. The pattern, therefore, that emerged from the teachers' experiences was that generally the schools did not have explicit, formalised or institutionalised procedures for contact with parents, i.e., the institutional culture led teachers to operate only individualistic contacts rather than institutional structures. This led the teachers to construct for themselves a personal style – based upon their own dispositions.

However, there was also evidence that suggested that for some teachers, especially in the rural schools, some parents appeared to be using 'credit slips' to entrust the various academic, social and personal responsibilities of their children to teachers, which underpinned their mutual acquaintance and signified parental deference to teacher authority. I also found that since most teachers viewed parents as working-class and poor, the underlying influences and structures of teacher habitus and the consequent field influence of the school led most teachers to present parents as homogenised and portrayed them all as uninterested in school visits. This finding contrasted with the parental perspective, which clearly showed that parents, whilst not

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homogenised, often had a keen interest in the education and welfare of their children. However, it seemed that they had neither the strategies, nor the habitus to enact this desire.

However, generally within all the schools, the communication of teachers with parents emerged as a complex, dynamic and patterned process that was far from random, which was not only engrained in the specific situations but was also underpinned by the power and class dynamics of the stakeholders. In this sense, teachers' communication and interaction with parents emerged metaphorically as an iceberg, i.e. on the surface there was not much activity and evidence of positive relationships, but hidden below the surface was an array of issues and aspects, which structured and influenced teachers' perception and practices with parents. It became clear that this had a dominant cultural dimension. Although, the teachers' relations with parents were culturally embedded in their respective school contexts, it is interesting to note that there are similarities cross-culturally with developed countries. For instance, Connell *et al.*'s (1982:53) portrayal of working-class families, and the description given by public secondary school teachers that working-class parents lack interest in their children's education also resonated with the experiences of the teachers I researched in Pakistan.

Although in most cases communication with parents was an individual matter of the teachers, in terms of comparisons between the schools, the heads in the rural schools fared well when compared to their urban counterparts in school effectiveness and communication with parents. In this sense, the principal of the RBS had been undertaking various measures to adapt the institutional habitus and teachers' habitus, at least insofar as school policy initiatives were concerned, towards inviting and informing parents about various matters concerning the pupils (see **Chapter Five**).

In order to understand the various parental perspectives of their relations with teachers and school, it was imperative that the contexts and practices of their home environment were taken into consideration. In this regard, I found that given the many similarities in the structures of parental habitus and the related aspects of social class, capital and social influences, the 'socialising experiences' that parents provided to their children were thoroughly socially and culturally grounded and individually determined (see **Chapter Seven**). In other words, what I found was that despite the differences in interaction and relations with children, for most parents the prevailing

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structures of practices and social influences had underpinned the collective structures of their habitus. In this regard, I found that most parents emphasised the normative and cultural values to instil in their children. The parents' data also revealed that many parents (especially fathers) were ambivalent in their interaction with children. I also found that most fathers viewed physical punishment of children as desirable and permissible and considered it a reformatory tool. These important findings resonated with the findings of teachers, suggesting in most cases that fathers were implicitly complacent with teachers in reforming their children by administering punishment. However, some parents differed with the dominant held views of the parents about punishment and the authoritarian stance with children i.e., some parents were against the suppression of children and argued for adopting child-centred strategies instead.

The role of mothers emerged as important in terms of their relations with children, husbands and thus their influence on the school matters of their children. Whilst the mothers in my research were not formally educated, although having some Quranic education, I found that they provided help and guidance to their children in everyday school and personal matters and contributed to their children's education in whatever way they could possibly do so (see **Chapter Seven**, especially **Sections 7.1.5** and **7.3.4**). Moreover, mothers also acted as an intermediary between the children and their fathers to communicate the children's requests or demands to fathers, which they themselves were not able to ask directly. This indicated some cultural notions of father-children ambivalence in relations. In terms of their communication with their daughters' school, I found that the mothers had added cultural and procedural issues and restrictions, which included, for instance, preoccupation in their home affairs and issues of *pardah*. Like fathers, mothers rarely had any contact with the school. In most cases, the mothers had either not paid any visit to the school or visited their daughters' school only a few times, mostly at the time of admitting them to school. This clearly portrayed a role that signified separate spheres of influence between families and schools.

Therefore, there is a case here that the structured patterns of parent-child interactions in the home were not recognised or valued, nor were they used in the structured expectations of the school. This implied that whilst the teachers portrayed a homogenised understanding of the home environment, it was evident from the data that the mothers had an important role in the home affairs. More specifically, by

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providing help and guidance to their children in everyday and school matters they played a pivotal role in liaising between the children and their fathers and hence were the focal point of the home. However, since the patterns or structures and practices of the home were not in congruence with, and appeared detached from, the structures of the school and vice versa, much of what least the families could have offered could not appear to have been incorporated in the structured expectations of the schools. It was here that the disconnection between the way the institution viewed the family structure (and how it appeared to the families themselves) made the possibilities for effective communications much weaker.

Whilst there were clearly differences between the individual habitus of different parents and the related aspects of social class, capital and social field influences, parents were unequivocal in terms of their support for communication with the school. In this regard, I found that most parents appreciated and acknowledged the importance of parental visits to the school and had a clear understanding of the specifics of what and how they needed to enquire about their children. However, in practice, very few parents ever visited the school (see **Chapter Eight**). The evidence that I gleaned from the data suggests that those few parents who claimed to have been communicating with the teachers seemed to have been deploying their social and cultural capital to gain access to the school. In other words, these parents already had connections and links with the school that they could rely on, whether by directly accessing the school services or indirectly through proxy through the teachers these parents knew before hand.

I also found that there was also some evidence of parent-teacher contact using ‘credit slips,’ which seemed to have a diverse meaning and usage. For some parents (and teachers) whilst it meant ‘out of the way’ favours reciprocally, for others it meant delegating some or most of their parental responsibilities of their children to teachers because of their social/clan connections or solidarities (see **Chapters Five and Eight**).

However, generally, unlike the teachers’ portrayal of parents as uninterested in their children’s education and not wanting to visit the school, most parents wanted better relations with the teachers and the school. However, due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the school structures and dynamics, they were not confident of their role in the school. In this regard, I found that whilst most parents were willing to visit the school, they wanted teachers to contact them and invite them to the school.

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However, it appeared that generally, the schools' institutional habitus was not structured and sensitised to deal with such parental diversity; and the schools were more inward looking, probably because of the structured structures of the schools and the teachers' habitus. What this meant is that for the parents, since schools were specialised bodies and institutions that had professional expertise and structures, and exercised considerable control and power over their children and families, parents were of the view that the initiative of contacting them needed to come from the school.

### **9.1.2 Communication between parents and teachers: structures within structures**

In this section, I look at the depth and dimensions of parent-teacher relations that for teachers seemed to have entailed many school related issues and factors and for the parents involved both their personal aspects of class and culture, habitus and capital, and the related influences of the social fields and structures.

For teachers in the schools, many school related issues and factors seemed to have structured their perceptions and experiences of communication with parents (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2**). Generally, most teachers described the structural and functional constraints of their work as a hindrance to their contact and communication with parents. By this, they meant specifically that time and resource constraints, teaching load and overcrowded classrooms were the main reasons, which they argued influenced and limited them for having any meaningful contact with parents (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.1**). This implied that in most cases the school structure and culture was not explicitly oriented towards a structured communication system with parents and appeared to have structured the teacher habitus in describing these factors as restricting effective communication with parents.

However, whilst most teachers' communication with parents did not appear to take place on a regular basis, it appeared evident that most teachers seemed to have embodied the "compensation pathological model" (Goode 1982:82) in their relations with parents. Under this model, having developed a homogenised understanding of the parents and their background, most teachers saw that parents had a deficit in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding of their children's education and upbringing. Most teachers therefore seemed to have generalised these views, without

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giving much thought to the diversity and differences between parental background and situations.

In the boys' schools, the communication practices and experiences of the male teachers with parents revealed an aspect of parent-teacher contact, which involved a minority of students who had some chronic academic, or more importantly conduct, or behavioural problems. To avoid the involvement of their fathers in their school problems, such students would present someone not directly related to them as their fathers or brothers: 'mock' parents (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.2**). However, I found that the institutional habitus and the habitus of the teachers were predisposed to such practices of 'mock' parents and when found guilty such students in the majority of cases were either fined or punished.

In considering the issues of girl students and female teachers' communication with mothers, I found that for most teachers huge gender disparities existed for girls in education generally and concerning mother-teacher interaction and communication specifically (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.3**). Most female teachers therefore were of the view that girls were treated less favourably compared to boys because of the social and cultural traditions that underpinned the patriarchal societal norms, in which boys were perceived as a source of earning and support and girls as an economic liability. Moreover, for most female teachers, mothers' communication with the school was constrained by their home environment and engagement patterns that were determined by their educational levels and cultural influences. These issues seemed to have implications not only for the quality of care and education parents were inclined to give to their daughters but also had implications for mother-teacher relations.

Although, in most cases teachers rarely communicated with parents, some teachers' 'personal interest' became a strategy of communication with some parents. This involved finding or locating those students in the class or school whose parents could help solve their personal problems (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.4**). This involved such teachers using their position and authority to obtain personal favours through the parents of their pupils. In such instances, I found that many parents would also reciprocate to such teachers' requests because of the cultural desirability of respect for teachers and submitting to their authority (see **Chapter Eight**).

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For some teachers, however, communication with their students' home entailed cultural nuances, which were shrouded in mistrust and cultural sensitivities. For example, I found that some teachers thought that if they contacted the parents' home, the parents would be suspicious and think that the teacher was in need of something or wanted some personal favours (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.2.5**). However, some teachers considered communicating with the parents' home using the telephone to be culturally sensitive and inappropriate if they talked to the females at home, which they argued in some cases resulted in complaints against some teachers.

In considering the factors that structured parental perception and experiences about their communication with the teachers and school, for many parents the dynamics of the field structures outside the home seemed to have a major role in shaping their habitus and practices (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.2**). In this regard, I found that the broader social structures influenced parental habitus, and informed and structured parental attitudes towards norms and values about children, which seemed to have implications for parental contact with the school (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.1**). In addition, parental interaction and experience within their respective social and professional fields seemed to have structured their habitus and communication patterns with their children, albeit differentially (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.2**). All these influences and structures had important implications for how parents related to and interacted with their children, which also had implications for how parents thought about their contact with the school.

In addition, I found that for some parents the cultural pull had a strong influence on parental habitus and on their practices and interaction (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.3**). The cultural pull as a mandatory and compulsive force of the neighbourhood and community fields had conditioned some parents to remain in contact with the field structures outside the home. For such parents, contact and interaction with the children at home therefore was minimal because of the cultural dynamics and field structures that prevailed outside the home, which as a result seemed to have structured parental attitudes not only about their relations with their children, but also about their contact with the school.

In a similar vein, one important finding was that due to changes in the social structures and practices towards the education of girls, many parents seemed to have readjusted their habitus and incorporated alternative patterns of dispositions and

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practices regarding their daughters' education (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.2.4**). In this regard, I found that whilst most of the uneducated parents had not sent their eldest daughters to school, it appeared evident that over time due to change in the social field structures and dynamics the parents seemed to have adapted their habitus and started sending their youngest daughters to school. However, for most parents given the influence of the culture and social class and their specific field positions and habitus, despite a realisation of adopting alternative practices, many parents seemed to follow and replicate their habitus within their home and community interaction. This therefore seemed to have implications for parental communication with the school of their children.

Concerning parental communication with the school, for most parents, communication with teachers was strongly influenced by their class and relative social and cultural capital standing, which shaped and informed parental habitus accordingly. In addition, the parents' disparate educational levels also appeared to have important implications for their communication patterns with the teachers (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.2**). As a result, most parents in some way or another expressed incompatibility of communication with the school and teachers.

The findings revealed that whilst most parents had sufficient understanding and experience of the dynamics of human interaction, parents with less stock of cultural capital felt less confident to interact with the teachers on equal terms (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.2.1**). In addition, I found that due to their seemingly educationally disadvantaged position, many parents did not find it comfortable or easy to visit school and converse with the teachers on an equal basis about aspects of school life.

Many parents were also of the view that communication with the school was required only when they felt a pressing need such as when their child had some conduct or attendance problem (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.2.2**). In this regard, what seemed evident was that whilst most parents considered it important to visit school, the emphasis of the many parents on 'need' as the basis of a visit meant glossing over their perceived and actual inadequacies of communication gaps with the teachers and school. In a similar vein, the findings revealed that most parents appeared to be deferent to teacher authority and school and for most of them home and school operated as separate 'fields' and thereby they assumed that the teachers and school were responsible for the education of their children (see **Chapter Eight, Section**

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**8.2.3).** I also found that most parents were of the view that if their children were attending school regularly then it meant that they were making good academic and personal progress. However, many parents expressed their dependency on the teachers in school matters, showing a desire to delegate many and in some cases most of the responsibilities of the upbringing of their children to school, and were more inclined to defer to teacher authority.

The analysis of the perspectives and experiences of both the teachers and parents suggest that their respective contexts and fields strongly influenced and structured their relations, which were thoroughly underpinned by the reciprocal influence of their respective habitus. This meant that due to the differences in the structure and practices of their respective fields and habitus, the teachers and parents did not seem to work in tandem with one another, and thus their relations seemed poles apart.

### **9.1.3 Institutional habitus and communication practices**

The institutional habitus appeared to have an important role in structuring the way parents and teachers perceived and experienced their relations and communication practices with one another. However, it was evident that the views of the teachers and parents about the school culture and environment seemed to have different meanings and interpretations for them, which in many ways appeared widely divergent. In this regard, I found that a number of issues and factors seemed to have structured the perceptions of teachers and parents about their relations and contact, which seemed thoroughly grounded in the influence of the school institutional habitus (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3** and **Chapter Eight, Section 8.5**), which I will now describe.

Concerning teachers and schools, I found that the majority of the teachers were of the view that due to the various school related constraints, meeting with parents on the school turf was generally uncommon. In other words, for most teachers the institutional habitus was collectively structured and oriented in a way that meeting with parents did not form a part of the normal school procedures. This was probably one of the main reasons due to which some teachers described the presence of and meeting with parents to be an ‘alien thing’ in the school environment (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.1**).

In a similar vein, for most teachers the institutional habitus seemed to have underpinned ‘*separate spheres of influence*’ (Epstein 1995) between the school and

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parents. In this regard, I found that some teachers rarely involved the parents or home in the affairs of students in instances like quarrelling, or bullying etc. (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.3**). This appeared to suggest that the teacher habitus had thoroughly embodied the role of '*in loco parentis*' in the school by taking over the responsibility for dealing with such matters rather than sharing or engaging with the family. A somewhat intriguing finding was that the school culture and teacher habitus were structured reciprocally in that some teachers were very keen to locate and contact those parents of students who could help sort and solve the teachers' personal problems or issues, such as sorting out gas or electricity bills (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.4**). However, the findings also revealed that some teachers voiced their concern about the lack of 'respect' and 'support' that some teachers and the school administration showed for parents in the school and argued that parents felt discouraged from having any contact with the school in the future when they were not valued and treated well (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.2**).

However, concerning the school principals, I found that their leadership qualities seemed to determine and influence much of the institutional habitus and the quality of practices within the schools, which had implications for communication and contact with parents. In this regard, I found that many teachers were critical of the role that the principal in the UBS played in the school affairs and hence some of the teachers described him as 'uninterested' and 'autocratic' whilst others considered the head's post as one that involved 'power' and 'politics' (see **Chapter Five, Sections 5.3.5 and 5.3.6**). As a result, given such a background, some teachers argued that since the primary purpose of teaching and learning in the school was a shambles, they could not think about involving and communicating with parents. In addition, I found that whilst some teachers also appeared critical of the principal's role at the UGS, the majority of the teachers of the RGS and RBS appreciated and commended the role that their respective heads were playing towards the school affairs, in maintaining and enhancing its quality and in having some contact with the parents. My assessment was that the Principal of the RBS seemed more keen on communicating with parents and informing them about their children, which was evident from the measures and steps taken in this regard, such as a letter template informing parents of the various issues of their children (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.7**). However, it appeared evident that the communication practices of the teachers were thoroughly grounded in and

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structured by the institutional habitus of the schools. This led most teachers to argue that systemic issues of the school determined and restricted them to have any meaningful contact with parents (see **Chapter Five, Section 5.3.8**).

In regard to parents, although most teachers labelled them as uninterested in their children's education and in the various aspects and issues of their school by not visiting school and having a contact with teachers, I found that most parents had a keen interest in their children's academic progress and education, and wanted them to do well in school. However, whilst parental habitus, class and culture seemed to have underpinned and influenced parental perceptions about their role in their children's lives, some parents highlighted the role that the school culture or institutional habitus played in influencing and affecting their relations with the school (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.5**).

In considering their relations with the school and teachers, I found that some parents had apprehensions about how the institutional habitus posed structural discontinuities for them in the school. This meant that for the parents generally the micro-interactive practices with the teachers or the principal within the school were unnerving, due to which they saw schools as hostile terrains, and hence perceived structural discontinuities between themselves and the school (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.5.1**). Moreover, the way the parents shared their experiences suggested that the institutional habitus operated along hierarchies of power; most parents therefore found it difficult to negotiate and navigate through these bureaucratic power structures.

The findings also suggest that owing to institutional habitus and teachers role in it, for parents the dynamics of power relations and issues of class fared dominantly (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.5.2**). This meant that in their interpersonal relations with teachers, power and class were deeply ingrained and this led parents to describe the feeling of powerlessness and 'inferiority complex' in the school culture. However, what seemed clear was that most parents had a clearer understanding that being 'valued,' 'respected' and given 'importance' in the school were the primary descriptors through which they were likely to be happy to visit the school and have contact with teachers (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.5.3**).

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From the above, it seems evident to conclude that for both teachers and parents, a complicated and diverse set of issues and practices appeared to underpin the institutional habitus of the schools due to which communication between teachers and parents appeared fraught with difficulties and problems. Although in most cases both teachers and parents were in favour of having close ties and contact with one another, in practice, below the common and ordinary, class, culture, habitus and capital seemed to have influenced the way parents and teachers visualised, experienced and structured their practices.

#### **9.1.4 The role of power dynamics in parent-teacher relations**

The role of power dynamics emerged as an important factor in the structure of relations between the teachers and parents; power was implicit in the conceptualisation and appropriation of all forms of capital which the teachers and parents deployed in their relations with one another, whether material, cultural, social or symbolic (Swartz 1997:73). The findings therefore suggest that the relationships between the teachers and parents were a result of contestation in the balance of power relations. These depended on the relative social and professional field positions of the agents, the amount of “power (or capital)” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:97) they possessed and their ability to appropriate the structure and practices within the field (i.e. the school or other social fields), which in most cases meant teachers protecting, maintaining, and enhancing their respective positions (Bourdieu 1996). It appeared evident from the findings that generally most teachers felt and described themselves as more powerful and dominant in their interactions and relationships with parents. However, in comparison to teachers, most parents felt and portrayed themselves as less powerful or ‘weak’ and appeared deferent to teacher authority, culturally and educationally and in social class and status terms.

From the teachers’ perspective, I found that the use and appropriation of power was therefore played out in the teachers’ habitus and practices and in the schools in many complex ways, which had underpinned and structured the relations between teachers and parents, individually as well as collectively, in subjective ways (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1**). The experiences that the teachers shared with me in the interviews and focus groups therefore were varied, subjective, and deeply ingrained in their personal and school structures. In addition, there were some noticeable differences between the

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experiences of the male and female teachers in both the urban and rural schools about the role of power in interactions with parents.

I found that teachers were almost unanimous in considering that most parents did not see themselves equal in power to the teachers and school and were usually 'submissive' and 'deferent' to their authority (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.1**). The findings suggest that the perceived and actual differences in levels of education, status and class and cultural underpinnings between the teachers and parents appeared to have implications for uneven power relations for parents. Hence, the power dynamics between the teachers and parents entailed not merely *differentiating* by role position, but *stratifying* by hierarchy. This means that whilst the role position adopted by the middle class parents (bringing with them power, prestige, political affiliations and status to school) had implications for power dynamics with teachers, generally the school-home hierarchy and stratification led teachers to assume more power and authority over parents. In addition, therefore, many teachers were also of the view that because of the cultural connotation of the teacher being their child's teacher, most parents were also more inclined to be respectful and obedient to teachers. Moreover, the resulting differences in the quality of the habitus between the teachers and parents implied that many parents relied on the judgement of teachers and looked up to them about their children's school matters, education and related social and personal aspects. For parents, this seemed to pose a conflicting set of positions i.e. in respecting professional judgement, knowledge, and expertise in the field of teaching, the parents seemed to have learned to maintain a more general subservient position. This is not usually the case when it comes to power relations between the middle-class parents and teachers, where parents can accept the professional divisions whilst still maintaining a sense of superiority in the relative power relations.

However, I found also that different teachers within their respective contexts felt and experienced different dimensions of power relations with parents. Some female teachers shared with me a dimension of power relations that they experienced with some mothers in which they described the mothers as 'squabbling,' 'confrontational,' and 'arrogant' on some minor issues or on the failure of their daughters in the examinations (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.2**). However, I found that for some male teachers, some parents and other people (of power) were a source of 'power tussle' and 'tension' in the school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.3**). By this the teachers

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meant that those people who had political connections and were relatively well off were more likely to cause trouble; they considered the teachers inferior and they were more inclined to use their status and position to influence the teachers to their advantage. For instance, some local councillors, administrators or other people with political connections were said to be over assertive and authoritative, would influence the teachers through their status and position.

In addition, I found that some teachers experienced ‘unruly’ and ‘threatening’ parents (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.4**). In this regard, many female teachers were of the view that as some mothers visited school only when their daughters had failed the examination, it was then that these mothers tended to become ‘unruly’ and ‘arrogant.’ However, the experience that some male teachers shared suggests that some parents resorted to getting physical with teachers on some minor issues; but such instances of conflict and power relations were very rare. However, for some teachers parental arrogance and aggression was also due to their social class and social, cultural and political connections, due to which some parents challenged teacher authority. In this regard, I found that the ‘social positioning of teachers’ led some teachers to share their experience of how some parents used their ‘social class’ and ‘status’ to belittle the teacher status and considered them inferior in terms of power relations (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.5**).

However, the findings suggest that generally the teachers who felt more ‘dominant’ and confident did so because the majority of the parents were either uneducated or appeared to come from a working-class background, and who considered it culturally obliging to have respect for the teacher (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.6**). This appears to suggest that the schools had a different set of logic and practice compared to the structure and function of the home, due to which most parents experienced unequal power relations with the teachers. This also means that the social and cultural capital that the mostly working-class parents made use of in their interaction with teachers was probably not sufficient for the parents to comprehend the educational jargon and the structures and practices of the school life. This led to the perception of teachers feeling more confident and dominant in their power relations with parents. These findings seem to suggest that, for most teachers, the cultural desirability of entrusting parental responsibilities of their children’s education to teachers meant that parents viewed teachers as more powerful and their stances as obliging.

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However, I also found that some teachers shared their experience of ‘handling dominant parents’ who seemed to have a middle-class background (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.1.7**). In this regard, there was some evidence in the RGS that suggested that the institutional habitus structured and sustained by the principal seemed to have encouraged some (middle-class) mothers to question and demand explanation for matters relating to the academic aspects of their daughters.

From the perspective of parents, I found that, generally, most parents who participated in the research felt themselves less powerful, and appeared deferent to teacher authority, culturally and educationally and in social class and status terms (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.3**). These findings resonate with the findings of a number of studies that suggest that generally for the working-class parents, teacher power pose many problems. My findings therefore are in line with other longstanding research evidence that shows that generally working-class parents (since socially, economically and educationally are at a disadvantage), as a group do not have enough ‘voice.’ This has implications of powerlessness at an individual and collective level for parents (Connell *et al.* 1982; Crozier 2000; Lareau 1989; Lightfoot 1978; Reay 1998a; Vincent 1996a).

In considering power relations with teachers then, for most parents, social class, capital and status played an important role in structuring parental habitus (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.1**). The findings suggest that because of their perceived differences in and variations between class and capital, which were reinforced by the structural dynamics of the various social fields, parents mainly considered teachers as ‘powerful’ and ‘high’ in status. In this regard, I found that most parents felt ‘low’ (in distance and status terms) in comparison to teachers and the majority of the parents had a sense of being inferior and powerlessness. The unequal power distribution was also because of the cultural underpinnings. In this connection, I found that the majority of parents appeared to be culturally conditioned to have respect for the teachers and to submit to their authority.

In addition, the findings suggest that since most parents had a working-class background (and thus were socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged), as a distinct group with common sets of dispositions, they did not have a voice and therefore individually and collectively felt powerless (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.2**). In this regard, I found that for the majority of the parents the field position of

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the school and its related cultural implication and significance acted as a unique power bastion that they saw difficult to surmount, which had implications for unequal power relations between the parents and teachers.

However, I found that even some parents, who had an understanding of the dynamics of power relations with the teachers in school, could not overcome the imbalance in power relations with the teachers because of the influence of the school environment and the cultural conditioning of having respect for the teachers (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.3.3**). As a result, this had implications for the way parents conceptualised and structured their practices with the teachers in the schools, such as by avoiding visits to school or learning to appear ‘weak’ to avoid any power tussles.

### **9.1.5 Perceptions of parental involvement in school**

The teachers’ perception of parental involvement or engagement in the school appeared to have different meanings, evoked different experiences and had different implications for different teachers. These seemed grounded not only in the structure and the culture of the schools but also in the teachers’ habitus, capital, status and in related social and professional issues and practices (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.2**).

In this connection, the findings suggest that the institutional habitus of the schools underpinned by the teachers’ habitus governed much of the practices of the teachers due to which most teachers cited the various school constraints as limiting factors for inviting parents to school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.2.1**). This meant that the teachers’ practices were preconditioned to some specific practices within the school in which accommodating parents and ensuring their involvement required extending or adapting their habitus, dispositions and practices and the related structures within the schools. More simply, most teachers were of the view that since overburdened with work and teaching at school, in most cases, they could not afford to reach out to parents or involve them in the school.

However, I also found that despite these constraints and issues, some teachers in the UBS claimed to have used their personal initiative to organise and conduct co-curricular activities for students, due to which they argued parental participation and engagement in the school was also ensured (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.2.2**). In this regard, the teachers explained how qualitative and quantitative improvements and benefits were accrued by the school when parents participated in the co-curricular

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activities of their children in the school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.2.3**). According to these teachers, in qualitative terms, parental involvement appeared to influence reduction in the behaviour problems of students and resulted in an increase in their academic achievement. In quantitative terms, through donations and parental help and services, the teachers argued that a number of physical improvements were made to the school. This meant that there was considerable potential for parental involvement in schools, which relied heavily on the individual teacher dispositions and habitus, and their inclinations and initiatives towards these ends. In this regard, my own experience of the fieldwork suggests that compared to the more mature or ‘traditional’ teachers, the majority of the middle aged and young teacher participants seemed to have more ideas, knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding parental participation and interaction in the school. The reasons for such a difference between these two groups of teachers appeared grounded in their personal and historical life trajectories, which were further set apart by their professional and pedagogical mastery of their teaching. Yet, the institutional habitus of the schools seemed to have an overarching influence on all teachers and the teachers who spoke about and were in favour of student-centred practices felt constraints by the school culture and practices.

Concerning the girls’ schools, a number of female teachers shared their experience that there was a strong cultural aspect of parental involvement that appeared to have numerous layers of cultural influence for the girl students. The findings suggest that these ‘layers of parental influence’ (Crozier 2000) were not so much in the school, rather operated at a distance from the home (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.2.4**). In this connection, the findings suggest that most female teachers were of the view that the culture and logic that underpinned parental habitus mapped closely the sensitivities and issues around girls and their participation in various programmes in the school or related venues outside the school. This meant that whilst most parents were not seen as directly involved in their children’s education, their involvement patterns had a dominant layered cultural influence that was deeply positioned in the home context rather than more actively engaging with the school.

Concerning the sensitivities of issues around the girl students, I also found that most female teachers had a more thorough approach and an understanding of the issues and concerns around parental approval and permission for their daughters’ participation in co-curricular activities. This also meant that these teachers were more oriented

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towards the various aspects of their students because of the cultural sensitivities and related understanding of privacy and safety of girls implicitly directed towards issues of honour and dignity of the girls.

### **9.1.6 Parental perceptions of education**

In exploring parental perceptions of education and their underlying rationale for educating their children, I was not only able to discover more about parents, their background and practices and in turn about their habitus, but this also helped in effectively understanding the nature of parental interactions and relations with the teachers and school (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3**).

The findings suggest that the interplay between parental habitus and parents' views on education seemed to shape and inform their perspectives about the cultural 'norms' and 'values' that they wanted to inculcate in their children (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.1**). In this regard, I found that there was a strong desire amongst all parents that their children do well in education, become better human beings and be well protected from the bad influences of society. This is perhaps understandable, however, parental views were strongly influenced by their respective habitus and the social and cultural influence had a strong bearing upon the process of how and in what manner the parents wanted to instil in their children the cultural 'norms' and 'values' they espoused. In this regard, for instance, through the collective agreed cultural understanding most parents put much emphasis on instilling 'obedience' and 'respect' in their children as the primary purposes of education, in many ways by adopting authoritarian styles of interaction with children.

The findings also revealed links between parental social class dynamics and their views on education (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.2**). In this respect, I found that for most parents there were strong connections between acquiring education and a desire for upward social mobility, which they mostly viewed as economic dividends and in utilitarian terms. Moreover, since for most parents the purposes of education singularly signified social mobility, they described seeing their children securing good positions in public and private sector institutions. In a similar vein, I also found that many parents do regard education as *capital* (though they have not referred to it explicitly as such), which they saw as a liberating force and as an ability to make effective sense of one's society and structures and practices (see **Chapter Seven,**

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**Section 7.3.4).** To this end, social class featured prominently in the parents' data, with most working-class parents therefore desiring that their children do not end up doing the work they were doing and wanting something better for them.

The findings also revealed an interesting aspect of parental habitus in which the majority of the parents made use of metaphors to spatially visualise and describe links between education and the physical and natural world (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.3**). In this connection, I found that most parents used 'light' as a metaphor to describe how they viewed and understood education and its significance in the 'real world,' that it had a 'physical existence,' was 'enabling' and a source of 'direction' and 'power.' Moreover, some parents also made use of the analogies of 'sight,' 'language' and 'cognition' to describe the significance of education in everyday aspects of their lives. They seemed to point to differences between the underlying structures of cognition and habitus of individuals in which language(s) plays an important and significant role, which people use to appropriate and decode structures and practices in various social settings. The use of metaphors, besides being powerful descriptors of what the parents thought and experienced in their everyday personal, social and professional contact and interaction, gave important insights into how the structure and functioning of the parental habitus operated and made sense of between two mediums i.e. one's dispositions and the external social and physical world.

The findings also threw some light on gender disparities for girls in education that involved exploring the perspectives of fathers, which resonated with their views on their contact and relationship with the teachers and school (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.5**). In this regard, I found that many fathers, not surprising to someone brought up in that culture, held conservative and restrictive views about the education of their daughters. It was evidently clear from the findings that the majority of fathers seemed to treat their daughters differently by giving preference to sons in education and everyday aspects of life. Consequently, on a broader local and national level, this seemed to have implications for gender disparities in education for girls, documented extensively in Pakistan (Aslam & Kingdon 2008; Shami & Hussain 2006; Winkvist & Akhtar 2000). What seemed clear from the findings was that the many fathers who held restrictive views about the education of their daughters were predominantly because of cultural reasons, but also because of economic constraints. Moreover, it also appeared that the interplay between culture and religion seemed to have

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underpinned how some fathers construed religious ideology and practices differently to have attitudes that seemed culturally influenced, which probably led to the constraining and prohibiting views of the fathers on their daughters' education. For example, many fathers were of the view that daughters should not be allowed to study beyond middle or secondary education and were in favour of restricting them to their houses. This in many ways is seen as contradictory to what Islam and the Quran propagates. The Quran and *Hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad encourage and necessitate both Muslim men and women to acquire knowledge and education (Badawi 1972; Jawad 1998; Khatab & Bouma 2007; Shorish-Shamley, online), something which is clearly interpreted differently by some parents who seem to see no contradiction between this stance and the withdrawal of girls from educational institutions. Thus, it appeared that the constrained habitus of the fathers not only had implications for their daughters' education, but this also seemed to have implications for their contact with the school.

However, there was also evidence in the findings that established that some parents were supportive of both the sons and daughters education. For such parents the interplay between parental habitus and field avoidance highlighted how the constraining field structures of the village environment instigated them to move to urban areas for providing education to their children (see **Chapter Seven, Section 7.3.6**).

#### **9.1.7 Perceptions of communication barriers**

The findings have identified a number of issues that appeared to create barriers to parent-teacher communications, some of which specifically related to teachers and parents whilst others involved their interpersonal dimensions (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3** and **Chapter Eight, Section 8.4**). There is also empirical evidence in the literature which argues that a number of both home and school factors have implications for parent-teacher contact and collaboration, alongside other reasons that create barriers to parental involvement and parent-teacher communications. For instance, barriers to parent-teacher communications include issues around skills and knowledge about building collaboration, lack of interaction opportunities, psychological and cultural barriers, work preoccupations, delegation beliefs, transportation, childcare, and attitude differences, lack of confidence, and insensitivity and hostility on the part of school personnel (Bauch 1993; Bermúdez 1993; Moles

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1993). I found that many of these issues and factors seemed to resonate with the perceptions and experiences of the majority of the teachers and parents in my study; although there were some stark differences between their perceptions and experiences about communication barriers.

Concerning teachers and schools, it was abundantly clear from the findings that most teachers saw no apparent barriers to parental involvement or visit to school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3.1**). In this connection, most teachers were of the view that, since parents themselves were uneducated and had little interest in their children's education most parents therefore were least inclined to visit the school. By this, it seemed that most teachers homogenised parents as if representing a single entity and therefore portrayed them as 'hard to reach,' which from the perspective of the parents was not the case: it seemed apparent from the findings that in most cases it were the schools that inhibited accessibility for parents (Crozier & Davies 2007).

I also found that as the majority of teachers only and very rarely contacted parents when their child was in trouble or had behaviour, conduct or academic problems, it was evident that most barriers to parental communication or engagement with the school were intrinsically from within the school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3.2**). This appeared so because generally in the structure and function of the school, parents were usually perceived as an *external* entity. However, even then the findings suggest that the general perception of most teachers was that parents were responsible for not visiting the school. Moreover, I also found that most teachers espoused a 'deficit view' of the parents (Davies 1993; Scott-Jones 1993). This seemed to have implications for the parents to consider the school structures as alien territories, which had a logic and practice of its own, leading to creating barriers for parental engagement with the school. However, notwithstanding the barriers that may have existed in the schools and practiced by the teachers, it also seemed evident that the parents and community were complicit in perpetuating the distance between home and school. This seemed so because there was an implicit understanding of the parents towards non-interference in the school affairs and parental deference to teacher authority, which meant creating self-imposed barriers to their own participation or visits to school.

However, the findings also revealed that many teachers were also of the view that some structural and operational issues of the school created barriers to parental visits

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to the school. The most frequently mentioned of these, according to the teachers, were ‘time’ and ‘space’ constraints (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3.3**). By this, the teachers seemed to find it hard to extend the already established and conditioned boundaries of their habitus that were strongly positioned in the field of the school. Moreover, this also indicated the structured role of the teachers’ habitus and practices due to which accommodating alternative and open structures of practices were seen as fraught with problems.

Some teachers, however, highlighted the more important issue of the ‘culture of separation’ as a barrier to parental involvement with the school or teachers (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3.4**). In this connection, I found that the culture of separation was dominantly constructed and instituted through the role that the teachers played in the school. More specifically, the socio-historical context of school, and the students’ social class and their conditioned role in it, formed an important part of the collective outlook that shaped and influenced the practices of all the stakeholders, which created spaces of exclusions and separation for the parents in the school. This also seems to imply that, the feeling of separation between the school and home was also because of the huge disparities and incompatibilities between the structure and quality of the habitus and practices of the teachers and parents in their respective spheres as well as with one another.

In addition, I found that some teachers highlighted the role that the structural and functional aspects of the school played in creating barriers to parental engagement with the school (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.3.5**). In this regard, the teachers argued that the autocratic structures that existed in the school posed barriers to parental involvement in which parents felt themselves to be less ‘important’ and that they were not being ‘listened’ to properly. The findings suggest that the issue of prioritising and listening to parents was compounded by at least two factors. Firstly, I found that, for most teachers, class and status consciousness operated very strongly both within and outside the school structures, which according to some teachers posed barriers to parental visits. Secondly, and as a result of the first, at the micro-interactional level, generally, the field dynamics of the schools and the teachers’ habitus were not appropriately sensitised to incorporate (working-class) parents as individuals and equal partners. This, according to some teachers, resulted in unpleasant experiences

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for the parents who visited the school, and hence which posed barriers or obstacles to their future visits.

The picture that emerged from the parents' findings about barriers to their communication with the school showed that in most cases parental background factors (such as class, capital and status issues, besides their habitus) seemed to have a major and dominant role in them not having contact with the school. In addition, some parents indicated aspects of the school environment that they saw as barriers to their visits to school (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.4**).

One of the main issues that arose from the findings pertained to parental perception of their 'unawareness' as a barrier, due to which many parents felt constrained to communicate with teachers (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.1**). In this regard, I found that many parents were of the view that since they were not 'aware' enough, they would not be able to talk to or communicate with the teachers. This was an important finding and suggests that since parental habitus was not in harmony with the dynamics of the field of school and with the teachers' habitus, many parents did not feel comfortable about their role in school and hence they saw their 'unawareness' as the major barrier to their participation with or visit to the school.

In addition, one other most cited factor as a barrier to their visit to school was parental perception of their work engagement as a constraint (see **Chapter Eight, Section 8.4.2**). In this connection, I found that most parents (i.e. fathers) were of the view that their work engagement patterns and earning a livelihood for their families were the main barriers to their communication with the school. What was intriguing was that, although most parents showed keen interest in the education of their children and appeared willing and motivated to visit the school, they rarely had any contact with the school or the teachers. However, their habitus and home structures and practices were not appropriately oriented towards and sensitised in the way they spoke about their communication with the school. It was probably because of these reasons that many parents cited their work engagement as an excuse and a barrier to their communication with the school.

However, in addition to considering their own background factors as obstacles to their visit to school, I found that for some parents, teacher 'attitude,' 'authority' and their lack of 'accountability' in school posed as communication barriers (see **Chapter**

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**Eight, Section 8.4.3).** The findings suggest that, whilst the majority of the parents were deferent to teacher authority, felt culturally and religiously obliged to respect teachers and have ‘trust’ and ‘faith’ in their teaching, for some parents the teachers’ attitudes was one of the barriers that they thought got in the way of their communication with school. In this regard, I found that since the perception of teacher attitude was grounded in the power structures of the school and in the social spaces outside the school, some parents therefore anticipated and were wary of teachers’ attitudes and the way teachers might treat them in the school. In addition, I also found that given that for the majority of the parents there were differences of status, class, and capital between themselves and teachers, for some parents the perception of social transactions with the teachers involved a feeling of ‘neglect’ and ‘difference,’ which they perceived as obstacles to their visit to school.

In a similar vein, the findings suggest that although most parents did not seem to have a direct contact with the teachers and school, many parents were equally aware of the issues, processes and practices that structured teacher ‘authority’ in the school. In this regard, I found that parental habitus was adapted to the power structures within the school and therefore teacher authority was understood as unquestionable, and since it was very difficult to challenge, it was seen as a communication barrier for them with the school.

The findings also suggest that the lack of teacher ‘accountability’ for their teaching and performance in the school was the more important issue that seemed to have implications for parental communication with the school. In this regard, I found that not only the parents, but also some teachers and one principal were of the view that since the inspection and evaluation of the teachers and schools had limited functionality and significance, most teachers could get away with anything, which also resonates with the research evidence on school supervision in Pakistan (Ali 1998, 2000). The lack of teacher accountability was therefore one of the important factors that some parents shared as an obstacle to their communication with school.

### **9.1.8 Perceptions of the role of PTA in school**

In exploring teachers’ perceptions about the role of PTA in schools, I found that the majority of the teachers did not know much about the role that the PTA had in their schools, with some teachers even not knowing about their very existence. In regards

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to parents, none of the parents had ever heard about the PTA in school or what it stood for, let alone taking part in one. The findings suggest that for most teachers there were issues around the role and effectiveness of the PTA in schools and of parental involvement in it (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.4**).

In terms of policy provisions, my findings suggest that it was relatively recently in 1991 that the Government of Pakistan made it mandatory for every school to have a PTA (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.4.1**). However, surprisingly I found that the issues around parent-teacher relations and the importance of the PTA in schools had been worked out in considerable detail in 1956 in a Conference on the objectives of secondary education in Pakistan (Khan 1956). However, most of the issues and constraints, which the Conference had pointed out, still seemed to resonate with the experiences of the teacher participants of my research and appeared practiced in the schools. This seems to suggest that little appeared to have changed in decades in the agents' habitus as well as in the structure of field dynamics of both the school and society. It was probably because of these reasons and factors that for most teachers, PTAs in schools were either non-existent, were seen as a 'label' or at the most were regarded as a spending body that spent a modest amount of funds on school maintenance.

In addition to policy provisions, I also found that for many teachers there were issues around the structure and funds of the PTA in schools (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.4.2**). About the structure and composition of the PTA, I found that many teachers held and shared with me conflicting perspectives. The findings suggest that some participants were amazed to express that officially teachers did not form members of the PTA. However, surprisingly, I established that whilst on the official documents teachers were not represented on the PTA, a number of empirical studies found that in many cases it was the teachers and their relations that dominated the PTAs in schools in Pakistan. In a similar vein, concerning the participation of women on a PTA, the literature suggests that the representation of mothers on PTAs in girls' schools was also an issue, since men and husbands of female teachers operated these associations.

In regard to the issue of funds of the PTAs, I found that many respondents did not have much knowledge about the PTA funds, and the very few that had some knowledge, held varying perspectives. In this regard, the literature suggests that the lack of liaison between the various segments of the government machinery hampered

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the delivery and monitoring mechanisms of the PTA funds. Additionally, the pilferage of funds at the various levels, especially at the end-user level, meant that the majority of the PTAs had no functional significance.

In a similar vein, the findings also reveal that the majority of the teachers raised concerns about the functionality of the PTA in schools (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.4.3**). I found that many teachers did not have much knowledge about the role and significance of the PTA in schools and some teachers were not even aware of their existence in schools. It was probably why the literature has identified a number of important factors and processes, which seemed to have worked both individually and reciprocally to render PTAs as ineffective, non-functional and of little influence in most schools (Khan 2003; Robson 2004; Shah 2003; Tim *et al.* 2005).

However, it was evident from the findings, and there was strong empirical evidence in the literature that suggested that predominantly it was the teachers and the conditions that lay inside the schools due to which PTAs were not functional (see **Chapter Six, Section 6.4.4**). The findings from my study suggest that since the majority of the teachers had a collective understanding of the parents as a homogenised entity, most of them therefore were of the view that it was because of the parents that the PTAs were not functioning. In other words, the teachers' habitus and the field dynamics of the schools appeared to have created and perpetuated a system of practices and conditions in which PTAs had only symbolic significance.

## **9.2 Limitations of the study**

Reflecting back on the various stages of the study and the processes involved therein, in this section, I identify and discuss some limitations of the research. These limitations should not be seen as a lack of success of the study, rather the discussion of the various issues highlight the strategic decisions that I made during the course of the research, due to which I successfully and effectively completed the research study (see **Chapters Four-Eight**). These experiences therefore also formed an important part of my research skills that need to be seen in a positive light. In addition, the discussion of the limitations of the study will help researchers to avoid the various impediments whilst conducting further research on the various aspects of home-school relations and parent-teacher interaction and communication in Pakistan or elsewhere in related contexts. The limitations I discuss pertain to sampling issues,

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fieldwork processes, researcher intrusiveness, translation, transcription, analysis and interpretation of data, and researcher subjectivity and reflexivity issues.

### **9.2.1 Sampling issues**

One of the impediments concerns sampling issues during the fieldwork. In this study, I adopted a qualitative methodology to explore parent-teacher relations in public secondary schools by recruiting a diverse sample of parents (both mothers and fathers) and teachers (both male and female) from urban and rural contexts. Whilst I did face some problems in the boys' and girls' schools recruiting teachers and fathers for the research, seeking informed consent of the mothers was the most difficult issue I encountered, reasons for which had strong cultural underpinnings (see **Chapter Four**). Due to this, few mothers volunteered for the research study. A female researcher subsequently interviewed the mothers. Due to time and resource constraints, I could not seek the consent of other mother-participants for this study, which could be seen as a limitation of the study. Nevertheless, mothers' data was rich and diverse and resonated with and provided contrasting perspectives to that of the fathers' and teachers' data, and therefore had depth and 'thickness' of the context under investigation.

### **9.2.2 Fieldwork processes and issues**

In regard to the tools of data gathering, whilst I used semi-structured interviews and FGDs as the main research methods, the research would have benefitted more by employing in-depth (non)participant observation as a research tool spanning a longer duration of time. In this sense, specific instances of parent-teacher interaction and communication within the school context would have strengthened the study further and would have provided an added triangulation dimension to the research.

### **9.2.3 Researcher intrusiveness**

Although, I was an 'insider' in the sense of being a 'native' and had a thorough understanding of the dynamics of social situations and transactions, at times I felt I was perceived as an 'outsider' within the various school contexts. Due to this, I felt some intrusiveness in the schools (especially in the girls' schools) and in some participants' personal and professional lives. This may have shaped and influenced some of the process and content of my research, which I tirelessly aimed to counter throughout the fieldwork. Whilst the physical intrusiveness of my presence was

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completely evident in the girls' schools, I made every effort to blend in the various contexts, to maintain the naturalness of the respective environments and therefore to generate data that represented the contexts in earnest. This may not have been fully possible with some of the respondents because of my being perceived as having a middle-class status and my gender seemed to have been an issue for some participants, when I was interviewing female teachers.

#### **9.2.4 Issues around translation, transcription, analysis and interpretation of data**

One of the strengths of my research is that I employed qualitative research tools to capture the insights and perspectives of the participants by creating an informal conversational environment that relied heavily on the cultural context underpinned by the use of mainly Pashtu language. However, whilst these strategies generated 'thick description' of the research contexts, their use meant that there were limitations as well, which involved issues like respondent validation, transcription and translation of data from Pashtu to English, the difficulty of transposing cultural nuances from the data and overcoming researcher subjectivity (see **Chapter Four**). To appreciate the fullness and richness of the research, an alternative format for this thesis (for instance in video format) would have provided a completely new dimension to the research. However, I endeavoured hard to present as accurate a description as possible of how and what the various participants shared as their perspectives, in order to generate a coherent and cogent picture of parent-teacher relations underpinned by their respective social and cultural contexts.

#### **9.2.5 Researcher subjectivity and reflexivity**

It is generally agreed that in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection and interpretation (e.g. Lincoln & Guba 1985; Marshall & Rossman 1995, 1999, 2006; Merriam 1988; Patton 2002; Stake 2010; Strauss & Corbin 1998). However, in conducting qualitative research the role of the researcher has been the subject of much debate and criticism, which centres on claims of subjectivity, bias and subjective interpretation of findings. Hence, being aware of these issues, throughout the research process, I endeavoured to maintain a reflective stance. I therefore strived to follow Bourdieu, whose theory of practice and sociological project underpins an invitation to reflexive sociology, stressing that the researcher should rise above the subjective-objective dichotomy and explore the dialectic of relations and

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structures within social relations (Bourdieu 1977, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Therefore, throughout this research, my effort had been to maintain a balanced subjective-reflective stance in the interpretation and analysis of the findings in a manner that I may not overshadow the research with my own subjectivities.

### **9.3 Implications of the findings**

Some of the expected outcomes, which follow, may sound too ambitious, and in reality they might be, but in fact are possible to achieve with some planning and devotion. In other words, by having some flexibility in one's habitus and by adapting the field structures of schools, we may see progressive, open and engaging practices between teachers and parents.

I believe this research not only contributes towards the existing knowledge of home-school relations but it also has policy implications. The major implication of this research is its potential to bring parents and teachers closer, which will make a difference to the quality and delivery of education for children, for which both the home and school are responsible and important natural partners.

Based on the findings of the study, some implications of the research are as follows.

- The findings of the research could be used by practitioners and policy makers for creating a positive healthy environment for interaction between the school and parents and the community in the existing socio-cultural scenario and infrastructural facilities in Pakistan.
- Gaining the knowledge about and showing how teachers and parents interact with one another and with children and how these interaction patterns might influence children's attainment have important policy and practice implications at the macro and micro levels in Pakistan.
- The findings could be used to empower parents and the community to engender participation in schools, which may help address a variety of problems (e.g. students' dropping out, curriculum delivery, school effectiveness, management) in education.
- Since I have identified a number of barriers (pertaining to both teachers and parents) to parental involvement and engagement with school, the findings could educate the stakeholders to work towards removing the real impediments to parental involvement in schools.
- By documenting and demonstrating the way interactions are structured amongst the teachers and parents, the research knowledge thus acquired could be used to educate parents and community members towards their positive involvement in schools and conversely to inform schools of the structural

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impediments that would appear to be placed in the way of enhanced parental involvement in schools and education.

- The research findings might lead to a general awareness amongst teachers, parents and community members to adopt flexible and more child-centred approaches towards children's learning in schools and the community.
- An important implication and contribution of my research would be towards adding to teachers' awareness of creating a 'caring environment' for students, which gradually will lead to encouraging parents and community participation in the school life.
- Besides the parents providing help to improve the physical aspects of school, ensuring parental involvement in school life could also help assist teachers in their academic work, if/when the field dynamics of the schools are sensitised towards these ends.

Whilst these implications of the findings could be taken-up by individual schools, teachers and parents and also at the education department level, what is more important is that at the local and national level, these findings need to be incorporated in the policy and practice framework as mandatory components and aspects of school practices. In this regard, I suggest some recommendations.

#### **9.4 Recommendations**

Based on the research findings and discussion from the previous chapters, I suggest some recommendations, which have the potential for improving and strengthening cooperation and relationships between teachers and parents.

One of the most frequently cited and mentioned issue and problem of most teachers pertained to the various constraints they claimed to face in the schools, due to which they argued they did not have any time to communicate effectively with the parents. As a first step for improving relations between teachers and parents, I recommend substantial investment in and improvement of physical infrastructure, material resources and related staff development. However, as many of the teachers and the principals were of the view, this needs to be followed up by a well thought out system of audit and evaluation that is maintained and sustained by rigorous checks and balances for which every individual is held responsible and accountable.

Keeping the above points in mind, what this research clearly demonstrates is a need for adapting and sensitising the teacher habitus and the cultures of schools, as material provisions and physical facilities mean nothing unless driven and deployed by well-intended teachers and principals. This means that in order for the schools to have open

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and welcoming environments and culture, there is a need to provide effective and sustained training to the teachers and principals in interpersonal relations with both parents and community members. In this regard, in teacher training programmes, the significance and importance of home-school relations and parent-teacher cooperation and contact should form a mandatory component of the curriculum and syllabus of the training programmes at the primary and secondary levels.

In addition, the role of the principal emerged as one of the important and significant aspects of the research. The principal has the potential for creating effective links between the school and parents and on creating a culture of accommodating parents in school, which ultimately has implications for school effectiveness. In this regard, I suggest some recommendations. Firstly, in the existing socio-cultural landscape and politics, the principal needs to be given more powers and resources to run schools effectively, although with sufficient accountability (see **Chapter Five**). This may include the powers of hiring and firing teachers, which may eliminate the political and class leverage some or many teachers might be using for not teaching properly and not communicating with parents. Secondly, the principal as a head has the more important role in informing parents and communicating and interacting with them in the school and as their first point of contact. Principals therefore need to be provided with effective training and strategies for not only communicating with and inviting parents to the school but also educating and working with parents on how effectively they could help their children at home (given their capacities and education), and for closely associating with their children in the prevailing culture and related practices. Thirdly, being the head of school and commanding cultural respect from both teachers and parents, a principal has the potential to invigorate and mobilise links with the community. Contact with the community seems to be one of the important areas through which not only parental involvement in the school could be ensured, but also through reorganisation of the PTA, a number of self-help programmes and provisions could be initiated, which could transform schools into community centres. In this manner, a positive healthy environment for interaction between the school and the community can be created within the existing socio-cultural setup and infrastructural facilities.

As discussed in the previous chapters on parents, although most parents had an effective understanding of the various aspects of communication with teachers and the

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school, for most parents there appeared huge power implications in communication with teachers. In this regard, the recommendation is that parent and community awareness programmes be conducted at the school level with an aim to provide in-depth understanding into the various aspects of parent-teacher relations in school and parent relations with their children at home. This could not only lead to empowering parents and the community but will also engender their participation in schools, which may help address a variety of problems (e.g. students' dropping out, curriculum delivery, school effectiveness, and management).

There are some recommendations concerning barriers to parent-teacher relations and parent participation in school. Of all the barriers noted by teachers as obstacles to parental involvement in school, what appeared evident was that the structural and functional barriers, that seemed to have been strongly rooted in the teachers' habitus and the field dynamics of schools, were the most cited and pervasive barriers. In this regard, firstly, teacher workload needs to be reduced and provision of average class size be ensured by providing for physical facilities and resources and related human resources. Secondly, effective in-service training programmes need to be organised that provide training, awareness and education to teachers about the worth and potential of parents and of their significance and importance in the children's personal, social and academic development. Thirdly, whilst most teachers homogenised parents as uninterested in their children's education, teachers' awareness and training could help remove the 'culture of separation' as a barrier that existed between teachers and parents within the schools. Fourthly, following on from the above points, a gradual and sustained shift in schools towards giving 'importance' to parents and 'listening' to them could be incorporated into the culture of schools (see **Chapters Five and Eight**).

With regards parents, whilst most cited their 'unawareness' and their preoccupation with their job as barriers to visiting school, most of them were more than willing to visit school provided they were invited by the school. In this regard, whilst attitude, authority and accountability of the teacher were the major concerns for some parents, it is recommended that parental contact with teachers and principal needs to be made a mandatory component of the curriculum and school structures that is based on sharing mutual information about the children's progress and development, academic or otherwise. Contact needs to be initiated by the school because schools and teachers

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have a responsibility towards parents about their children and are professionally more attuned to the various aspects of children's learning.

### **9.5 Originality of research and contribution to knowledge**

In this section, my aim is to discuss and justify the originality of my research and its contribution to the existing body of knowledge and literature in the field of home-school relations generally, and to parent-teacher relations at the secondary school level particularly. The 'originality' of research and 'significant contribution to knowledge' are the widely agreed and essential criteria and requirements upon which the quality and credibility of a PhD research is assessed (Blaxter *et al.* 2006; Cryer 2006; Dunleavy 2003; Lee 2009; Phillips & Pugh 2005; Potter 2006; Trafford & Leshem 2008).

Concerning originality, most writers agree that originality in research need not be a major breakthrough or a groundbreaking development of theory (Lee 2009). However, on offer is a broad range of definitions and criteria through which researchers can demonstrate the originality of their research (e.g., Birley & Moreland 1998; Cryer 2006; Potter 2006; Phillips & Pugh 2005; Trafford & Leshem 2008). What appears evident from these criteria is that the claims for originality of research broadly underpin demonstrating the effective and unique use of one or some aspects of one's research pertaining to theory, methodology, methods, tools and data, and interpretation and analysis of findings. To demonstrate the originality of my research, I follow and discuss briefly Cryer's (2006:192-97) suggested criteria.

My research has been unique and original in the way I have used the tools, techniques and procedures in the fieldwork. I employed qualitative research tools that incorporated semi-structured interviews and FGDs, which seemed to have been new, untested and unknown ways of gathering data from the research participants in the study area. This proved to be the major strength of my research as the respondents spoke freely and shared informally their perceptions and experiences about the topic under study, therefore justifying my claims for originality.

I would also like to reiterate that to the best of my knowledge the research that I have conducted has not been explored before at such depth and level specifically in the context of parent-teacher relations in Pakistan. Therefore, in this sense, the mere exploration of the topic makes my work original. In addition, whilst my research

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questions guided the framework for interviews and FGDs and the fieldwork, I clearly had an open mind for exploring the unanticipated. For instance, one of the powerful unanticipated aspects of my fieldwork and data pertained to parental habitus and their background factors and aspects of norms, values, cultures and structures that seemed to have structured much of their practices within their various fields. In this sense, it was fascinating to explore and discuss parental views and experiences in the light of the theoretical underpinnings and to present a ‘story’ that charts their trajectories of life and practices.

In a similar vein, as the chapters on parents and teachers demonstrate, I have endeavoured to analyse, interpret and present the data in a manner that is as trustworthy as possible, in my representation of the context and practices of the participants, which were shown to have been thoroughly grounded in theoretical bases. This indicated my potential for the use of data in original ways. Moreover, by deploying the concepts of habitus, capital and field as theoretical tools, I have attempted to make a strong argument for the “originality in transfer of mode or place of use” (Cryer 2006:195). What I mean by this is that I have demonstrated through empirical evidence the presence and use of the concepts that the various participants deployed and incorporated in their day-to-day activities and practices.

Overall, reflecting back on the entire research process and practice, I have not only been “able to tease out something worthwhile from an academic or scholarly standpoint” (Cryer 2006:197), but it has also proved to be a novel and original experience that informed and structured my habitus as a researcher. In addition, whilst my thesis has the potential of being published as a book, there is also a potential to generate several journal articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Many of the aspects of originality discussed above also overlap with and contribute towards the claims for a significant contribution to knowledge. In this regard, Finn (2005:14) suggests that what constitutes a contribution to knowledge could include aspects of one’s research that discusses “the nature of the research question, the use of an effective research methodology and evidence of critical evaluation.”

Throughout my research, I have endeavoured to answer the overarching question of “how do parents and teachers interact and communicate in secondary schools in Pakistan?” In order to do this, the proposed theoretical framework provided a strong

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conceptual and analytical basis, which seemed to have contributed towards “an advancement in understanding” (Finn 2005:14) of the complexities and structures of parent-teacher relations in Peshawar. Through the interplay between my research questions and the theoretical tools (see **Chapters One** and **Three**), I was able to explicate the relationship between variables and facts that seemed to have structured parent-teacher interaction and communication. In this manner, my study went beyond the descriptive level and operated at a deeper level and sought explanations, tested predications and aimed “to extend understanding at the forefront of the discipline” (Finn 2005:15).

To contribute to the existing body of knowledge, an effective and appropriate research methodology was one of the crucial requirements, involving “a thorough reflection, identification and justification of the choice of research methods” (Finn 2005:15) (see **Chapter Four**). Since my study was driven by a qualitative research methodology, the choice of the research tools was not only based on the research questions and theoretical framework, but also most importantly on the characteristics of the field or context and on the variation and diversity of the research participants. Therefore, with an effective qualitative methodology at its core, driven by a careful and judicious selection of qualitative research tools, I strived hard to garner such quality data that represented the practices and contexts of parent-teacher relations in earnest.

Finally, alongside the above, “evidence of critical evaluation” (Finn 2005:14) has been identified as a component through which one ensures and justifies their claims for contribution to knowledge. As has also been identified above, throughout the thesis I have tried to maintain a critical-reflective stance that also permeated the individual chapters. In the introduction chapter, I introduced the thesis and research questions, it also provided a sound and intellectually challenging backdrop to the entire thesis. In the literature review chapter, I critically evaluated and mapped the research terrain not only to locate and position my topic along an array of diverse and disparate literatures concerning home-school and parent-teacher relations but also to identify the gaps that existed that I wanted to fill through my research in the context of Pakistan. In the theoretical framework chapter, I discussed, justified and critically analysed the concepts of habitus, field and capital to locate, position and make a case for how these conceptual and analytical tools provide a best fit for the research topic and context under study. In the methodology and methods chapter, I was then able to

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design a road map and therefore justified the ways and means of how best I might be able to connect the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the research with the more practical and pragmatic issues of real life for parents and teachers and their relations. In this manner, throughout the findings chapters, I endeavoured to ensure that the participants' perspectives are presented through a critical-reflective stance that has taken into account the theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of the research. I have demonstrated in this thesis that whilst the relations between parents and teachers were poles apart and most teachers and most parents were of the view that they did not interact and communicate with one another, I have critically and empirically determined that a number of issues contributed to structuring their practices within their respective contexts. This establishes a significant contribution to knowledge in the area of parent-teacher relations at the secondary school level.

### **9.6 Suggestions for further research**

My research has demonstrated that there is a huge potential for further research on a number of issues and aspects discussed throughout this thesis. At a more general and broader level, further research could be undertaken into some important areas that have strong cultural dimensions. These include the influence of family and parental characteristics on parental interaction with children and their relations with teachers and school; the interplay between parenting styles and children's learning at home and parental views on links with school; perceptions of barriers to parent-teacher interaction and involvement; and the influence of parental values on their relations with teachers and school. For further research, of particular importance would be a greater understanding of the influences of both rural and urban cultures upon parental attitudes and involvement in secondary schools.

In schools, further research can be conducted on the interaction patterns of individual teachers with parents of various social classes and into the varieties and dimensions of how their relations are structured and enacted within the school cultures. Also important for further research is teacher-pupil communication patterns, which specifically focus on the culture and field dynamics of how teachers talk to, make use of the language and deploy their bodily habitus to ask their pupils to communicate their messages to parents.

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In addition, the need for having an in-depth understanding of the cultural dimensions and issues concerning gender disparities for girls about parent-teacher relations and their influences about the girl child needs to be given more importance. In this regard, various cultural constraints and issues that girl students face within their schools and that pertaining to issues around home and social contexts are important areas for further research.

Further research can be undertaken into the role of institutional habitus in influencing and structuring parent-teacher relations. In this regard, questions that could be of significance include: What constitutes institutional habitus in schools? How it is structured, enacted and perpetuated within the dominant socio-cultural environment? What constitute 'separate spheres of influence' between schools and parents?

Concerning institutional habitus, the role of the principal emerged as an important determinant that had the potential for making or marring the relations with parents and related organisational and managerial issues at school. Further research specifically looking into the roles, responsibilities and distinguishing features of different principals through which they manage their schools and structure relations with parents will provide important insights into how given the existing socio-cultural environment different principals manage their schools and connect with parents. Examples of best practices of school-home relations developed and managed by successful principals could then be widely shared at the local and national level.

Moreover, power relations between parents and teachers emerged as one of the important aspects governing and influencing their interaction, communication and relations, and their perceptions about these. What appeared more evident was that power dynamics was inherently determined and influenced by the social class, status and related dimensions of the stakeholders. In this regard, further research could be undertaken into the various aspects of parent-teacher transactions involving the issues of power, class and culture. Specific importance needs to be given to how the influence of status and class influences parental perceptions about the role of power with schools and teachers.

Concerning parents, more research into the role of culture, norms and values as structuring parental habitus and practices will throw more light on how different parents enact their relations with their children and perceive their relations with

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teachers and schools. In addition, the cultural field dynamics and its influence on parental habitus and practices appeared important determinant of conditioning parents collectively and structuring their practices accordingly. In this regard, further research into the specifics of how culture influences parental interaction patterns would add to the knowledge of issues that impinge upon parental habitus and practices.

### **9.7 Reflections**

Having reached this point, I reflect back on the entire research process and see the phenomenal experience I have had that has truly changed and shaped my own habitus as a person and as a researcher. I began this study with some assumptions and questions to set off on a research voyage that was hard, unpredictably difficult and challenging that often led to uncharted territories, yet the entire process was exhilarating and rewarding. I began my research with literally nothing. However, I am confident that I have produced a thesis that has an important place in the current national and international geo-political context and debate.

In this thesis, I have endeavoured to deconstruct and present how parent-teacher relations are structured and enacted in secondary schools in Pakistan by adopting a sociological stance that incorporated capital, habitus, and field as conceptual and analytical tools. The aim of the thesis therefore was to interpret and understand the complexities and dynamics of communication and interaction between parents and teachers and within their respective spheres of life. Therefore, I have attempted to chart the sociological journeys of the different stakeholders and participants that they contributed by sharing a slice of their time that represented their habitus and related dynamics. This led to a reconstruction of how the respective participants viewed themselves concerning their relations with each other and fitted in the dynamics of home-school relations. In this sense, whilst the thesis provides a strong cultural representation of parent-teacher relations, I have demonstrated with empirical evidence how parents and teachers appropriate and make sense of the various practices and relations that involve the way they deploy their respective habitus in their respective field(s) to construct and give meaning to their actions and practices. Thus, each one of the participants constructed their own version of reality that was meaningful, justifiable and hence valid according to their standards.

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Whilst I acknowledge that, I had an important role in constructing and mapping a sociological ‘story’ (with an anthropological flavour) that the various participants contributed, throughout the various stages of the research and the writing up stage, I adopted a reflective stance. This meant that whilst total objectivity in interpretation and analysis was something idealistic and hence not possible, I have made every effort to critique and constantly question my own habitus and the underlying understanding and presuppositions of the dynamics of the various field(s) from the perspectives of the participants. Thus, I was continuously engaged in the process of meaning making, of how and what the different participants shared about their relations and practices about teachers and parents.

I have made a humble effort to present a sociological portrait of parent-teacher relations in Pakistan. I have shown that this was dominantly structured and conditioned not only by the respective habitus, capital and field dynamics of the agents individually and reciprocally, but the culture and in some ways the interpretation of religion seemed to have played a dominant role towards informing and structuring the practices of the parents and teachers. As such, the reader of the thesis will be positioning their habitus and background, and related conceptual and analytical tools to interpret and more specifically to construct a meaning of their own. In this sense, it is true to say that reality is dynamic and subjective and for different readers the thesis may have multiple realities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Letter of Introduction

June 13, 2006

The Director Schools and Literacy Department  
N-W.F.P., Pakistan.



The University of  
**Nottingham**

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Dean of the Faculty of Education and  
Head of School:  
**Dr Carol Hall**

Dear Sir,

**Re: Application for Permission to Conduct Fieldwork for Doctoral Research**

I am writing this letter to apply for permission to conduct fieldwork for my PhD research at public secondary schools (male/female) in NWFP between September and November 2006.

I am a second year student in the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom (UNESCO Centre for Comparative Education). I have been working as lecturer at the Institute of Education & Research, University of Peshawar since 2001 and am presently on study leave from my parent University for the period of my PhD studies at Nottingham. The topic for my research is "modes of interaction between parents and teachers in public secondary schools in Pakistan: a socio-cultural investigation of home-school relations."

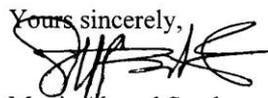
The fieldwork will involve interviews with participants (parents, teachers and students; male and female) from secondary schools in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, I will request to interview key educational administrators of the concerned schools. I also aim to conduct focus group discussion with participants (parents, teachers and students; male and female separately) from the respective schools. The study will also include some observation of the interactions involved and recording images of the various physical settings, events, etc.

As this study is purely for research purposes, the information provided by all the research participants, in any of the formats, would be kept confidential and anonymous.

My supervisor, Dr Peter Gates, Associate Professor and Director Research Degrees, may be contacted at the above address should the need arise.

I look forward to hearing from you.

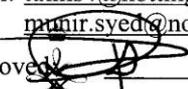
Yours sincerely,

  
Munir Ahmed Syed  
PhD student

Email: [ttxms4@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ttxms4@nottingham.ac.uk)  
[munir.syed@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:munir.syed@nottingham.ac.uk)



Approved

  
Dr. Peter Gates  
Supervisor

---

## Appendix B: Participant consent form

**Project title** Modes of interaction between parents and teachers in public secondary schools in Pakistan: a socio-cultural investigation of home-school relations

**Researcher's name** Syed Munir Ahmad

**Supervisor's name** Dr Peter Gates

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped/photographed during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored electronically and in hard copies and the researcher and his supervisor will have access to them.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** ..... (Research participant)

**Print name** ..... **Date** .....

### Contact details

Researcher: Syed Munir Ahmad, PhD student, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Wollaton Road, Nottingham NG8 1BB UK.

Supervisor: Dr Peter Gates, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Wollaton Road, Nottingham NG8 1BB UK.

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: [andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk)

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## Appendix C: Information sheet to participants

### Information sheet:\*

Dear participant:

I am interested in exploring the way parents and teachers interact with each other. I am also interested in knowing what role do children play in relation to their interaction with teachers and parents. Furthermore, my particular interest is in finding out what activities are performed by teachers and parents in school and home in regard to their relations with children.

For the above, I require your help to participate in interview and discussion. I also request to observe some activities, and setting in home and school. The information thus gained would help in understanding those issues and factors, which affect relations of home and school.

The information provided in audio and written formats would be kept in complete confidentiality and all the names would be kept anonymous. All this is to ensure complete secrecy of the data. Transcripts and audiotapes would later be disposed off.

Syed Munir Ahmad

Researcher

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\* Note: This information sheet was translated to and verbally communicated in Pashtu/Urdu language.

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## **Appendix D: Semi-structured interview schedule for parents**

### **About you**

- Qualification
- Job/work
- Children

### **About your home**

- Work and home commitments
- Issues faced in regard to children
- Perceptions of the purpose of educating children
- Understanding of interaction with school/teachers
- Nature/pattern of relations with children

### **About you and your children**

- Patterns of interaction with children
- Type of activities children do at home
- Responsibilities delegated to children
- Inquiries about school activities
- Ways of resolving school related problems of children

### **Perceptions about School**

- Visit to school
- Perceptions of quality of education in school
- Perception of and knowledge about the impact of material resources/physical provisions on children
- Awareness of rules and procedures of School
- Barriers from school
- Interaction with principal

### **Interaction/communication with teachers**

- Purpose of visiting child's school/class
- Comfortable communication with teachers
- Power relations with teachers
- How many teachers known
- Perceptions about interaction within classroom amongst teacher and students
- Knowledge of PTA

---

## **Appendix E: Themes for FGD of parents**

### **About parents/home**

- Nature/pattern of interaction with children: personal, social, academic, others
- Issues of home
- Issues of job/finances
- Perceptions of education
- Perceptions about teachers/school
- Issues of access of children to school
- Perception of sharing the responsibility of education with teachers
- Perception of social construction of interaction with school

### **Perceptions about school**

- Knowledge of the structure and function of school system and perceptions of quality of education provided to children
- Awareness of rules and procedures of School
- Perception about parental rights and responsibilities
- Communication channels
- Barriers from school

### **Interaction with teachers**

- Issues of access
- Perception/experience of power dynamics
- Perceptions of barriers
- Perception of social construction of interaction
- Understanding of rules and procedures

---

## Appendix F: Semi-structured interview schedule for teachers

### 1. About you

- Qualification
- Classes you teach
- Experience
- Other interests
- Any other preoccupation (including job)

### 2. Interaction in class

- Your approaches in class in addition to teaching styles
- Students: how they approach and respond in varying situations
- Communication problems with students
- Effect of class size (number/strength) on your performance

### 3. Interaction in school

- Other commitments in school?
- Factors affecting performance in school
- Discussion about parents and their issues discussed formally or informally with colleagues and
- Ways and means of helping one another (amongst colleagues)
- Reinforcement (positive or negative) from colleagues for various efforts and initiatives
- Any role of parents in co-curricular activities of their children in school
- In-service training programmes for personal professional development or for parental involvement strategies organised by Education Deptt. or NGOs etc.
- Effect of parental educational background on interaction of students in school/classrooms
- Ways of interaction of students with teachers in the present social and cultural environment.

### 4. Interaction of/with parents

- Categories of parents (their SES) and related background
- When do parents visit you?
- In your opinion, what factors are responsible for parents sending their children to school.
- Which aspects of their children parents are interested to enquire?
- How do parents inform themselves of their child's performance in the school?

- 
- Your views about parental perception of sharing responsibility of education and learning.
  - Your views on the parents understanding of the image of the teachers/school.
  - Your views on power dynamics between various parents visiting and interacting with you.
  - What factors do you consider as potential barriers for parental visit to or engagement with school?

**5. Effect/Interaction of school administration & Education Department officials**

- Principal's role in school
- Nature of annual inspections and their effects on the performance of teachers, students and parents
- Your views about the school culture/environment and the effect of outside (social and cultural) influence inside school.
- Your views about the role of EDO, ADO etc. on the quality of education
- Your opinion/views about PTA, its management and functionality in the school.

**6. Any other item not asked or worth mentioning here regarding this study**

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## **Appendix G: Themes for FGD of teachers**

### **1. Interaction with parents on**

- Student progress
- Student behaviour
- Social interaction
- Others, discuss all

### **2. Interaction of students**

### **3. Interaction in/issues in school**

- Colleagues
- Administration
- Barriers
- School environment
- Classroom congestion
- Teaching load
- Social status issues

### **4. Role of PTA**

### **5. Role of principal**

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## Appendix H: Demographic information of parent-respondents

Name	Age	Education	Children	Occupation	Experience
Mr. MG. (RBS)	50 years	Nil, except some Quranic education –can write his name	6 children–4 sons & 2 daughters	Carpet Fitter	10 years in Dubai For the last around 7 years in a shop at Peshawar.
Mr. LK (RBS)	Around 45 years	Upto grade 2	6 children-2 sons & 4 daughters	Manual Labourer (daily wages)	For the last 30 years
Mr. SA (RBS)	Around 45-50 years	Nil	8 children-2 sons & 6 daughters	Street Food vendor	15 years
Mr. MJ (guardian/ brother) (RBS)	29 years	Grade 2	Siblings-4 brothers & 1 sister	Mason	15 years
Mr. SK (UBS)	55-60 years	Nil	8 children-4 sons & 4 daughters	Workshop owner	30 years
Mr. AtU (UBS)	45 years	Primary/middle	2 wives, 7 children- 6 sons & 1 daughter	Book binder	20 years
Mr. AmU (UBS)	around 50 years	Middle (upto Grade 8)	2 wives, 6 children-3 sons & 3 daughters	Taxi Driver	3 years, before this had established business
Mr. MZ (UBS)	38 years	Primary (grade 5)	8 children, 5 sons and 3 daughters	Naib Qasid - Bearer	15 years
Mr. SA (UBS)	around 50 years	Higher Secondary	8 children, 5 sons & 3 daughters	Laboratory Technician & pharmacy business	20 years
Ms. BB (UGS)	45 years	Nil, except some Quranic education	1 adopted daughter	Housewife (Husband driver)	
Ms. HB (UGS)	46 years	Nil, except some Quranic education	5 children, 2 sons & 3 daughters	Housewife (Husband carpenter)	
Ms. BF (UGS)	48 years	Nil, except some Quranic education	6 children, 3 sons & 3 daughters	House wife (husband Lawyer)	

Appendix I: RBS-various registers (students/teachers/progress/movement)

CLASS	ON ROLL	SICK	LEAVE	ABSENT	PRESENT	Sign. Class Teacher
10thA	45	-	1	-	44	Rehman
10thB	38	1	-	10	27	Rehman
10thC	61	3	-	3	55	Imran
9thA	47	-	1	4	42	Raffy
9thB	48	-	1	8	39	Rehman
9thC	47	-	-	6	41	Abulhasan
8th	64	-	-	5	59	Mali
7th	57	1	-	6	50	Rehman
6th	61	1	-	-	59	Abulhasan
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>416</b>	

Date: 16/12/2006 PRINCIPAL

Date: 17/11/2006 PRINCIPAL

CLASS	ON ROLL	SICK	LEAVE	ABSENT	PRESENT	Sign. Class Teacher
10thA	45	-	1	-	44	Rehman
10thB	38	1	-	10	27	Rehman
10thC	61	3	-	3	55	Imran
9thA	47	-	1	4	42	Raffy
9thB	48	-	1	8	39	Rehman
9thC	47	-	-	6	41	Abulhasan
8th	64	-	-	5	59	Mali
7th	57	1	-	6	50	Rehman
6th	61	1	-	-	59	Abulhasan
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>416</b>	

Date: 17/11/2006 PRINCIPAL

*Handwritten note in red ink: "Student a person / declining / ... / class / ... / ..."*

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100						

### MOVEMENT REGISTER

S.No	Day	Name	Designation	Department	Purpose of Visit	Time of Departure	Time of Arrival	Signature
1		Muhammad Ali	CT	H.R.C	Official	9:00 AM	11:00 AM	
2		Ali Ahmad	SET	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
3		Carl W.	SET	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
4		Zunaidi	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
5		Abdul Halim	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
6		Wenar	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
7		Julian Anwar	CT	H.R.C	Official	9:30 AM	11:30 AM	
8		Zunaidi	CT	H.R.C	Official	9:30 AM	11:30 AM	
9		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
10		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
11		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
12		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
13		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
14		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
15		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
16		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
17		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
18		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
19		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
20		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
21		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
22		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
23		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
24		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
25		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
26		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
27		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
28		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
29		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
30		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
31		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
32		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
33		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
34		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
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53		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
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69		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
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72		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
73		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
74		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
75		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
76		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
77		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
78		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
79		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
80		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
81		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
82		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
83		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
84		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
85		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
86		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
87		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
88		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
89		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
90		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
91		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
92		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
93		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
94		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
95		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
96		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
97		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
98		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
99		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	
100		Hamza	CT	H.R.C	Official	10:00 AM	11:00 AM	

ڈیجیٹل

# پورٹ بک

سکول: \_\_\_\_\_

کلاس: B. 780 سیکشن: B

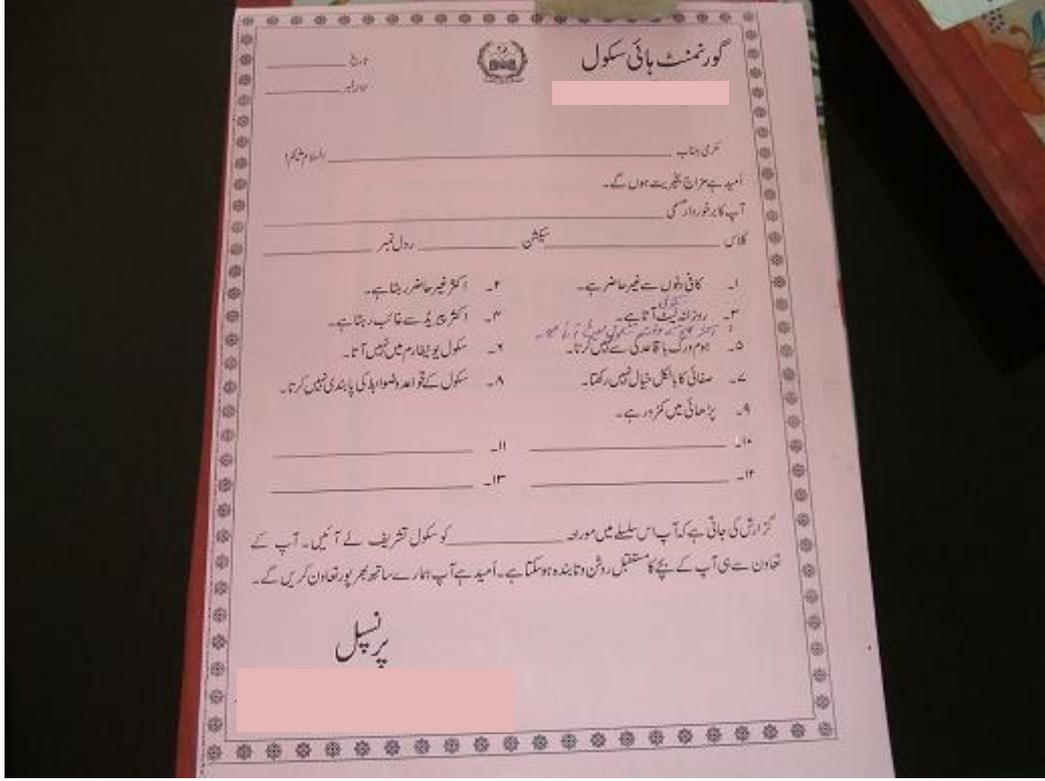
قیمت: 25 روپے

## عادل پرنٹرز

6- سیکنڈ فلور صدف بازار محلہ جنگلی قصہ خوانی پشاور  
فون: 2210637-2580055 موبائل: 0301-8852558

صفحہ نمبر	موضوع	تاریخ
1	عزت الہی	28/4/2024
2	اردو	
3	سرحد	
4	ریاضی	
5	سائنس	
6	P.t عالم ربیب	
7	ڈرائنگ	
8	انتہائی	

## Appendix J: Letter template for communication with parents



Government High School  
Rural Boys' School

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Ref. No: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Sir \_\_\_\_\_

I hope you are doing well.

Your son Master \_\_\_\_\_  
Class \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_ Roll No. \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Has been absent for many days                       | 2. Frequently remains absent                               |
| 3. Daily comes late to school                          | 4. Frequently remains absent from periods                  |
| 5. Does not do his homework regularly                  | 6. Does not come in school uniform                         |
| 7. Does not take care of proper cleanliness altogether | 8. Does not follow the rules and regulations of the school |
| 9. Is weak in his academic work                        |  |
| 10. _____  | 11. _____  |
| 12. _____  | 13. _____  |

In this regard, it is requested that on \_\_\_\_\_ you visit the school. Only with your help and cooperation, your child's future can be bright. I hope that you will cooperate with us in this regard.

Principal  
RBS