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Over the past fifteen years I have worn many educational hats. I have served on school P.T.A. committees in many offices, including that of Chairman, in both the primary and secondary sectors. Five years ago I was one of the first elected Parent Governors to represent parents' views in the management of a school. At the same time I began working as an ancillary in another school in the city. As I was already married to a Head-teacher I was now in the unique position of having a very clear overall view of education.

Now, although my thoughts on education have been influenced by all these roles, the views and observations I wish to express in this paper are primarily those of a parent.

I have always held a fundamental belief that parents should be fully involved in their children's education and that schools should welcome and encourage this partnership and should not just pay lip-service to it. This philosophy grew out of the excellent relationships that flourished in the primary schools where my three children began their education. The relationship that I built up with those schools made it easy for me to help, firstly with reading and cookery, then with taking small groups for needlework and eventually with making costumes for full scale music and drama productions. I never got the impression that I was interfering when I approached a primary teacher; the three way partnership worked so much better because of the relationship with the single class teacher.

I have often wondered what happens to the eager, helpful, caring parents and pupils during the six weeks summer holidays between primary and secondary school. Is it that the inflated importance of the secondary hierarchy baffles and perplexes many parents? I have found that in far too many cases although parents are told how and who to contact in the huge bastion of secondary education it is still too complicated to attempt an exchange of communication. Old feelings of oppression and fear often perpetuates through the years of their children's education. These fears will never be alleviated whilst arrogant verbal bullying still goes on, keeping pupils in their place and making parents defensive. Teachers will never generate goodwill and build bridges if they abuse and patronize the very people with whom they should be working. The spiral of fear and superiority must be broken, for other fields of education have moved on in leaps and bounds whilst this important facet has remained in the realms of divided Victorian society and is anachronistic within the concept of modern community education.

It is so good to see a genuine, caring teacher working in the classroom who has a creative relationship with the pupils. Discipline problems do not arise and this engenders a fertile learning environment. Pupils can always tell the difference between poor and effective teaching, and should really be consulted in any future schemes for teacher appraisal.

When I became a Parent Governor over four years ago, I was naive enough to believe that the governors actually governed the school. I soon found out that the only person with any influence was the Chairperson and even that was limited by the power of the Head-teacher. The specialist knowledge and educational jargon gives the Head-teacher an advantage and renders most governors "toothless tigers". The educational verbosity of the Head-teacher in full flow can leave a Chairperson and governors in the position of the blind leading the blind.

The fixed agenda of all meetings limits the discussion so that it is difficult for anything that spontaneously arises to be explored in any depth. Sometimes questions cannot be answered until the next meeting, which can be up to four months away. Thus, difficult questions can be side-stepped by the Head-teacher, never to be answered.

I felt at the beginning of my term of office that the Parent Governor could be the most useful and hard-working asset to a school if they were allowed to flourish and feel part of a useful team. They have their ears to the ground in the community and could alert and assist a Head as to parental opinions and worries. If, on the other hand, they felt that they were not valued or that they were ignored they could become cynical and even alienate themselves and stop acting as a link between management and those who elected them. I regret to say that subsequently the latter became my experience.

I have seen an example of a good working relationship between Parent Governors and Head-teacher which has been to the benefit of all concerned. But this has been due to the development of confidence, open and accepted criticism and willingness to learn on both sides, and a genuine respect for one another.

If that model was transferable I would be more optimistic for the future of parental involvement in education.

A sense of deep wonder, as Aristotle knew, is the beginning of the philosophical quest, the quest for Wisdom. "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars and about the genesis of the Universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders, thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders)." We have our whole academic heritage to learn from and utilise. And I hope the quest is neverending, joyful, blasting a way through hypocrisy, deception and bigotry to give the word Education its true meaning.