

**PARENT SUPPORT OF LEARNING IN AN INTERNATIONAL
RECEPTION CLASS IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK**

by

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Declaration

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I declare that **Parent Support of Learning in an International Reception Class in Copenhagen, Denmark** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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November 2006

Abstract

Parents play an integral role in the support of early learning. This study focuses on parent support of learning in an international reception class in Copenhagen, Denmark. This study includes a literature review of parent support of early learning and school facilitation of parent involvement in early learning. A qualitative investigation of parental support of early learning, within the context of global mobility and multi-culturalism, was undertaken in Rygaards School, in particular in its Reception Class. It was established that very little support exists on a global, social and local level, for the globally mobile families whose children attend this particular international school. Furthermore, the school itself does not fully meet the needs of its globally mobile families. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for introducing comprehensive parent involvement were proposed, amongst others the introduction of an Induction Programme for newcomers to Rygaards, strategies for compensating for the absence of a middle management amongst its teaching staff and the extension of parent participation in curriculum provision.

KEY TERMS

Cultural, language and religious diversity

Global mobility

Interpretive framework

International reception class

International School

Multi-culturalism in an international school

Parents

Parent involvement programme

Parent support of early learning

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CHAPTER 1

Overview and Rationale of the Study

1.1 Introduction and rationale

A growing body of evidence shows that parent support of learning has a positive impact on student achievement. Studies carried out in poor inner city schools of America and documented by Anne Henderson (1987) in a significant study entitled *The evidence continues to grow – Parent involvement improves student achievement*, are testimony to this.

This study focuses its attention on the learning support of globally mobile parents in a multi-cultural international reception class in a middle-class area of Copenhagen, Denmark. Using evidence gathered thus far, my aim is to conduct an ethnographic investigation of this reception class within the context of the broader global, national and local environment of an international school. The investigation will deal specifically with the issue of global mobility and its impact on the early learning support of parents.

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Motivation and premises

The researcher suggests that the motivation and premises behind this investigation may be understood in terms of the complex situation in which she finds herself, namely that of observer of others as well as reflective practitioner.

Having acknowledged her self reflective, double perspective and the manner in which it, of necessity, influences the outcome of this study, the researcher is obliged to provide the reader with background information that relates to the motivation that lies behind this investigation; the practical experience that led to the identification of the research problem and the reflective framework that defines not only

the manner in which research problem is approached but also the impact of the researcher's participant-observer role on the final outcome of this study.

The author trained as a primary school teacher and worked in a government school during the late 70's of apartheid South Africa. This period in the history of South Africa made her aware of the country's political system, the world-wide women's liberation movement and the role of education in society. Having become involved in the struggle waged by black secondary school students in 1976, she recognised that she could better play a role in South Africa's liberation outside of the country. In 1981, the researcher moved to newly independent Zimbabwe.

As a young inexperienced teacher in a newly independent African State with high hopes for a new future and radical expectations of education in general, the author was faced with children who had little, if any pre-learning skills, as they related to formal learning in a classroom environment. Furthermore, most of their parents were ex-freedom fighters, many of whom had little formal education. Consequently, the aspect of parent support was a challenging reality for the author when faced by mothers and fathers who had high expectations for their children but little schooling experience themselves.

The recognition of insufficient expertise resulted in further educative reflection when the researcher returned to Zimbabwe from London with a Montessori diploma and established a Montessori pre-school, wrote text books for pupils and teachers and initiated a pre-school teacher training project for Zimbabweans as well as exiled South Africans. All the while the issue of parental support of learning was in the foreground.

The move to Zimbabwe was the first in a series of many others. Since the author's early teacher training days in South Africa she has lived and worked in the field of education in Britain, Italy, Denmark, India and Kenya, where the issue of parent involvement in learning has remained an interest. Until now the researcher has not taken the time to reflect why this interest has persisted, however as a result of a pertinent question from someone well-known to her, in both her personal and professional capacity, the realisation arose that in her experience as a teacher, the hardest part of the work has been

dealing with parents! And so without realising it, this investigation may be said to be an attempt to reflect on why this is so and what could be done to improve, not only the researcher's personal interaction with parents but also that of other teachers who have a similar experience and who would like to see more support from their school and school leadership in this central area of their professional life.

1.2.2 Rygaards reception class (RRC)

Rygaards International School is a member of the Council of British Independent Schools in the European Union. The school is a unique learning environment. Located in Copenhagen, Denmark, Rygaards is a private, Catholic school established almost 100 years ago. The school is characterised by a parallel Danish and British style education. The Danish department follows the Danish curriculum in Danish and serves a predominantly mono-cultural Danish population, while the International department presents the British curriculum in English to a multi-cultural population of approximately 350 students. Almost 60 different nationalities are represented at Rygaards, and its international learners and parents are served by staff from Britain as well as its former colonies.

In August 2000 Rygaards reception class, hereafter referred to as RRC, was established as a new addition to Rygaards School as a consequence of an influx of new learners brought about by a building frenzy in the late eighties and nineties in Copenhagen. In the mid-nineties, the city witnessed an economic upswing with the construction of an underground metro. In addition, an ambitious plan was made to develop an entirely new business and residential district that would link the cities of Copenhagen in Denmark and Malmö in Sweden into a new economic zone called Øresund. Consequently, with the impending enlargement of the European Union, the governments of Denmark and Sweden began the construction of a joint venture, namely the Øresund Bridge that would facilitate the movement of motor vehicles and trains over and under the sea between the two countries and thereby link Rome in the south with Stockholm in the north. Besides the expansion of its capital city, Denmark had begun to establish itself as a centre for bio-medical research and communication technology.

The consequence of these developments was that multi-national companies set up their addresses in Copenhagen and brought with them highly educated employees looking for schooling opportunities for their children. During this economic upswing, Rygaards School saw an increase in the number of its pupils and a third international school was established further north of the city centre. However, with the completion of the bridge in 1999 and near completion of the metro in 2000, as well as increased competition from two other international schools, the number of families attending Rygaards began to dwindle. Meanwhile, the head of the international department, who had dealings with every family in her department, quickly realised that many of the families' already attending Rygaards School had children under the age of five years and were looking for placements for their children in a pre-school setting. The idea of establishing RRC was therefore seen as an opportunity to rescue Rygaards School from the economic situation that it found itself in, as well a way of providing a service that would win support from families new to Denmark.

As an international learning environment, RRC represents the state of affairs in schools of the future. A multi-cultural population is increasingly becoming the norm as globalisation and family mobility take hold. Families in RRC find themselves with one foot in their own culture and the other in a foreign part of the world in a multi-cultural environment. While the children in these families are flexible and fairly well able to adapt to new situations, they remain dependent on their parents when it comes to learning support. The manner in which parents deal with geographic, social, cultural and educational change is of relevance to their children's learning achievement.

Studies show that parenting style plays more of a role in pupil achievement than parent education or family structure. (Epstein 1995; Dornbusch 1987). This factor is an important consideration in the research investigation of a multi-cultural and mobile family population and its varied parenting styles. Furthermore research indicates that parent-initiated activities are particularly related to learning achievement (McAllister Swap 1993). This finding is significant when considering the study's goal of identifying present levels of parent support of early learning and developing strategies for improving them.

A literature study suggests that the school community has an impact on children's learning (Epstein 1990; Kato 1995). The multi-cultural make-up of families in RRC constitutes a rich educational resource base and its rich cultural diversity provides scope for exciting curriculum development.

Rygaards is a Catholic school. Studies indicate that Catholic schools have a greater effect on the achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, in this case as second language speakers (Monksviciene 1996). Such studies prompt further investigation on the effect of Rygaards religious ethos on the support of early learning in general in RRC.

Researchers argue that attitudes relating to a self-concept and a sense of control over one's environment play a critical role in school achievement (Gordon 1978). This factor is relevant to this study considering the multi-cultural nature of RRC, the mobility of its family population and the cultural exposure that its young learners bring to and experience within the learning environment of RRC. At this point, while I recognise that gender, gender roles and family structure impact on parent support of early learning, the scope of this investigation does not encompass a gender study. However, the information contained herein may provide material for such an investigation.

Finally, my position as RRC Leader, in the establishment of RRC within the context of Rygaards School, gave me the opportunity to influence educational practice, not only within RRC but in Rygaards School as a whole, and to gather the rich source of information contained in this report. Taking all of the factors mentioned above into account, the globally mobile population at Rygaards, the multi-cultural nature of RRC's family population as well the researcher's personal interest and motivation, RRC is an invaluable site for contemporary educational research.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 Background to the problem

The term 'diverse' best describes the family population in Rygaards School. In RRC, parents have a wide variety of expectations for their children and of teachers. In general they are well educated and

each has passed through an education system very different from that offered at Rygaards. Their experiences of the world vary widely since they come from all corners of the globe, each with particular cultural, religious and social norms. In addition, the question of gender, gender roles and family structures constitute important aspects that influence the manner in which parents support learning. Consequently, it becomes clear that the multi-cultural and globally mobile parent population of this study brings with it a number of challenges.

Firstly, a diverse language base has characterised the group of families attending RRC throughout the five year period of this study. German, French, Japanese, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Danish, Italian, Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, Portuguese, Finnish, Estonian, Swahili and Dutch are only some of the languages that have been heard in the corridors of Rygaards School. It has therefore not been uncommon that one or both the parents in a family have been unable to communicate in English, which presents a special challenge for successful school-home communication and co-operation.

Secondly, allowing that the families in RRC come from a wide variety of cultures and religions, staff are faced with a very broad pattern of parenting styles. It is said that the way that parents bring up their children has important consequences on the success of their formal learning. The degree, to which parents inspire or expect independent behaviour in their children, varies widely and conflicts between teachers and parents arise when the one partner perceives the other to be pulling in the opposite direction. So, discipline at home and the support teachers can expect from parents in this area, present educators in a multi-cultural learning environment with numerous challenges.

Thirdly, experience shows that the parents of RRC display a diversity of values and attitudes when it comes to the care and education of young children. Many of the children attending RRC have attended play groups, other have not. Some of them, particularly those children from south and south east Asia have already been exposed to formalised learning while children coming from more liberal societies in the west have experienced play situations. In addition, issues of gender and the way boys and girls are raised as well as the expectations that parents have of teachers in this regard, are numerous and often conflicting.

Fourthly, the understanding and expectation that parents have of a British-based reception class is in no manner homogeneous. Families coming from Britain expect something identical to that at home and forget that they find themselves in an international environment outside of Britain. Families coming from Asia feel that their children have taken a step back when rote learning no longer happens. Second-language families are disturbed when their child is given a book on a lower level than their English-speaking peers and families from more liberal northern European societies are surprised and disturbed by the formalised learning activities presented in the reception class curriculum. All of these factors make special demands of RRC staff.

Considering how dependent young children still are on the care and supervision of adults, parent-teacher involvement at RRC level is characterised by a number of often conflicting expectations. The level of daily contact between parents and teachers increases opportunities for both co-operation as well as conflict. What one parent considers being adequate child-care may be regarded as lacking by another. The present media exposure of international terrorism has had an impact, which has resulted in some very anxious parents who want schools to implement extreme security precautions, while others regard increased security as a potential provocation and therefore undesirable. Illness and an explosion in childhood allergies create concern amongst parents and place extra demands on teachers since young children are unable to administer medicine and take care of their own health. Furthermore, some parents expect staff to be surrogate parents and forget about the professional nature of teachers' work. Finally, teachers of young children come into close contact with families and are often more familiar with the personal and social status of families than their colleagues who do work with older children and who meet parents on a less regular basis. Access to such information gives teachers of young children access to information relating to the status of the family's social network and relationship difficulties in the home. All of these aspects make special demands on the teacher.

When examining the role of parents in children's early learning, the parent population in the RRC is characterised by variety. For some parents, the location of RRC in Copenhagen plays an essential part in their choice of school. Consequently parents are less concerned about the curriculum on offer than they would otherwise be. For others, the reception year is seen as one in which their child can master English, master some of the socialisation requirements for "real school" or begin to read and write. In

other words, there is no shared expectation of what their children should do during the hours of 9.00 and 14.00. This broad variation in expectations then gives rise to differences in parents' attitudes towards teachers as professionals, as well as the way they perceive their own role in and responsibility for supporting their own child's learning. Furthermore, parents have differing expectations of teachers in terms of meeting their child's needs as well as those of their own particular family. From this it becomes evident that the parents in RRC perceive their own role in their own child's learning as well as the group as a whole, in numerous and often conflicting ways.

While it is clear that the family population of RRC is diverse there are however some characteristics that they share. Denmark is not home, they have moved to the country as a family and the majority of them do not speak English as a first language. They have little or no extended family network in Denmark and their social network is initially weak, especially for the homebound parent. Apart from the fact that they all share the difficulties of establishing themselves in a new country and getting to know its customs, stereotypical gender roles and nuclear family patterns increase the vulnerability that many RRC parents experience. Furthermore, increasingly common amongst this group, are the challenges presented by family break-ups and then make-ups with resultant challenges for step parents, step-siblings and new half-brothers or sisters.

1.3.2 The problem formulation

From the above it is evident that the cultural diversity of the family population in RRC, as well as the phenomenon of global mobility, has drawn attention to issues relating to the support of early learning by schools, teachers and parents and raises a number of problems for investigation:

- What are the particular difficulties faced by globally mobile families?
- How do these parents support early learning and how does Rygaards School and its teachers support them in this task?

- How can Rygaards school environment help teachers to assist parents in their task of supporting the early learning of their young children?

1.4 Aims of the study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the particular difficulties that globally mobile parents face and how a diverse school environment can assist parents to support the learning of their young children. This was done by conducting a case study at an international school in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The aim was divided into a series of sub-aims:

- to describe parent support of children's learning in a multi-cultural school as it exists at present
- to identify problems facing RRC parents in this task
- to identify the present level of support for parents provided by the learning environment
- to gather information on and identify strategies for the development of a comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme in Rygaards School.

1.4.1 Objectives of the study

The short term objectives of the research investigation are:

- to highlight and discuss obstacles that hamper parents endeavours to support their children's learning
- to identify and discuss ways in which these obstacles can be removed
- to identify and describe ways in which parents can be supported in their task.

The long-term objective of the investigation is:

- to gather information and describe strategies for a comprehensive parent involvement programme in RRC in particular and Rygaards School in general.

1.4.2 The relevance of this study

1.4.2.1 The relevance of this study for Rygaards reception class in particular

It is hoped that the study will shed light on the present level of parental support in the early and multi-cultural learning environment of RRC and provide information on how the present level of staff support can be improved using the school environment.

1.4.2.2 The relevance of this study for Rygaards School in general

Taken the experiences at RRC level, the long term aim of this study is to gather and provide information relating to parental support of learning in a multi-cultural international school and thereby provide material that could be used in the development of comprehensive parent involvement, hereafter referred to as a PI programme throughout Rygaards School.

For the study to have any relevance for Rygaards School an attempt was made to answer these questions:

- In what way is the reception class school year different from the ones that follow for parents and their involvement in their children's learning?
- What relevance do these differences have for PI in the school generally?
- What are the particular characteristics of the present international PI at Rygaards?
- What relevance do these characteristics have for the school, if any?
- In what way does PI in RRC provide a positive experience for continued parent co-operation and involvement in Rygaards School?

- Since we know that parent involvement decreases as children get older what aspects of parent involvement and communication work done in the RRC could be adapted and adopted in Rygaards school?

These issues are examined in the study.

1.4.2.3 The relevance of this study for the field of education in general

The study can hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge about support offered by parents from multi-cultural backgrounds within the context of an international school environment and thus formulate the kinds of help that these parents and their children need from international schools and their staff patterns and needs of globally mobile families with young children.

1.5 Chapter division

A preliminary literature review is undertaken in Chapter 2 to indicate that parental support of children's early learning has long-term effects for learners whose families are engaged in their first learning activities and that the quality of schools is positively affected by early parent participation.

In Chapter 3 an in-depth discussion of Rygaards School, its environment and policies regarding parent involvement and the reception class is presented. This chapter serves as a backdrop for the whole study and provides the context and site of the empirical qualitative case study.

In Chapter 4, the researcher focuses on qualitative research strategies which utilises questionnaires, conversations, observations and primary documents to gather data on a multi-cultural group of internationally mobile RRC parents within the context of Rygaards School. All of these methods form part of a case study research design.

The findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 5 and an analysis of the present status of parent support for early learning presented.

The findings of the study are summarised in Chapter 6. The conclusion of the study provides material that could be used to develop a comprehensive PI programme in the reception class in particular. General recommendations are made as to how such a PI programme could be adopted and adapted by Rygaards School.

1.6 Research methodology

An ethnographic investigation of issues relating to mobility and parental support of learning in a multi-cultural international learning environment was conducted. The methods that were utilised include observations, conversations, questionnaires as well as an analysis of primary documents.

1.7 Definition of terms

1.7.1 Parents

The term is used throughout this study to describe the adult/s that has/have primary responsibility for a child. This term is therefore inclusive of non-biological as well as absent mothers and fathers. Secondary carers such as grandparents or au pairs are excluded from the term.

1.7.2 Early learning

The term ‘early learning’ is used broadly throughout this study and refers to the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and moral development of children aged between four to five years old.

1.7.3 Parent support of learning

Parents are viewed as primary carers and educators. The term is inclusive of parents’ responsibility to provide for their child’s basic needs, ensure that he/she is able to benefit from RRC attendance, maintain regular communication with teachers, attend parent meetings, practice school activities

informally at home and give their child a wide experience of the world outside of the school as well as volunteering their services and becoming involved in decision-making.

1.7.4 Rygaards International Reception Class

The term refers to a group of twenty children, aged between four and five who may or may not speak English and who come from a number of different nationalities. The class receives the British “Early Years” curriculum in English and is an integral part of Rygaards International School which serves 350 children aged between four and seventeen.

1.7.5 Mobile families

Mobile families include those families attending Rygaards who come from different parts of the world, live in Denmark for a limited number of years and may or may not return to their country of birth as well as those children who attend RRC for a single year and therefore both they and their parents pass out through its doors after a relatively short period of time.

The term is also inclusive of families who are separated from one another for one or other reasons like divorce, employment and residence of one parent in another country, consultancy work that involves regular and extended travel and time away, as well as the imminence of new postings to other parts of the world. As can be imagined, this unsettled lifestyle creates disruptions in the families concerned.

1.7.6 Diversity of culture, language and religion

The families attending RRC are not a homogenous group. The parents come from numerous different countries, speak a number of different languages, are adherents of Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism and are engaged in employment ranging from diplomacy and communication to international business and communications. More importantly in relation to this study, is the diversity that exists amongst the primary care givers, that is, those parents who are directly involved in the day to day life of Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular.

1.8 Conclusions

RRC is, for many families, their first meeting with formal education and in most cases, their first contact with an international learning environment. For the majority of families, RRC is the gateway to Rygaards School. It presents parents with their new task of supporting the formalised early learning of their young children. As a group, these families provide material for an interesting case study on issues of cultural diversity and mobility, both of which are increasingly relevant to and impact on the provision and support of early learning.

In Chapter 2 a literature study, on parent support of learning and school facilitation of parent involvement within the context of global mobility, will be undertaken.

Chapter 2

Literature Study on Parent Support of Early Learning and School Facilitation of Parent involvement within the Context of Global Mobility

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher would like to draw attention to some of the research findings that highlight the importance of parental support of early learning in general, as well as those dealing with the impact of global mobility on learning.

A literature review of parent support of learning indicates that parent involvement is integral to children's learning achievement, that the activities that parents initiate are relevant to their children's attitude towards learning and that there is a correlation between parenting style and children's learning success. On the other hand there are numerous indications that there are factors which effect parent ability to support early learning.

It is also generally accepted that the state and community have an impact on early learning achievement. As regards the relationship between the school and the home, there are strong indications that the school's task of providing formal teaching and the parental task of supporting early learning do not occur in isolation but are complementary to one another and that they exist within the context of global, national and local policies and practices. It is evident that these aspects, together with school policies and teacher practices, impact on parent involvement in schools.

Finally, there are strong arguments demonstrating that parents constitute a rich resource in terms of social and cultural capital. They represent a pool of knowledge and information for curriculum development within an international learning environment.

Literature dealing with globalisation and education indicate that family mobility impacts on teaching and learning achievement and that the movement of populations from one country to another presents schools with a number of new challenges.

The findings mentioned briefly above, will now be discussed in greater depth.

2.2 Findings from a literature study

2.2.1 Parent support is integral to learner achievement

A substantial body of evidence indicates that learning begins at birth with the child's first teachers, namely his/her parents (Epstein 1987; Gordon 1978). The responsibility that parents have is complex and their participation in formalised learning is integral to their children's achievement.

2.2.1.1 Parents are primary educators with long term obligations

The role and responsibility of parents as primary educators is well documented. In his traditional educational theories Dewey (1953) emphasises learning within the context of the home. Epstein (1987: 97 -101) distinguishes six categories of parent involvement in the process of formalised learning. The categories include supervising and guiding, providing needed learning materials, communicating with the school about their child's progress, initiating learning activities at home that complement those learnt at school, volunteering their skills, time and knowledge, attending school functions, participating in decision-making in schools as well as collaborating with the wider community on educational matters.

2.2.1.2 Long term effects of parent involvement

Without parent participation in formalised learning, the chances of children achieving are poor. Gordon (1978: 115 -120) argues that research on parent involvement in pre-school programmes shows that there are significant long-term effects for learners whose families participate in these programmes. In addition, he suggests that not only does parent involvement in early learning have long term consequences on children's achievement, but that the quality of the school as a whole is also positively affected by their participation.

2.2.1.3 *Relevance of observations for this study*

These findings are relevant to this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, this study is focused on the phenomenon of parent support of early learning. The Reception Year qualifies as a pre-school year that constitutes the basis of each child's formalised learning. The findings highlight the importance of RRC support for early and long term parent involvement. Secondly, the long term goal of the study is to gather information on and identify strategies for the development of a comprehensive parent involvement programme in RRC and throughout Rygaards School.

Furthermore, an outcome of undertaking a literature study is that these findings prompt further questions:

- What considerations need to be made in terms of planning a comprehensive parent involvement programme, taking into account family mobility?
- How is the quality of Rygaards School affected by a mobile parent population?

These questions will be dealt with in Chapter 6 once the research findings have been identified.

2.2.2 Parent initiated activities influence children's attitudes towards learning

One of the premises of this study is that parents and the school play complementary roles in the process of formalised learning. The following points highlight literature study evidence of this premise.

2.2.2.1 *Interaction between parents and the child*

A report by the Secretariat of OECD (2001:16-17) suggests that, "the production and the dissemination of 'know-how' is facilitated by what has been termed 'learning-by-interaction'". Put more simply, individuals are able to build on what they know through 'learning-by-doing' and by communication and exchange with others. Moreover, the report suggests that individual 'learning-by-interacting' is especially important where people perceive themselves to have exhausted the learning potential of

‘learning-by-doing’. This argument points to the essential role that parental interaction plays in early learning and backs up the notion that parent initiated activities influence children’s educational outcomes by means of modelling, reinforcement and informal instruction.

It is interesting to note that the idea of “learning by interaction” is shared by Karkkainen (2001:134 - 139) whose research shows that the participation of parents at home seemed to influence the activity, interest and capabilities of the child in the school context. Similarly, Davies (2001:7 - 9) argues that, “children in a new democratic order [read: an international learning environment] need to understand and respect their own roots, culture, language and community traditions as needed foundation for understanding and respecting the roots, cultures and traditions of others” and that this task would be impossible without the participation and involvement of their parents.

Brief mention is made here about research references to the consequences of children operating in virtual and ephemeral spaces. Karkkainen (2001: 140 -142), suggests that these experiences are seen to erode individuals’ cultural reference points because of the lack of social contact and reduced parent initiative in shared activities in the home.

2.2.2.2 Interaction between parents and the school

The parental efficacy model of Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. and Sandler, H.M. (1995: 58 - 63), suggests that parents’ involvement is dependent on their understanding of their collaborative role with the school and their belief that they can influence their children’s education. The model reasons that, having decided to involve themselves, the activities that parents choose are based on their perception of their own skills and abilities, demands on their time and energy and invitations to participate that are extended from children, teachers and schools. Epstein’s school-family partnership model (Epstein 1987: 97 -101) makes suggestions about what these activities could include, namely, involvement in home learning, volunteering and attending school events. Very importantly, parents, who represent a wealth of human capital, can contribute to the quality of schools by interacting within them at the various levels mentioned by Epstein.

While the tasks and responsibilities of parents have been highlighted, the role of the school in supporting them should not be forgotten. Deslandes (2001:14) reasons that parents are unlikely to become involved if they believe teaching should be left solely to teachers. He suggests that “parents become more involved in their children’s education at home ... when they perceive that their collaboration is actively encouraged by the teachers and the school”. In addition, he argues that learning opportunities in the home and the active involvement of fathers in home-based education be encouraged. In this regard evidence seems to suggest that parent initiated activities should be promoted and circles linking people with common interests need to be supported by schools.

2.2.2.3 Relevance of observations for this study

These findings are relevant to this study when the proposed attempt to identify the present initiatives of parents in RCC and to integrate them into a school-wide PI programme is considered.

Moreover, they prompt some relevant questions, such as:

- What type of interaction takes place between RRC’s parents and their children?
- What type of interaction takes place between RRC’s parents and Rygaards School?
- How can this interaction be improved and supported by Rygaards School?

These questions are integral to the case study and will be dealt with in the course of this report.

2.2.3 Parenting styles affect learning achievement

Studies indicate that there is a correlation between parenting style and children’s learning success and that differences in child rearing often result in several variations in parents’ involving themselves with their children’s learning (Coleman 1966; Dornbusch 1987 & Hofstede 1986). However, when discussing parenting styles, it is important to remember that families in an international environment are both culturally diverse and becoming smaller. In addition because the economic and cultural

contexts in which they are operating are shifting rapidly, new social relations and family structures are being established.

2.2.3.1 Families in the 21st century: individualisation and fragmentation

While it is true that supportive family environments are critical for students and schools, it is also clear that families are subject to global, national and big business attitudes and policies. As a consequence of these environmental factors relationships within them can be fraught with difficulties. Affection within families is accompanied by growing rates of family break-up. Increased individualisation and fragmentation of families presents a challenge to parents' involvement in their children's learning. Van Aalst's (2001: 76 -83) review of studies into the future world of schooling in a number of countries shows that there is widespread perception of the weakening role of the home and family. He refers to a study conducted in Japan between 1995 – 1996 in which it was found that company-centred life has weakened the educational role of the family and increased the use of convenience services. Similarly, he mentions a study that took place in the Netherlands in 1996 in which it was shown that parents expect more tasks to be performed by schools and that mothers and fathers have increasingly become the “clients” and “consumers” of educational services.

Karkkainen (2001:76) argues that, “in the fragmented post modern world, opportunities for parents to have a dialogue with their children have become scarce and possibilities for children to learn in familiar, relevant and contextual ways have diminished”. Similarly, van Aalst (2001:120) suggests that, “the variety of lifestyles is expected to increase, so leading to greater alternatives to the family”, the outcome of which, must impact on parents' ability to support learning and the role that schools will have to play in the future in terms of assisting parents to carry out this task. On a more positive note, Miller (2001 : 82 - 84) points out that a major force behind the transformation of family life is the changed social role of women, who, despite their responsibilities outside the home, are significantly involved in the support of learning at home, particularly in the early years. How the school can support women in their multi-tasked role is of particular interest in this study.

2.2.3.2 *Parenting in the context of the school and the community*

Family life and parenting do not occur in a vacuum but within the context of global and national attitudes and policies, as well as the society and community in which each family exists. Consequently, parenting has to be viewed against the backdrop of the environment in which it finds itself.

In an article entitled *The relation of parenting style to adolescent school performance*, Dornbusch (1987: 126 -128) suggests that parenting style plays more of a role in pupil achievement than parent education or family structure. However, since parents will spend much of their time working outside the home, the services available to them to invest in their children will be the key to how well the family does in its child rearing role. Similarly, in a study examining the changing responsibilities between home and school, Klaassen and Smit (2001:105) found that parents and teachers were of the opinion that the elementary school teacher has a formative task in addition to a teaching task [and] that “elementary school teachers consider themselves not only as professional in the area of knowledge and skills but also in the domain of value formation”. From these studies we can say that the socialisation, and indeed “childcare/parenting” functions of schools, especially in the light of global employment as well as family and community trends, place new responsibilities on schools.

The institution of school is a relatively recent phenomenon. (OECD: 2001). Compulsory elementary attendance was still in its infancy and universal secondary schooling was only established in some places in Europe, just a century ago. Now schools are among the most established means of organising children and the power of the schooling model is reflected in its existence in diverse cultures. However, the OECD report of 2001 on schools, reminds us that they are less permanent than they seem and may be subject to further important changes in the future, as parents expect them to perform more tasks and as families increasingly become “consumers” of educational services.

The phenomenon of consumption has been further influenced by the information revolution in which the media exercises a powerful pressure on the socialisation of children, with both negative and

positive implications, as well as having an impact on parenting styles. Amongst other effects of global communication on parenting, relations between children and adults have changed, and are now often based on negotiation that has consequences for more authoritarian parenting styles as well as teaching practices within classrooms (Karkkainen 2001 : 94 -98).

2.2.3.3 Relevance of observations for this study

Davies (2001: 97) highlights the changing context within which parenting occurs and the bearing of this on schools. This changing context has a direct impact on the families in RRC whose life-styles and parenting practices are constantly influenced by global and national attitudes towards families with children, the demands of global business as well as a number of cultural factors. Davies (2001: 88) also draws attention to the diversity of child rearing practices that occur within and between cultural groups and he suggests that as ‘consumers’ of education, parents are increasingly demanding that schools assume many of the tasks previously accredited to parents.

The issues relating to modern, mobile families and their involvement in learning are numerous. The life-styles that families adopt and the lives that they lead are particularly significant to this study and raise some significant questions:

- How does mobility impact on the support that RRC can expect its families to provide?
- How does mobility impact on primary care-givers and the learning support that they can provide?
- To what extent has the educational role of families been weakened by their mobility?
- What responsibility do these factors place on RRC to provide a solid anchor amid fragmentation?
- What support does RRC need from Rygaards School to provide the required level of support for parents?

These questions are fundamental to this investigation and will be dealt with as the case study findings emerge.

2.2.4 The community has an impact on parent involvement in schools

The size of the family has diminished over the last century. Many of the tasks, previously assigned to parents, have been assumed by so-called social institutions. The impact of those with an interest in education as well as changes in the world economy have had an influence on the way we look at children as well as the way society collaborates to support them.

2.2.4.1 Collaboration of family, school and community

Looking firstly at the child, Miller (2001: 152) reasons that, “given their centrality, children can act as the fulcrum around which family, community and future worker are brought together in a system of interaction, blending instrumental goals of child-care, development and education with expressive, emotional and social interactions”. She is of course quick to place the responsibility for such a transformation on governments and society to transform the school, and thereby opens it to the community.

On the other hand, Epstein’s (1987a:97 -101) categorisation of parent involvement focuses attention on the responsibilities of parents and identifies six types of parental activity that support learning development. In her theoretical model of overlapping spheres of influence, she argues that children are best supported when school, home and community collaborate (Epstein 1987b:129).

2.2.4.2 Fragmentation of community

In a broad definition of parents as world citizens, Della-Dora (1979: 279) argues that parents are not a homogenous mass with common characteristics. He suggests that schools have to identify the skills of individual parents and their interest in contributing to the improvement of the school in general as well as the learning of their child in particular. In this connection he concludes that a diverse group of parents will usually end up making decisions that provide for more scope and flexibility than any of the individuals in the group. Conversely, the OECD Secretariat (2001), reasons that while multi-

culturalism is a norm of contemporary school systems, it brings its own tensions, especially as it relates to equity and equality of opportunity.

David and Davies (2001: 79) support the argument that collaboration between parents, school and community is not without its complexities. Beginning with parents, the Secretariat of OECD (2001) suggests that the rising level of education of parents has reduced the distance between schools and teachers on the one hand, and the general public on the other, with the result that many parents are familiar with the world of education and are sometimes better qualified than teachers. This means that schools have lost some of the mystique and authority that they enjoyed in earlier times. Furthermore, parents are articulate and demanding, which results in increased pressure for greater accountability and transparency of schools. This situation has given rise to a confusion of the status of teachers as a professional group.

The loss of traditional stability amongst modern communities also raises worries. Van Aalst (2001: 372) found that “urbanisation [read, globalisation] has resulted in declined educational power of, and loosened solidarity in, local communities”. This finding raises questions about what communities are, since global mobility reduces lifelong connections as well as the depth of social interactions. Additionally, new patterns of urbanisation, the individualisation of lifestyles and the decline of established religions in many societies challenge established notions of “community”.

Another issue of concern is that of social engagement. The issue of social capital depends on the home and volunteerism (OECD 2001). Evidence in advanced societies, however, points to a serious erosion of membership of local communities and voluntary associations as a result of individualistic values, time constraints and dual-job families (Putnam 2000 :156). The OECD report (2001: 85) supports this evidence and suggests that in some countries there are signs of a decline in social engagement, membership of different bodies and other associational activity to the detriment of individual well-being, society and the economy. One reason for this appears to be a shift towards individualised leisure and transient forms of engagement. It could therefore be argued that, schools can less readily turn to the “community” as an educational partner as it has become elusive, transient or virtual.

2.2.4.3 The school and its position in the global village

One can ask what the implications of 21st century transitions for schools in general, and international schools in particular, are? Miller (2001: 152-153) suggests that “the new goal is to equip children for a world where their sense of identity is derived from a diverse set of specific rather than general communities, and where they are faced with a vast range of active, self generated, rather than passive, choices”. This view is radically different from that of the mass society which puts a premium on norms of national allegiance, common culture and obedience. This presents schools with further new challenges.

When thinking about global mobility, individual schools, parents, as well as families are under more intense pressure than ever before. It is also becomes increasingly difficult to build social communities and neighbourhood. This means that the possibilities for making long-lasting social attachments are substantially reduced. Carnoy (2001:119) suggests that this reality provides “a crucial additional role for schools to play as key community institutions in societies that have lost so many of their traditional sources of social interaction”. The OECD Secretariat (2001: 52-53) supports this reasoning, and sees schools as hubs, where “sociability is made easier through children’s connections... and [where] schools become the platforms for a variety of neighbourhood [international community] issues” OECD. (2001:52-53).

2.2.4.4 Relevance of observations for this study

From a preliminary literature study it becomes evident that schools have a central role to play in terms of parent and community participation in education. It seems that they will increasingly be called upon to provide the material support for the formation of networks of solidarity between families of different types such as those represented in RRC.

Research that relates to the impact of the community on early learning is of relevance to this study. In terms of the diverse family population at RRC it prompts further questions:

- How is world citizenship reflected in RRC amongst parents?
- How is an international awareness, amongst parents in RRC, balanced by an individual family concerns?

These questions are integral to an investigation such as this and will therefore direct the case study.

2.2.5 Parents and schools complement one another in their educative task

Research indicates that the school's task of providing formal teaching and the parental task of supporting early learning do not occur in isolation but are inter-dependent. (Carnoy 2001; Coleman & Hoffer 1987; Della-Dora 1979; McAllister Swap 1993). In this regard they suggest that school policies and teacher practices have an effect on parent involvement in schools and that, in their turn, parents constitute a rich resource pool for curriculum development

2.2.5.1 *School policies impact on parent involvement*

Epstein (1980: 109) argues that “school policies and teacher practices are more important than parent education, family size, marital status and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education”. Her findings are supported by Davies (2001: 6) who asks whether “schools can contribute significantly to a new changed social order” and concludes that, “schools should not and cannot do much that matters – except in collaboration with their students, the families of those students and the community institutions, agencies and residents”. It is clear that doing something that will have a lasting and meaningful impact, demands planning and policy-making is the first step towards making such collaboration a reality. Other researchers supporting these views include Deslandes (2001: 82 -84) who, in turn, shares the view advanced by the OECD in its 1997 report that “the development of partnership is an ongoing process that is continually subject to negotiation and an ideal or goal towards which parents, teachers and schools must work together to achieve”. Similarly, Dunst et al (1992 : 64-67), emphasise that genuine partnership takes time and places the responsibility on the school to develop policies and plans that make teachers more available for s with parents.

Taking the idea of policy development one step further, research indicates that schools, together with parents, need to formulate and articulate the ideals of democracy to pupils (Davies 2001; David 2001). Davies (2001:56-60) draws our attention to the content of what children are taught, the democratic role-model practices of the school, exchange between the school and the community as well as leadership by teachers unions and parent associations in support of a progressive agenda

2.2.5.2 Parent governance – an important aspect of parent participation

David (2001:225) draws our attention to the fact that, “over the last twenty years or so, there have been major political and policy shifts in the governance of many western countries. A hallmark of these developments has been development of new forms of public management ... [and] changing expectations about how families are involved in the provision of education services”. This change, in the expectation that parent involvement, whether at home or school, has become normative is reflected in two articles. They are *Relationships between parents and school in the Czech Republic*, in which Emmerova and Rausicova (2001 : 74) argue that, “the legislative framework constitutes the basis for potentialities and ways of establishing and developing partnership” and that of van Tilborg and van Es (2001:46) who suggest that, in order to cement such a relationship, the “school [should] legitimise its demands to parents [in policies] by pointing out that certain educational behaviour and an interest in school business promotes the learning behaviour and motivation of children”.

On a more cautious note Hiatt-Michael (2001: 143 .145) offers a warning in policy-making on parent involvement reminding us that schools draw up plans without considering that many of its parents are mobile. On a similar note Moles (2001:29) comments that “schools tend to implement parent involvement activities without regard to whether parents are migrants/ [mobile]”. Both authors recommend a school policy that takes this issue into consideration and stimulates parent participation at all levels of decision-making.

2.2.5.3 Teachers must reach out to parents

Collaborative relationships are formed on the assumption that education is a shared responsibility and that all partners are equal players. This means that both parents and teachers have a say in determining

the path of learning. Creating and developing communication is therefore crucial. Hiatt-Miller (2001:185) makes a relevant observation that “the primary pressure for parent involvement in teacher education programmes is coming from teachers entering the contemporary classroom that may be filled with students from cultures other than that of the teacher”. On the other hand, the enabling and empowerment model of reciprocal partnership, used by Dunst et al (1992: 96 -98), advocates the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences in which both parties learn from one another and thereby facilitate interdependence and reciprocity. They stress that a genuine partnership takes time and advocate that teachers receive training in skills relating to interpersonal relations.

When applying democratic principles to teacher-parent co-operation, Davies (2001:7) recommends that “the school should work towards becoming a model of democratic ideas in practice”. By showing respect for others, especially those who are different, encouraging everyone to have an influence on decisions that will impact on them and recognising different needs and talents are the initial steps to engaging parents and involving them in their children’s education at home and at school. Hoover-Demsey and Sandler’s (1995 : 34 -37) model of parent involvement demonstrates that parent involvement in their children’s learning is improved when teachers invite parents to express their expectations and try to see the issue from their perspective. They argue that parents’ sense of efficacy gives rise to increased participation and Epstein’s observations (1987a: 132) suggest that teachers reaching out to parents and involving them in learning activities in the classroom, positively and significantly, influence changes in reading achievement.

In general then, it can be said that teachers are integral players in school programmes designed to stimulate parent involvement and that continuous invitational attitude must be extended to parents by teachers as well as the school as a whole. However, if this is the case, the school has a responsibility to provide teachers with the support that they need in this task.

2.2.5.4 Relevance of observations for this study

The articles relating to school policies and teaching practices (Carney 2001; Davies 2001; Dunst et al 1992; Hiatt-Michael 2001; van Aalst 2001) are of relevance to this study especially since RRC may be

the first contact that parents have had with a formal schooling system. The arguments stimulate additional questions:

- What school policies on parent involvement exist at Rygaards?
- What considerations are given to parents' mobility?
- What are parent's needs in this area?
- What initiatives have been taken in RRC that relate to parent involvement in general and support of learning in particular?

Parent involvement is the key to student success, but parent education is essential for effective parent involvement to occur. However, parent education requires specific teacher training and support from staff when it comes to developmental, academic, and social and health issues of their children. The onus is therefore on school management to ensure that resources are allocated for this task.

The issue of parent education receives a great deal of attention in RRC. However, practices can always be improved and the study may provide answers to the question:

- How do teacher practices in RRC promote parent involvement in children's learning?

This question will direct the case study and will be dealt with as the findings emerge.

2.2.6 Parents constitute a resource for curriculum development

On the subject of the curriculum, it is clear, that the more complex and uncertain the world in which we live, the more knowledge is perceived as uncertain and changeable. With the advent of new technologies, alternative sources of knowledge influence students. The sheer quantity of information has become bewildering. The changes in knowledge have led to what van Aalst (2001: 96) refers to as "new literacies" which, he reasons, is the task of teachers to develop. However, while he argues that, "the criteria for being a literate citizen are not-self evident" (van Aalst 2001:173), he is adamant

that children need to be taught to appreciate their own language, history, traditions and culture. This is where parents come into the equation.

An OECD/CERI (1974 c) study conducted several years ago found numerous positive examples relating to consultative governance and active parent involvement in homework schemes, but there was far less evidence of such involvement in school-based teaching and learning. Adults in the 25-44 age group correspond to the parents of students in today's schools and as Carnoy (2001: 69), points out the post- World War II expansion of educational provision has boosted the numbers of learned adults. Parents' enhanced expertise could therefore be used to exert significant impact on schools in the area of curriculum development.

The introduction of parents and others into school teaching and learning is a modification of a single-teacher classroom model. In her of home-school relationships McAllister Swap (1993: 142 -146) notes that many schools have adopted an interactive approach to curriculum development that recognises the resource pool which parents represent. Because their student population is becoming increasingly diverse, schools are searching for resources in multi-cultural education, amongst others input from parents, so that accurate representations, points of view and achievement of immigrants and oppressed minorities are represented.

2.2.6.1 Relevance of observations for this study

It is evident that curriculum planning in a multi-cultural learning environment requires attention to the specific as well as an appreciation of the general. This reality in an international learning environment demands flexibility and is a challenge to parents as primary educators in the home as well as co-educators in schools alongside teachers who would like to draw on parents' experiences and expertise.

McAllister Swap focuses attention on the home-school relationship. (McAllister Swap 1993: 142 – 146) The home-school relationship is of relevance to this study given RRC's interest in the development of a learning relationship between home and school, the need to be sensitive to cultural

diversity, the cultural capital at its disposal including its desire to encourage parental promotion of cultural heritage.

This facet of parent involvement in learning encourages the questions:

- Are parents contributing to the development of a multi-cultural curriculum in RRC, and if so, how is this manifest?
- How can the cultural capital present amongst parents be better utilised?

Where possible, these important questions will be dealt with as the report unfolds.

2.2.7 Family mobility impacts on teaching and learning achievement

An important aspect of globalisation is the movement of populations from one country and culture to another. Mobility of families presents major challenges to the place called school. It presents schools with new challenges and increases the range of family expectations and aspirations regarding what schools should achieve.

2.2.7.1 *The new global workplace demands mobility and flexibility*

The OECD Secretariat (2001: 12) contends that job insecurity puts pressure on families to maintain income and security. Even well-educated parents are subject to change and flux in their careers until they retire and this means major family shifts throughout their working lives. Carnoy (2001: 40) recognises that this intense international competition demands mobility and flexibility. This has resulted in the re-organisation and restructuring of companies. Sub-contracting, engaging consultants and hiring temporary staff have become the norm and the OECD Secretariat (2001:34) warns that “the safest assumption is that all [including school going children], can expect unpredictable and changeable careers”.

2.2.7.2 *Mobility and flexibility impact on the family*

The impermanence that results from mobility and the demand for flexibility has implications on the stability and security of the family in which young children find themselves. Coleman (1987: 27) argues that, “attitudes, including self-concept and a sense of control over one’s environment, which are formed largely at home, are highly related to achievement at school”. Hiatt-Michael (2001:21) suggests, “the new relationship between time and space ... herald[s] a new civilisation ... of network communications ... of virtual and tangible reality ... and the predominance of immediacy to the detriment of an appreciation of the longer term”. Furthermore he argues that such mobility leads to fragmentation and a reduced sense of belonging to a wider community (Hiatt-Michael 2001: 25). Putnam’s (2000: 174 - 184) analysis of social capital seems to concur that modern society is characterised by individualism, fragmentation and isolation and Carnoy (2001: 119 -121) argues that since women constitute an increasing percentage of the work force, the family can no longer be assumed to reproduce labour and knowledge as it has in the past and that these factors have implications for the way in which work and families are organised. On the positive side however, he argues that, “while the transformation of work and employment has resulted in a crisis of the family’s relationship with society, it has also created the basis for reintegrating the individual into highly productive, more egalitarian social structures” (Carnoy 2001:122). It is knowledge and information that create flexibility in the work-place and enhance the capacity of workers to learn new processes, to move geographically, to shift jobs, even vocations, over the course of a working life.

On the topic of global movements, the OECD (2001:50) reports that, “a striking feature of population inflows for each country is that they tend to be dominated by a very small number of sending countries”. These reflect a pattern of regionalisation and sometimes continuing ex-colonial links. The population flows are predominantly from poor to rich countries for a very large amount of the movement between OECD countries themselves. Many of these are highly skilled personnel who participate in international labour markets.

2.2.7.3 Relevance of observations for this study

Confirmation that change is as much a reality for working parents as it is for their school going children is highly relevant to this study since it confirms that the situation in RRC reflects a worldwide trend.

Increased global mobility has made it increasingly difficult to build social communities and neighbourhoods. This has implications in terms of cultural identity and wider community support.

Worldwide trends seem to indicate that not only are families, as groups, mobile, but that individual parent's within families, are transient actors who exert a transient influence on the everyday life of their children.

The OECD finding on population flows between countries is relevant to this study, as a review of RRC applications over the years shows an even spread of families coming from OECD countries, while applications from Asians, in particular, Indian families, have dominated over the last five years.

These observations arouse more questions:

- What are the implications of the demands for flexibility for RRC?
- What support does RRC offer its families in terms of the formation of social networks?
- How does mobility amongst the families at RCC affect their self-concept and sense of control over their environment?
- How is learning achievement affected by a family's change of social and cultural environment?

These questions are central to this study and will be taken further in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.2.8 Various barriers affect parent involvement in early learning

The literature review indicates that both deprivation and excess create barriers to parent involvement in schools in general and their children's learning in particular. These barriers are numerous and arise for a number of reasons and will be briefly discussed.

2.2.8.1 *Personal barriers impede parent involvement*

Personal barriers that limit parent participation are numerous and include little or no education as well as a background in the rural areas (Emmerova & Rabusicova 2001: 54), little or no mastery of the language (van Tilborg & van Es 2001:73), minimal personal experience of school life and time constraints (Denessen et al 2001:149).

2.2.8.2 *Cultural barriers prevent parent participation*

Many parents have high expectations of schools since they see education as a vehicle to social mobility. However, they may not be familiar with the education system and their own role in the learning process. Md Nor and Wee Beng Neo (2001: 182 -184) point out that in Asian cultures, there is the belief that school and family constitute separate roles in the education of children and so parents often wait for the school to initiate the request to participate, a finding shared by Sonneschein et al (1996: 111-112) who suggest that in cultures where role-division is clear-cut, parents see themselves as having responsibility at home and expect teachers to take responsibility at school. Similarly, Denessen et al. (2001: 167 -168) suggest that parents of minority students see school more as experts than as partners. These observations are very interesting when considering the findings of van Aalst (2001: 234 -240) who mentions two studies, already referred to, in which it was shown that parents expect more tasks to be performed by schools, that western parents have increasingly become the "clients" and "consumers" of educational services and that company-centred life has weakened the educational role of the family and increased the use of convenience services.

2.2.8.3 Pedagogical barriers prevent collaboration

There are powerful barriers that inhibit educators from reaching out to parents. Denessen et al (2001:52) argue that schools themselves are quick to come to conclusions about why parents are not participating and that these can play a deciding role in parent involvement.

On the other hand some of the blame is placed on parents themselves and Denessen et al (2001:58) suggest that one of the reasons parents do not get involved in their children's learning is because, "their educational attitudes differ from current pedagogical norms and values". Furthermore, differences in child-rearing practices and discrepancies between family and school pedagogies are often cited as a barrier to collaborative partnership.

As regards the role played by teachers, McAllister Swap (1993: 117 -118), points out that while diversity is enriching to the class, the teachers and the curriculum, parent involvement in school is surprisingly minimal because the extent and range of differences make it difficult for teachers to cope with, never mind encourage, parent participation. Sonneschein et al (1996:117) suggest that in cultures where role-division is clear-cut, parents see themselves as having responsibility at home and expect teachers to take responsibility at school. We know also that the educational levels of parents have improved considerably over the last fifty years and that this has made them more critical and demanding as "consumers of education". Consequently, a mutual lack of respect between teachers and parents is also given as one reason for poor co-operation, while another is that of differing perspectives on division of labour. Similarly, Ravn (2001:181) found that, "the socio-cultural distance between some teachers and parents in our study made relationship-building difficult, interfered with teachers' and parents' ability to empathise with each other's purposes and work more closely together, and undermined the emotional understanding on which successful partnerships depend".

2.2.8.4 Barriers within the family create fragmentation

The fragmentation of families and communities in the 21st century has created a barrier to parent involvement in their children's learning. Van Aalst (2001) found that urbanisation and more recently, globalisation have resulted in declined educational power of, and loosened relationships in, local communities as well as families. On a similar note, Karkkainen (2001:76) argues that, "in the fragmented post-modern world, opportunities for parents to have a dialogue with their children have become scarce and possibilities for children to learn in familiar, relevant and contextual ways have diminished".

Miller (2001: 140 -142) points out that a major force behind the transformation of family life is the changed social role of women, who, despite their responsibilities outside the home, are still significantly involved in the support of learning in the early years. Good news also comes from Karkkainen (2001:123 -124) whose studies indicate that while parent participation at school may be weak, their participation at home seems to influence the activity, interest and capabilities of the child in the school context.

2.2.8.5 Relevance of observations for this study.

From the above it is clear that the barriers to parent involvement are complex and create situations that are not conducive to collaborative relationships in the context of formal learning. It is therefore evident that schools and teachers have to strive to understand the diversity of parental beliefs and practices amongst their family populations in order to reach out and educate parents on their educative role.

These observations lead to further questions:

- What experiences and attitudes prevent parents from participating in RRC activities?
- What barriers exist between the teachers and parents of RCC?
- What difficulties arise as a consequence of mobility of families in RRC?

- Are there examples of collaboration between parents and teachers in the RRC and can they be built upon?
- How can the population diversity of parents benefit Rygaards School?

Answers related to these questions will be addressed in Chapters 3 to 6.

2.2.9 Private and Catholic Schools affect learning achievement

In Denmark today, private education and its contribution to society is a topic of hot debate. There are approximately 20 000 Catholics living in Denmark and given that Rygaards is both a private and a Catholic school, some investigation was required to uncover the motivation of parents for choosing a Catholic school, as well as the contribution that private and Catholic schools make in learning.

2.2.9.1 *Schools serve a formative function*

In a 1997 study of the changing responsibilities between home and school, Klaassen and Smit (2001:105) found that parents and teachers were of the opinion that the elementary school has a formative task in addition to a teaching task. At about the same time, Braster (2001:68), in an article entitled, *The parental need for pluralistic primary education in the Netherlands*, was asking whether “the stress [in schools] should be on the transfer of knowledge about societal diversity or the transmission of values?” In an editorial of a Danish newspaper (Weekend Avisen: 20 –26 January 2006: 10) the editor argues that it is the task of schools to teach pupils what they do not learn at home. In another study, Davies (2001:6) asked, whether “schools contribute significantly to a new changed social order ...in which we have learnt how to reduce and control hatred, hostility, suspicion and fear between and among people across boundaries and ethnic groups, religions and genders?” In other words, the issue of the formative role of schools is under the spotlight and if parents are of the opinion that the school has a formative task then this could be a motivation for their choice of private or religious schools.

2.2.9.2 The motivation for choosing private schools is not necessarily religious

An article in *The Economist* (January 14th –20th 2006 :48) mentions that parents in Washington D.C. used a voucher scheme, aimed at helping Florida's children escape from inner-city schools, to send their children to a private Catholic school where their grades were now excellent. However, teacher's unions argued that this approach robs inner-city schools of much needed resources and challenged it legally, with the result that the courts ruled in their favour. A consequence of this court ruling is that supporters worry that, while the voucher system is spreading in the US, other state legislatures will follow Florida's route and parents may be prevented from using these vouchers to send their children to outer city religious schools .

In a study on motivations for faith-based schools, Dijkstra and Herweijer (2001:259) document that “in the year 2000, around 1.4 million of the 2.4 million children attending school in the Netherlands went to private schools”. These schools are funded entirely by the state and more than half of them have a religious identity. This means that a parent's choice is free of financial consideration. However, religious embedding in the Netherlands has been reduced by the process of secularisation and these researchers found that religious considerations do not play an important role when parents choose a school. Similarly, van Aalst (2001:159) argues that “in post-industrial society, consensus about moral values and education's proper role in this domain [has become] frayed”. It appears therefore that the motivation for choosing a religious school is not based simply on religious considerations.

Having said this however, Dijkstra and Herweier (2001:260) suggest that” the need for an existential examination and moral debate has not disappeared and it seems that religious schools are better equipped to deal with this need than public schools”. This finding provides a reason for parental choice but it has had a knock on effect on religious schools since it appears that religious education has become more general using forms of religious-philosophical instruction or coaching. Schools have adapted to the altered nature of religion in society and “they cannot be much more religious than the groups they serve, or else they lose market share” (Dijkstra &Herweier 2001:260).

On the question of social equality and attitudes to private schools, Soderberg (2001:186) found that the interest in and choice of private solutions should be understood in relation to more deeply embedded values concerning the objectives of schools. In Sweden there is widespread agreement that classes should be mixed thus bringing together pupils from different social and cultural backgrounds. The same attitudes are reflected in the present debate in Denmark. However, while both Swedes and Danes believe that choice of schools widens rifts in society, over 43% of Swedes were supportive of private schools and there has been an increase in the establishment of private schools in Denmark.

Financial considerations also play a part in parental choice of schools. Government cutbacks have an impact on parental choice of schools as is documented by Soderberg (2001:178) in which he mentions that, in the 1990's "the proportion of children attending private schools [in Sweden] has increased from around 1% to over 3%". Important to note was the economic recession that characterised the first half of the 1990's in Sweden which brought about extensive cutbacks for schools. Additionally, there was an opening up of the system to allow for more school choice, and an initiative of the conservative government to strengthen the private sector. In a similar move, in Denmark, the government is sponsoring school attendance in private institutions in its attempts to cut the costs of establishing new public schools.

Reputation and examination results play their part in drawing parents' attention to private schooling. Coleman and Hoffer (1987: 88 -93) found that students in private and Catholic schools perform better in comparison to students attending public schools. The authors explain that while private schools practice selective admission, it seems that Catholic schools have a greater effect on the achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition they suggest that that "while the aim of public schools is to overcome the deficiencies of a pupil's family, Catholic schools act as agents of a religious community to which these families belong and independent schools are agents of the parents in a more individualised sense" (Coleman & Hoffer 1987:27). Furthermore, Coleman (1987: 27) found that private Catholic schools "do not contribute measurably to racial and economic segregation".

2.2.9.3 Relevance of observations for this study

Families coming to Copenhagen have a relatively narrow choice of schools offering an international education, amongst others, an expensive American school that offers the American curriculum from pre-school to Baccalaureate level, a newly established non-denominational British style primary school and Rygaards Catholic school, offering education for four to seventeen year olds. The findings of a study conducted by van Kessel and Kral in 1992 (no reference provided by Dijkstra & Herweijer 2001), showed differences in parent ideas about public, Catholic and Protestant schools, where public schools were associated with freedom for the pupils and an emphasis on the development of creative skills and a critical attitude, whereas religious schools had an image of paying much attention to moral values and classroom discipline. Given the interest in the observations mentioned and the motivations of parents, it will be interesting to see whether it is possible to identify parent's reasons for choosing Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular.

The factor of government sponsorship of early learning in private institutions is significant taken the 70% subsidy offered to tax-paying families whose children attend RRC. Whether this factor has a bearing on parental choice of RRC remains to be seen.

The Danish department of Rygaards Catholic School serves a population very similar to the public schools in the area; however this is not true of the population of its international department who are largely second language speakers from a multitude of denominations from all over the world. Consequently, while Rygaards School focuses its attention on the transmission of Christian values rather than an exclusive Catholic doctrine, how it acts as an agent of the religious communities to which its families or its parents in a more individual sense belong, is of interest to this study.

A question that arises is:

- What role do Rygaards Parents' Committee and Catholic Parents' Association play in the life of the multi-cultural, multi-religious and diverse socio-economic population of RRC in general?

The issues raised in this section as well as the question above will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.3. Conclusion

In this chapter a literature study has highlighted the complexities of the phenomenon of parent support of and involvement in early learning. Furthermore, the review has provided a number of valuable guidelines and prompted questions for further investigation. In addition, the issue of mobility has been touched on and initial findings have highlighted the challenges that globally mobile families present to schools and teachers.

Having said this however, it should be noted that a large proportion of the literature that has been consulted in this review, has been primarily focused on the challenges of multi-culturalism within a dominant culture. Consequently, while the review has provided an invaluable background against which to view the phenomenon under investigation it has not so much provided answers, as prompted questions that relate to the special situation that exists in Rygaards School, an environment characterised by a globally mobile family population and a multi-national culture.

Chapter 3

Rygaards Reception Class within the Context of Rygaards School

3.1 Introduction

RRC does not exist in isolation but is subject to international, national and local spheres of influence. Chapter 3 provides details of the context within which it exists in order to provide a backdrop for a closer examination of the phenomenon under investigation, namely the provision of early learning support by globally mobile parents within an international reception class.

This chapter provides details of stakeholders, whose involvement with RRC, have implications for the learning achievement of its pupils. These interested parties consist of, amongst others, an international inspectorate, Danish legislation on education, outsiders representing the Danish social and education system, the Catholic Church of Denmark, Rygaards School in general, the principal of Rygaards School and its head of the international department, Rygaards Governing Body and Parents' Committee, the staff of RRC, as well as RRC parents and ex-RCC parents in particular including the parents in Rygaards School in general.

3.1.1 Reception Class (RRC) within the context of Rygaards School

3.1.1.1 Getting started

Rygaards School is subject to the impact of the broader environment in which it exists, amongst others the global economy, Danish educational legislation, its membership of international school associations, competition from two other international schools in Copenhagen, as well as the influence of a number stakeholders involved in education in general and parental support of early learning in particular.

The school serves approximately 350 pupils and their families, and is a place of employment for a group of international staff. All these people, who constitute the supportive base of Rygaards school,

find themselves under the influence of global forces. It is clear, therefore, that an initial investigation of the support that parents in the RRC provide for their young children, demands an examination of the wider context in which RRC exists.

Following a ten year economic upswing in the Danish economy there was a downturn in the number of pupils attending the school when a number of international companies left Denmark. Rygaards School is reliant on state subsidies for each child on its attendance register and thus faced an impending economic crisis.

After meetings at School Board and international staff level, a decision was taken in 1999 to establish RRC as an independent addition to Rygaards School. The aim of this initiative was to attract more families to an institution that was keen to show that it was aware of the needs of its international clientele. By offering a more comprehensive educational service to accommodate the needs of four to five year olds, Rygaards hoped to attract the support of a greater share of the international community living in Copenhagen. The head of the international department gathered together a group of volunteer parents and a Key Stage 1 teacher to plan the establishment of a reception class at Rygaards. Within a period of less than a year Dkr 25,000 was raised from private donors. A constitution for a Reception Class Board was drawn up. In addition, a waiting list for prospective pupils was established, a classroom on the premises of Rygaards identified as a suitable venue for the project, all the necessary permission obtained from local authorities and staff interviewed and employed.

Once news of the planned opening of RRC spread, it became clear that demand exceeded supply and that the criteria for pupil selection, as applied by Rygaards School, would have to be applied in RRC, namely prioritisation of children with older siblings already attending Rygaards School, Catholics and those children whose family's residence status and employment conditions denied them access to public Danish pre-schools. Furthermore, every effort was made to ensure that a balance was maintained in terms of gender and ratio of English to non-English speaking pupils.

On August 8th 2000, twenty children and their families were welcomed to RRC. They had completed all the necessary registration forms which were developed by the head of the international department in her capacity as chairperson of RRC together with its leader: had paid a non-refundable registration fee, determined by the volunteer steering group to be a source of income for future building plans and made their first month's school fee payment.

A parent meeting was held a couple of weeks after the beginning of the school year and parents were given information on how to apply for the state subsidy available to those of them who paid tax in Denmark. In addition, they were advised of the goals of RRC and invited to draw staff attention to any aspects of the daily routine that might need attention or clarification. Most importantly, volunteers for RRC's Board were sought from this parent body and elected to the position of secretary and treasurer.

3.1.1.2 Factors that impact on the administration and management of RRC

RRC caters for children between the ages of four and five years and, according to Danish legislation, falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Welfare. This means that international tax-paying parents receive subsidies of up to 70% of fees from the state to cover the costs of English pre-school education for the under fives. The remaining funds available to the Reception Class Board are raised through school fees collected from parents. Given this differentiation in the Danish state's provision of care and education for children under the age of five and the necessity for the establishment of RRC as a legally independent institution administered by its own Board of Governors, it becomes clear that the role of Rygaards School, in the administration and management of RRC was somewhat limited and indirect. The head of the school's international department was elected to the position of chairperson on RRC's Board and a member of the Rygaards School Board sat on and had voting rights at RRC Board meetings and every effort was made to ensure a close working relationship between Rygaards School and RRC.

Until recently, Rygaards School management has been in a state of flux. In June 2003, the headmaster of 25 years retired and after a series of unsuccessful interviews, the Board decided to establish a 'leadership team' consisting of an experienced male teacher from the secondary level of the

International department, two experienced female teachers from the junior level of the Danish Department and the long standing head of the International department.

In January 2004, the male teacher was promoted to the position of school principal, the two Danish female teachers were given the title of heads of the Danish department and in January 2005, after twenty years of service, the head of the international department was pensioned and a new head, recruited externally, was appointed in her place. This group of four people now constitute the new leadership team of Rygaards School.

New Danish legislation, from early 2005, now encourages schools to open their doors to young children under the age of five. This means that the responsibility for running RRC will now be undertaken by Rygaards School's administration and leadership. The present Reception Class Board was disbanded, with effect from August 2005, and a parent representative nominated to sit on Rygaards School Board.

The relatively recent state of flux within Rygaards School as a whole, changes in Danish education policy and the establishment of new leadership and management of RRC in 2005, have created a new environment in which RRC now exists and together they create the ideal opportunity for new thinking on many aspects of the life of RRC in particular and Rygaards School in general, particularly when thinking about parent involvement in Rygaards School in general.

3.2 The international educational context of RRC

Rygaards School is a member of the European Council of International Schools as well as The Council of British Independent Schools in the European Community (COBISec). As a result of this membership it is subject to international monitoring which in its turn, has an impact on the support that schools can/should provide to parents of early learners.

3.2.1 Summary report of the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) of October 2004

An Independent Schools Council (ISC) inspection of Rygaards School's international department was carried out in mid-October 2004. The final report of this Inspection is available to the public and can be found on the internet on the following web address,

http://www.isinspect.org.uk/reports/2004/0966_04_r.htm)

This inspection was carried out at the request of the governing body that represents parents in the school. ISI is a body approved of by the UK government for the purpose of inspecting schools and reporting on their compliance with British Education Regulations of 2003. It also inspects British schools in the European Community, who are members of the Council of British Independent Schools in the European Community (COBISec). Schools applying to be inspected, are not subject to the legal requirements applicable to schools in England, but are encouraged to meet them voluntarily. The inspection itself focuses its attention on the educational aspects of the school and does not concern itself with the economic viability or administrative procedures followed in the school.

The final report of the ISC inspection makes mention of aspects relevant to this study. The inspectors reported that the international department of Rygaards School achieves good standards, that it has a harmonious atmosphere, that it achieves its aim of celebrating a wealth of different cultures and nationalities, that the quality of teaching and learning is good and that a Christian ethos permeates the life and work of the school.

Taking at closer look at the successes of Rygaards School in general, the inspectorate reported that, "the many pupils who arrive new to the school are assimilated very quickly into the school's friendly and supportive community, [that] links with parents are strong and parents are closely involved in the life of the school [and that] the most rapid progress is made by ... pupils of all ages who join the school with little or no English language" (ISI 2004 Summary Report: 1 and 2).

Recommendations for improvement throughout Rygaards School, included relevant observations such as “... there are no formal induction arrangements to provide support for those new to teaching or those new to the school, [that] the most able pupils do not make as rapid progress as they might because they are not provided with sufficiently demanding material or suitable extension tasks [and that] little use is made of knowledge gained from assessment to adapt the curriculum to pupils’ needs” (ISI 2004. Summary Report: 1-2).

On the topic of curriculum provision throughout the school, the inspectorate reported that “the quality of curriculum provision overall is sound, but it is uneven and not broad and balanced for pupils of all ages [and] curriculum planning is not effective enough to ensure continuity and progression in pupils’ learning and equality of opportunity” (ISI 2004. Summary Report: 2 & 3).

On the issue of teachers, the inspectorate noted that while “the teaching staff are suitably qualified and experienced for the roles they undertake, ... the school would benefit from more support staff [and that] the planned programme of appraisal and the review and evaluation of staff professional development have not yet been implemented” (ISI 2004 Summary Report: 3).

On the aspect of the school’s links with parents and the community, the inspectorate reported that Rygaards links with parents are good and that its connection with the wider community is sound. Furthermore, it noted the existence of a strong parent committee (see detailed description below) that arranges school functions and runs an effective welcoming programme for new families. A pre-inspection questionnaire was handed out to parents to assess their attitudes towards the school and while most responses were positive, a significant minority expressed dissatisfaction about opportunities to discuss their child’s progress. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the inspectorate felt that there are in fact more than adequate opportunities for parental consultation with teachers.

When it comes to the personal development of pupils, the inspectorate observed that numerous spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities exist and that within the context of a harmonious and friendly learning environment, a wide range of cultural practices and beliefs of the school community

are sensitively introduced. In this connection, it was noted that the overall pastoral care, support and guidance provided by staff is good.

The governance and management of aspects of Rygaards school received a mixed response. The inspectorate found the Christian ethos of the school to be strong as a consequence of the efforts of the long-serving head of the international department, now retired, while it cited the lack of middle management roles in the school, as is common in Denmark, as creating a barrier to the sharing of good practice and the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum and pupils' progress. In addition, the inspectorate noted, that while the Board had approved a development plan for the school, the programme lacked a clear structure (ISI Report 2005:15-16).

In its conclusion, the inspectorate noted that Rygaards School meets Danish regulatory requirements and that had the school been located in England, it would have met most of the regulatory requirements applicable there.

3.3 The national education context of RCC

3.3.1 Danish legislation on private education

Denmark has a tradition of private schools with a substantial government subsidy. The tradition is founded on the ideas of the clergyman, poet and educationalist N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) and the teacher, Christen Kold (1816-1870) who advocated the concept of schooling for life. As a consequence of this philosophy, schools called 'folk high schools' were established for adults and 'free schools' or private independent school for children were founded from 1852 on.

The ideas of these two men were written into the Danish Constitution of 1849 and today, legislation stipulates that while all children between the age of seven and sixteen must receive education, it is a matter of choice for the parents whether the education is received in public schools, private schools or at home. In addition it makes provision for extensive parent involvement in schools in general and makes particular provision for private schools receiving state subsidies.

Statistics modified on 28th August 2002 by the statistics and information division of the Danish Ministry of Education, and provided on their Website <http://www.uvm.dk/cgi/printpage/pf.cgi>, indicate that 12% of all children at basic school level, (including the voluntary pre-school classes) attended private schools. Furthermore, a statistical analysis during 2000 indicates that in 1998, approximately 73,000 children attended 429 private schools, while 541,000 pupils attended the approximately 1715 public schools. Some of these private schools are very old, some are quite new and new ones are still being established. A general characteristic of them all is that they are smaller than the municipal schools.

The private schools can roughly be divided into the following categories: (Undervisnings Ministeriet: Information on Private Schools in Denmark, <http://www.uvm.dk> :1)

- small “Grundtvigian” schools in rural districts
- academically oriented lower secondary schools
- religious or congregational schools
- progressive free schools
- schools with a particular pedagogical aim such as Rudolf Steiner schools
- German minority schools
- immigrant schools.

All of these schools are state recognised and receive government financing regardless of the ideological, religious, political or ethnic motivation behind their establishment, since the notion exists that by ensuring financial support for private schools, municipal schools will benefit from the experience and competition they offer.

At this point it is relevant to mention the effects of 9/11 on the provision of private education in Denmark. As a consequence of this event as well as tensions at home with fundamentalist Muslim groups, suggestions have been made by a conservative party in the Danish parliament to establish a watchdog body to monitor the practices and standards of independent Muslim schools. These schools

are regarded as providing a curriculum that does not satisfy Danish regulations and whose affiliates are considered to present some sort of threat to the security of the country. Furthermore, following the publication of cartoons depicting the image of the prophet Mohamed in a Danish newspaper in late 2005, Denmark is likely to witness a backlash against all things Islamic in response to the fact that the Muslim world boycotted Danish imports which has had a knock on effect in terms of the laying off of Danish workers in factories producing these products. Furthermore, the activities of the Catholic Church in Denmark as well as fundamentalist Christian organizations in the country have come under closer scrutiny by investigative journalists. What impact these developments have for parental support of learning in schools in general and in RRC in particular, remain to be seen.

Returning to the aspect of Danish legislation on private education, it contains detailed rules about government financial support but only general rules about the educational content. All that is demanded of private education is that it measures up to that of the municipal schools. In this connection the education ministry confers on private schools the right to use the municipal schools' final examinations and so exercises an indirect form of quality control. However it is up to the parents of each private school to check that its performance measures up to ministry demands. On this issue of parent responsibility, legislation stipulates that the school shall not be owned by a private individual or run for private profit but that it must be a self-governing institution with a board of governors, consisting of a majority of parents, who are responsible to the Ministry of Education and who are regulated by rules concerning the use of any net assets in case of liquidation. The funds received by private institutions must only be spent for the benefit of the school and its activities. It is the parents' responsibility to choose a supervisor to check the pupils' level of achievement and to assist them in their hiring of teachers so as to ensure that the task of teaching is carried out. In extraordinary circumstances, the ministry may establish special supervision if there is reason to believe that the teaching is so poor that the children's ability to cope with life in Denmark may be impaired, as has been the case in an independent Muslim school.

Information available from the Danish Ministry of Education (Undervisnings Ministeriet: Private Schools in Denmark: Operational Grants. <http://www.uvm.dk>: 2) shows that each private school receives a grant per pupil per year for operational expenses that matches expenditure in public schools -

less the private school fees paid by parents. This is to ensure that public expenditure for private and municipal schools follow the same trend. In 2000 the average grant amounted to DKK 34,000 per pupil per year while the average fees paid by the parents amounted to DKK 8,000. (the exchange rate is approximately SAR 1=1DKk). The actual grant per pupil varies from one school to the next, depending on the number of pupils attending the school, their age distribution and the seniority of its teachers. Consequently, a large school with young pupils and inexperienced teachers will receive a lower grant than a small school with older pupils and more experienced teachers. The variation therefore ranges from about DKK 27,000 to DKK 55,000. The grant is allocated as one total block grant and as long as this money is used for school and teaching purposes, the school is free to spend the money, and fix the school fees, according to its own priorities. Having mentioned state funding, it is also significant that schools are responsible for some degree of self-funding and the requirement in 2000 was DKK 4300 per pupil per year. It can also be noted here, that the fees for RRC are DKK 4300 per month, 70% of which is refunded to tax paying parents by their municipality.

In a letter dated 17th February 1999, the Danish Ministry of Education sanctioned that the language of instruction in Rygaards School's international department be English. In discussing Danish legislation as it pertains to formalised education, it is important to reiterate that RRC finds itself in a special situation, since the concept of formalised education excludes children under the age of five years. Consequently, legislation and funding pertaining to four to five year olds in RRC falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Family and Social Welfare. Having said this however, recent legislation pertaining to schools has enabled Rygaards School to offer so-called pre-school or early child-care as a part of its' overall service package and has therefore formalised the status of the RRC and made it an integral part of Rygaards School; although it is still reliant on subsidies from local municipalities and fees paid by parents.

3.4 Stakeholders in RRC

Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular are subject to the interest of a number of stakeholders who are interested in the provision of child-care, education in general and the support of early learning in particular. These so-called outsiders will now be discussed.

3.4.1 The Danish Ministry of Family and Social Welfare

One of the reasons that the present liberal Danish government came to power was its policy of free choice and guarantee of child-care for children under the age of five, that is, children not yet attending school. As a result RRC parents, who have residential status and are subject to tax regulations in Denmark, are eligible to a 70% fee rebate from the municipality in which they reside since it is the responsibility of the municipality to provide child-care for its residents.

In order to ensure that the children under their jurisdiction are receiving quality childcare each municipality appoints a pedagogical consultant to visit all the early child-care institutions within its jurisdiction. In the case of RRC pedagogical consultants from all the municipalities visit the class on a regular basis to follow up on the health and general development of the children. It should be noted that since Danish children of this age are not expected to engage in “formalised learning”, these consultants are not essentially interested in educational provision but concern themselves rather with the environmental safety and general standard of child-care given to the children. The pedagogical consultants are required to write reports on their visits but do not provide copies of these reports unless otherwise requested by the RRC leader or Rygaards principal. Increasingly it seems that municipalities are joining forces to cut their costs and so their pedagogical consultants make visits on behalf of one another.

3.4.2 Gentofte Municipality and Rygaards School in general

Act No. 9 on free-schools and private elementary schools passed in the Danish parliament on the 6th of June 2001, as well as the Government Notice no: 696 passed on 4th August 2003, stipulate that “the responsibility for the supervision for the daily running of a free elementary school lies with the parents of the school”. (External Inspection Report of June 2005:1; <http://www.rygaards.com/international/Parents/Inspection.htm>) However, parents are at liberty to request the council of the school’s municipality to take charge of an inspection of the school and as a consequence of such a request, in a letter dated 7th May 2005, the children’s and school’s committee of the Gentofte Municipality appointed Mr Andre Lublin to take charge of an inspection of both departments of

Rygaards School. This inspection took place in two phases on January 11th 2005 and 24th May 2005. During these visits, the inspector consulted with the headmaster and leadership team and visited a number of classes where he saw a variety of lesson presentations. The report makes no mention of any consultations with parents during his visit to the school.

In his report, the inspector made various comparisons between Rygaards School and the state schools within his municipality. He noted that especially in the younger class, represented by amongst others, RRC, that more teaching hours, than those allocated in state schools, pertained at Rygaards. When examining pupil results the marks for Rygaards School represents an average mark for all its students. The inspector found these to be well above those of the national average of state schools and on a par with those of Gentofte Municipality. In addition, while the average class size in Gentofte's public schools are 22, 4 pupils per class, that of Rygaards School is 20, 9.

The findings of this inspection correspond well with those of the previously mentioned ISC inspection and Mr Lublin noted that a dynamic atmosphere exists in the school, that the teachers are competent and committed, that the students are motivated and that discipline is good. Furthermore, it was noted that classroom facilities, apart from those in RRC, are somewhat confined without being constricted. In this regard, mention should be made of a building project that began in mid-Oct 2005 and which is designed to include new premises for RRC within the junior primary department building now under construction.

3.4.3 Gentofte Municipality and RRC in particular

The Gentofte municipality is responsible for inspecting the physical condition of the school and approving any building changes or educational additions to the school. In addition it is responsible for co-ordinating unscheduled visits, made by the pedagogical consultants of other municipalities, to RRC. Consequently Gentofte municipality was consulted, early in 2000, when RRC was established in one of the classrooms of Rygaards School and then again in 2002 when a new building to house RRC was planned. The local fire-brigade concerned itself with building and safety regulations while Gentofte's municipal office dealing specifically with child-care was particularly interest in the standards of child

care offered by RRC. This was because this new institution within their municipality was seen to be a project worth funding since the municipality would be then relieved of the responsibility and cost of establishing such an institution itself. It would then be fulfilling its promise of guaranteed child-care.

As mentioned earlier, the pedagogical consultant from Gentofte municipality visits the RRC when children from the municipality are registered in RRC.

3.4.4 The Catholic Church of Denmark

The Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Assumption established Rygaards School in 1909 and their connection with the school remains strong today. The school continues to follow the chief goal of this order, that is, to provide education in a Christian spirit. The Sisters are active in the promotion of a programme of Christian values that form part of the daily curriculum of the school. In addition they have been instrumental in encouraging the participation of parents in weekly meetings on religious values. A number of RRC parents participate in these meetings.

Rygaards School is a member of the Association of Catholic Schools in Denmark and until recently RRC was, a member of the Catholic Nursery School Association of Denmark. While Roman Catholic pupils receive separate religious instruction, education in general at Rygaards is given in the Christian spirit. The Pope's representative in Denmark, the Catholic Bishop, has no direct influence on the day to day running of the school, but he is always invited to, and often attends, major events at Rygaards.

The local Parish Church of St. Theresa, which adjoins Rygaards School, is the venue of a number of Catholic and Ecumenical services held in the school. In addition, Catholic families from Rygaards School meet here to attend Sunday services.

3.4.5 Rygaards School Board

While it is not entirely correct to include the school board as an outside party with an interest in RRC it is applicable in the sense that Rygaards School is subject to Danish law and receives a block grant from

the state. Its Board of Governors is responsible for the distribution of these funds as well as the hiring and firing of Rygaards School staff. However, while this Board does not receive direct state funds for children attending RRC it maintains a strong interest in the running of RRC and follows its progress through reports from the school principal, the head of the international department and Rygaards Parents' Committee. In addition, following recent legislation on early child-care provision and the consequent disbanding of the previously independent RRC Board, Rygaards School Board is now responsible for the dispersal of RRC fees and the hiring of its staff as well as any enquiries that may be directed by the Ministry of Family and Social Welfare.

3.5 Parent involvement in Rygaards School

The aim of this study is to investigate parent support of early formalised learning and to ascertain how the school can assist globally mobile parents in this task.

While parents who are, resented on Rygaards School Board constitute the membership of Rygaards School's Parent Committee and Parent Association and can always be found on the school premises in a volunteer capacity, no comprehensive parent involvement programme exists in the school. In their provisional report on what the school should do better, the ISI state that "there are no formal induction arrangements to provide support for those new to teaching or those new to the school", that is, parents (ISC Summary Report 2005:1).

The above mentioned aspect of the ISC report supports the aim of this study to gather information on and identify strategies for the development of a comprehensive PI programme for Rygaards School. Before this can be achieved however, the present state of parent involvement needs to be highlighted.

The information that follows is an attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of parent involvement in the daily running of Rygaards School. Information is provided in Danish educational legislation about parents and schools, external inspection reports on parent involvement at Rygaards, parent participation on its board, parent committees and associations as well as parent involvement in the life of the classroom.

3.5.1 Rygaards School policies on parent involvement

In its mission statement, Rygaards School states that, “the school sees its mission to work together with parents to provide schooling which is in accordance with Danish law”. The summary report of the ISC inspection carried out in Rygaards School International Department in mid-October 2004, notes that “links with parents are strong and parents are closely involved in the life of the school” (ISC Summary Report 2005:1). The following information outlines the school’s attempts to achieve this aim.

There are a number of policies concerning communication between parents and the school. They include:

3.5.1.1 Parents’ right of educational quality control

Since Danish regulations for private schools require that the education at Rygaards School must be at least of an equivalent standard to that provided in state schools, parents of each class must elect a representative who together then form a parents’ committee. It is the responsibility of this committee to monitor educational standards in the school and to receive a written report of the annual inspection of the school as stipulated in Danish legislation.

This policy also stipulates that parents are responsible for keeping themselves informed about the progress of their child and the school’s teaching programme and in turn the school regards it as parents’ responsibility to attend parent/teacher consultations and class meetings. Furthermore, parents are free to sit in on their children’s lessons providing that they have received permission to do so from the head of the international department.

While this policy secures parents rights to monitor and receive outside input on the educational standards of the school it makes no mention of parent involvement in and support of the day-to-day learning of their children or the manner in which the school will assist them in this task. In other words the policy focuses its attention on educational control rather than educational participation by parents.

Furthermore, criticism, in terms of parents' right to monitor their children's progress is raised in the ISI Report (2005:13) where attention is drawn to the fact that "a significant minority [of parents] expressed dissatisfaction with the information provided about their child's progress and the opportunities to discuss it".

3.5.1.2 Line of authority and complaints procedure

The majority of organisations are hierarchical in nature and schools are no exception to this rule. The right to make decisions as well as the dissolution of disputes, demands that a clear line of authority be established within the organisation or institution.

In order to achieve its aim of co-operation with parents, Rygaards School has developed a policy that outlines the line of authority within its legal jurisdiction. The highest authority is its Board of Governors. In the event that communication between a family and teacher is found to be unsatisfactory, the head of department should be contacted. Failing this, the school headmaster should be approached. As a last resort to solving a dispute, the Board of Governors should be approached.

Considering that a comprehensive PI programme does not exist in Rygaards School, as well as the absence of a middle management in the school (ISC Report 2005: 16), as is typical in Denmark, numerous opportunities arise in which teaching staff and parents find themselves in conflict with one another and experience shows that school support for solving these conflicts has, at times, been weak.

3.5.1.3 System of communication

Communication between the home and school takes place on a daily basis using a contact book issued to each child at the beginning of the year. This system has never been adopted by RRC primarily because, until recently, there was no induction programme for the newly employed staff at Rygaards. As a consequence RRC staff were unaware of the system. Contact with teachers is by appointment and phone-calls to them have to be made during school hours. Staff in RRC are always available to its'

parents. Meetings concerning school matters should be held on the school premises and s about other teachers and the school leadership must not be entertained in parent/teacher consultations.

The final report of the ISC inspection carried out in Rygaards School international department in mid-October 2004, makes special note of links with parents and the community. It notes that “one of the school’s aims is to work together with parents to provide a schooling which is in accordance with Danish law and there is a strong belief that education is a partnership between school and parents” (ISC final report 2005:12).

There are however a number of criticisms levelled at Rygaards in the Report. As regards parents, the inspection team found that many opportunities are available for parents to talk to staff, however, a pre-inspection questionnaire revealed that “a significant minority [of parents] expressed dissatisfaction with the information provided about their child’s progress and the opportunities s to discuss it [and] some parents were unhappy with the lack of extra-curricular activities” (ISC final report 2005:13).

So while it appears that Rygaards places importance on the concept of education as a partnership between the school and parents, it does not meet the expectations of many parents nor does it provide sufficient resources for the teaching staff in this regard.

3.5.2 Rygaards School Board of Governors

Rygaards School Board is subject to Danish education legislation that supports decentralisation and parent management of schools. This Board is responsible for the disbursement of subsidies received from the Ministry of Education, the employment of qualified teachers and the collection of fees from both non-taxpaying and taxpaying families. A member of the Parents’ Committee (see below) is elected to be the parent representative on the school’s governing body for a period of two years, but longer if he/she is re-elected. He/she has the responsibility of informing the Parents’ Committee of issues discussed at Board of Governor meetings. The Board of Governors has representatives from both the Danish and International Parent Committees and has been keen to see greater co-operation between the staff, parents and pupils of its two departments.

On the issue of governance and management, the ISI inspection team noted that “[it] is sound overall but var[ies] in quality and effectiveness and ha[s] some significant weaknesses such as management structures, as exist, are well defined but the lack of any specific middle management roles within the school, as is common in Denmark, inhibits the sharing of good practice”. (ISC final report 2005:15 - 16).

As regards Rygaards development plan, which the Board approved, the report notes, that while “the school has a development plan...it lacks a clear structure” in terms of distinctions between major and minor projects, time scales for completion, provision of resources, indication of responsible staff, success criteria and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan (ISC final report 2005:16).

While it appears that the Board of Governors achieves its mission with regard to “working with parents in accordance with Danish law” its immediate and long term goals and plans do not extend towards developing a comprehensive PI programme.

3.5.3 The international Parents’ Committee

The International Parents’ Committee consists of an elected parent from each class in the international department of the school. The task of this body is to monitor the educational standards of the school, to work closely with the parents’ committee of the Danish department and to receive written reports of any inspections carried out at their request. It is understood that the committee’s role is to discuss educational issues but not to take final decisions on such matters. Rather, the committee should inform the school administration and the parent representative to the governing body, of its’ opinion. A parent representative from RRC sits on this committee, represents RRC parents’ interests and serves as a key link between the parents committee, the parent body in the school at large and the reception class parents in particular. (Rygaards School. Rules of the International Parents’ Committee. April 2003. Appendix 1).

There are however some serious weaknesses in this system of parent involvement. Firstly, an international staff member attends parent committee meetings and is expected to report back to staff meetings about decisions made by the committee. However, this single representative does not represent the interest of the entire teaching staff in terms of special problems at different levels of the school and no provision is made for him/her to collect points of concern from other staff members. In addition no provision is made for the class representatives to meet with the class teacher or parent body to discuss issues that could be presented at these meetings. A comprehensive PI programme that focuses on closer communication and co-operation between teachers and parents could alleviate this weakness.

3.5.4 The Parents' Association

All parents at Rygaards are asked to become subscribed members of the Parent's Association. The Association is open to every parent or guardian of the international department. Its affairs are co-ordinated by the Parents' Committee. A member of Rygaards teaching staff attends some of the meetings of this association. Parents, who wish to volunteer their time and skills for the betterment of the school, constitute this association. It has its own premises at the school and its purpose is to be of assistance to the international department and to give help and advice to new families recently arrived in Denmark. In addition this association focuses its attention on activities designed: to achieve understanding between its members and the School's management and staff, to arrange social activities to further the members' involvement with the school and to raise funds to supplement those provided by the block grant of the Danish state. A number of RRC parents are active members of this association (International Department, Rygaards School. Rules of the Parents' Association. April 2003).

While parent volunteers work towards bettering the school, there is often a lack of communication between parents and teachers which gives rise to de-motivation amongst parents and irritation amongst teaching staff already burdened by their teaching workload. A comprehensive PI programme could improve communication and offer the opportunity for both sides to share their perspectives on a number of issues affecting both them and their children and pupils.

3.5.5 The Catholic Families Association

Rygaards Catholic Parents Association was founded in 1996 as a result of initiatives taken by the now retired head of the international department and its aim is to maintain an environment in which parents can nurture their children as Christians. As one parent who had been involved with the association said, “being involved in the group has been a pleasure for me. You get to know each other very quickly. I have learned so much about what can be achieved, especially if we work together, doing a little bit”. Another parent noted that, “non-English speakers help too, there is always something you can offer – it’s rather like being with your family”. It should be noted here, that this association has had a great deal of success attracting the attention of RRC parents to its meetings and events.

While this association has done much to assist Catholic parents in their parenting role as well as style, its membership is limited to a relatively small group. However the association provides a foundation on which, a more comprehensive PI programme that involves all parents and teaching staff, could be built.

3.5.6 Class parent

At class level, particularly in the younger classes, it is invariable that a single parent begins to volunteer his/her services and assumes responsibility for drawing up a contact list for parents of the class, for helping the teacher to organise class events and assisting the class parent representative in the event of school activities such as the school bazaar, United Nations Day, summer party and the like. While the elected parent representative for each class represents the interests of RRC on the parents’ committee, the volunteer class parent is usually the person who establishes contact between new families joining the class and liaises between the parents and the teacher on issues of a practical nature.

It could be argued that the class parent who volunteers his/her time could be said to be the parent with his/her finger on the pulse of the class, since his/her informal involvement with the teacher and the pupils sensitises him/her to the strengths as well as weaknesses of the class. Moreover he/she has the opportunity to become familiar with the teaching methods employed by the teacher as well as learning

that can be supported at home. However, this experience and opportunity to learn supportive skills is limited to one or two parents out of a whole group. If a comprehensive PI programme was introduced in RRC, all parents could share in a similar experience and learn skills for supporting early, formalised learning in the home.

3.6 Parent involvement in RRC

This study focuses its attention specifically on the parent body of RRC. Information obtained on this group of parents has been gathered over a period of five years during which time a great deal of change has occurred with regard to parent involvement in early formalised learning in RRC.

A total of approximately 140 families have passed through RRC during the five years of its existence. This parent body has in no way been homogenous in terms of nationality, religion and culture. Its' only commonality is that the group's families are globally mobile and spend, on average, three to four years at Rygaards School.

Members of this parent body have been elected to sit on RRC's Board. They have volunteered their time and skills on an informal basis both in and outside of the classroom and have attended parent consultations and class meetings. A large number of them have gone on to be active participants on the various associations and committees of Rygaards School and an ex-RRC parent is today an active member of Rygaards School Board. Long distance communication with parents who have left Denmark, and whose children are now attending other international schools in other parts of the world, indicates that their involvement as volunteers and decision makers at Rygaards has continued in their new school environment.

In order to achieve the aim of gathering data that could provide information for the development of a comprehensive PI programme in Rygaards School, a detailed examination of the situation in RRC is required. The present reception class parent body consists of twenty families from approximately seventeen different nationalities and offers the opportunity for a manageable comparative case study on parent involvement in and support of early formalised learning.

3.6.1 Rygaards Reception Class Board

At its inception in 2000, the governing body of the RRC consisted of the head of the international department in the capacity of chairperson, two class parents holding the post of secretary and treasurer respectively, the parent committee representative to Rygaards School Board and an Assumption Sister. The leader of RRC, and researcher behind this investigation, attended all board meetings but had no voting rights. As a consequence of educational legislation in early 2005, the Reception Class Board was disbanded; Rygaards School Governing Body assumed responsibility for overseeing the running of the RRC and a RRC parent representative now sits on the parents' committee to represent the interests of RRC at school level.

While the parents, who were elected to the Board to represent the interests of the entire parent body of RRC, attended meetings and made decisions that would affect everyone involved in RRC, at no point, despite suggestions from the author of this study, did they produce any report of their meetings for the parent body. This significant weakness in communicating information can be said to have been counter-productive in involving other parents in the administering of the RRC. .

3.6.2 Parent representative to Parents' Committee

As previously mentioned, the parents of RRC elect a parent representative to Rygaards School's Parent Committee. The election takes place within three weeks of the new school year that begins in August. Parents are asked to volunteer their services to the Parent Committee and then each parent in RRC is asked to elect a class representative.

Criticism of the weakness in communication and co-operation between parent representatives to the parents' committee and the parent body of each class as well as the class teacher has already been mentioned. This is a limitation when it comes to engaging all parents in the task of participating in and supporting the early formalised learning of their children.

3.6.3 The class parent

Parent members of RRC's Board met on a monthly basis to get the project of the ground. In the meantime, there were issues of a practical nature that had to be dealt with daily. There was always a small group of parents who volunteered their time throughout the years. Consequently, a couple of parents always landed up co-ordinating the parent group on issues such as catering for parties, arranging transport for outings and the buying gifts for staff and such like. In addition, during the arrival rush in the mornings it was these persons that came in and read to small groups of children,, assisted staff with library visits, agreed to come in and help with craft and cookery sessions or stand in when staff were away sick.

As argued in point 3.5.6 above parents, who volunteer their time informally, gain access to the class in a way that other parents do not. If a comprehensive PI programme was to be introduced in RRC all parents could share in a similar experience and learn skills for supporting the early formalised learning of their children within the context of their homes.

3.6.4 Parents at the individual level

At the individual level, each parent is responsible for doing their best to fulfil the basic requirements of their child. In the context of this study, parents are responsible for ensuring that their child comes to school rested, fed and ready to benefit from the formalised learning programme on offer in RRC. Furthermore, according to Rygaards School policy on parent involvement, parents are expected to participate in class meetings and to attend parent/teacher consultations. As the year progresses and formalised learning becomes established, parents are expected to follow up on these learning activities by reading to their children and listening to their children's early reading efforts, to practise the songs learnt at school and to draw their child's attention to examples of early number mathematical concepts as they occur in the child's environment.

In an international learning environment in which globally mobile families constitute the majority of RRC's population, there are numerous problems that face staff when it comes to promoting and

encouraging parent support of early learning. When new families arrive at RRC they are faced with numerous challenges. Most of them are struggling with the practicalities of settling into a new country. Increasingly, families are separated from the bread-winner due to global employment demands. The majority are second language English speakers and it is not uncommon for one or two parents, and up to eight children in the group, not to understand any English at all. The majority of parents are not familiar with British-style educational approaches, teaching methods or the reception class curriculum and have conflicting expectations of teaching staff. Many of these families are expecting to be repatriated and are concerned that the level of learning in RRC does not correspond to that to which their children will be expected to achieve on return to their native school systems. Furthermore, cultural differences, differences in parenting style, stereotyped gender roles and learning expectations are also factors that impact on the degree of success that staff and parents enjoy in terms of communication and co-operation with one another.

As founder/leader of RRC, the author of this study initiated a variety of informal ways of reaching out to this small parent body with which she had daily contact. A member of RRC staff welcomes parents and their children at the beginning and end of the school day and takes care of incidental requests and immediate concerns that parents may have. A classroom notice board provides details of school events, parent committee meetings and activities organised by both the Parents' Association and the Catholic Families Association. In addition information, relevant to the activities of RRC, is posted daily to keep parents abreast of what their child is doing in school. A monthly newsletter is prepared by Rygaards School. Similarly, the class leader prepares a monthly newsletter, dealing with activities related to RRC. In addition, a casual coffee morning is held at the beginning of each month to give parents and the RRC leader the opportunity to communicate on topics of mutual interest and to give parents the opportunity to join their child in the classroom for a couple of hours. Two class meetings are arranged for parents in the course of the year and a parent consultation of twenty minutes is planned for each family in January. At the end of the school year, a written report is prepared for each child and this is presented to the parents. Over and above these possibilities for communication, parents are invited to make an appointment with the class teacher and the class teacher in turn calls parents in for meetings if and when she thinks it necessary.

Parents are encouraged to participate with their child's birthday celebration either in the classroom or to invite the class home for the day. The celebration of national days and cultural traditions, such as Diwali, Halloween, Eid and St. Patrick's Day, is also encouraged and parents are welcome to come into the classroom to lead such celebrations. In all these situations, the teacher is involved in the planning and helps the organising parent to pitch the activity at the correct level for young children. In order to draw parent's attention to the importance of their role as supporters of learning, a roster is drawn up at the beginning of each term and parents are asked to volunteer to come into the classroom at the beginning of the day to read stories or sing songs with the children as they arrive at school. Parents with interesting hobbies (bee-keeping, model building, cookery, origami and so on) are also invited to share them with the children, either within the school environment, at their home or relevant location.

3.7 Conclusion

The context in which RRC exists has been presented in this chapter. Initial observations and recommendations provide a background for a more detailed examination of the support offered by the parents concerned in Chapters 5 and 6.

Since families in the international department of Rygaards School do not stay for longer than three to four years in Denmark, and the reception class only has access to its families for a single year, a number of issues, relating to family mobility and parent practices, arise. These issues fall under the broad umbrella topic of parents supporting their children's learning within a multi-cultural, reception class.

On the grounds of this, the author suggested that a study of present parent support of learning at this initial stage in an international school, offers the opportunity for the beginnings of a comprehensive PI Program not only in RRC, but also throughout Rygaards School as a whole.

In order to shed light on the present beliefs and customs held by parents as well as their practices of supporting early learning, a number of questions, relevant to the reception class level have to be answered, namely:

- What kind of learning support are parents presently giving their children?
- What kind of support do globally mobile families from a variety of cultural backgrounds, presently receive from Rygaards school and RRC's teachers?
- What kind of support do these families need from Rygaards School and RRC's teachers in order to support their children's learning?
- What kind of support do the teachers themselves need in order to be able to provide such assistance?
- What resource base do mobile, multi-cultural parents represent?
- How can this parent resource base be harnessed to initiate a comprehensive, long-lasting and well planned PI programme in RRC and Rygaards School?

A research design, for investigating these questions is therefore the focus of the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 4

Research Design for Study on Parent Support of Early Learning and School Facilitation of Parent involvement in Early Learning

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical framework of qualitative research and the research design for an ethnographic investigation are presented and the aims, research methods and data processing methodology of this study on parent participation in early learning in RRC are introduced.

4.2 Aims

The problem formulation of this study limits its focus to:

- How do parents support early learning and how do teachers support parents in this task?
- What are the specific difficulties faced by globally mobile families and how can a school environment assist parents to support the early learning of their young children?

Consequently, the aim of the study is to understand the phenomenon of support of learning within the context of international globalisation, from the perspective of both parents and teachers in a specific situation, namely, RRC.

In order to uncover this phenomenon, the study is designed to investigate the context in which these people carry out their parental duties, as well as the environment that shapes and impacts on their involvement in formalised learning, specifically the global labour market, cross-national and cross cultural attitudes towards families with children, the state of Denmark and Rygaards School in general.

Moreover the research aims to investigate the attitudes and behaviour of RRC's parents and staff who come from all four corners of the globe – each with a particular cultural heritage, religious belief and

perspective on education as well as their role in it. A case study that focuses on the learning support of parents in an international reception class will be made. Furthermore ethnographic research tools will be employed as a means of understanding the phenomenon from the parents' social, cultural and religious perspectives.

In addition, since schools are obliged to facilitate parent involvement in engaging parents in the beginnings of their child's formalised learning, the research design aims to identify the role of Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular,.

Finally, since the investigation examines a single aspect of Rygaards school, that is, the activities of parents in its reception class, it is hoped that the outcome of the study will produce material for further inquiry into parental participation in the school as a whole.

4.3 Research design

4.3.1 Qualitative research theories

There are a number of ways of learning about the world around us. Positivism, post-positivism, constructionism and the critical tradition constitute different perspectives on the task of uncovering reality. Each provides a particular definition of science or theoretical description of how to gather information and ensure that the outcome of investigation is valid.

Comte (1798-1857) theorised that science constitutes the search for laws of society through the use of methods employed in natural science, such as, observations, experiments, measurement and comparison. Positivism, often referred to as empiricism, is based upon direct experience and objective study, in an attempt to search for general laws. (Murray: 2001 <http://www.med.mun.ca/chps>).

William Dithery (1833-1911) theorised that there were two types of science, namely *naturwissneschaften*, the science of objects that do not exhibit values, intentions and feelings and *geisteswissenschaften*, science that requires an intellectual and moral act of interpretation on the part of

the scientist to enter into the meanings that life has for others. In other words he made a distinction between *erklären* or explanation, which is typical of natural science and *verstehen* which relates to the insight and sympathetic understanding commonly associated with social science (Murray 2001 <http://www.med.mun.ca/chps>).

As a consequence of this distinction between the two types of scientific approach, doubts about the absoluteness of scientific statements began to be raised by physicists, such as, Niels Bohr (1885 – 1962), who suggested that objectivity is not absolute and argued in favour of probability rather than certainty (Murray 2001; <http://www.med.mun.ca/chps>). The gap between empirical and everyday, or common-sense reasoning gave rise to a rejection of positivism and a post-positivist tradition emerged in an attempt to control for the influence of the investigator. This new scientific paradigm determined that empirical/quantitative investigation of human phenomena was ecologically invalid, that it had difficulty generalising and that it was unable to fulfil emerging ideals of objectivity amongst scientists interested in so-called qualitative investigation.

A theoretical framework referred to as constructionism emerged from post-positivism. Constructionism is the term used for the individualistic and social approach to making meaning. The paradigm suggests that the researcher engages with the realities of the human condition, constructs a certain meaning in this process of interaction and transmits the meaning within an essentially social context. In other words, constructionism maintains that meaning is not discovered but constructed.

The interpretive framework emerged out of the constructivist paradigm, and can be characterised as an attempt to define a scientific framework for capturing, understanding and interpreting meaning. A detailed of this theoretical paradigm follows in 4.3.2 below.

Finally, while cognisance was given to the fact that meaning is constructed within the social context, the idea that particular sets of meaning exist to serve certain hegemonic interests emerged. Marx (1818 -1883) argued that ideology and meaning is linked to economic interests. This thinking gave rise to the critical tradition that is often applied in explaining and highlighting the economic, social and political conditions under which people are forced to live (Murray 2001; <http://www.med.mun.ca/chps>).

These theories relate to the qualitative research approach by enabling the researcher to understand experience by connecting the people under investigation to the context in which they find themselves. Furthermore the approach values contradictions and complexity and challenges established positions, often resulting in the empowerment of research participants. Consequently, while the qualitative approach rejects the positivist search for general laws, as is the case in the natural sciences, it affirms the post-positivist attempt to control for the influence of the researcher, applies the constructionist paradigm when interpreting the construction of meaning and employs a critical framework to engage research participants in what can become an empowering process of uncovering their own experiences of reality.

4.3.2 The interpretive framework

The interpretive framework emerged out of the constructivist paradigm and can be characterised as an attempt to define a way of capturing, understanding and interpreting meaning.

The interpretive framework assumes that meaning is socially constructed and that knowledge is gained through language and shared meanings, be these contained in the consciousness of a group or the artefacts that they produce. It is also assumed that since individuals are autonomous and that their actions can be understood in terms of the complex situations in which they find themselves, that objectivity of observation of human beings is impossible. This point gives rise to the assumption that since reality is complex and multifaceted, it is best studied as a whole taking the context of the situation and its actors into consideration to produce a rich description of an individual case rather than “universal laws or predictive generalisations” (Henning 2001: 20).

In this study, recognition is given to the fact that the multi-cultural family population at Rygaards speaks a wide range of languages that opens gates to a vast range of meanings. It therefore acknowledges that cultural diversity amongst families reduces the degree to which they share meaning. The aim of this study then is not to come to any generalised conclusions about the population but to provide a rich description of these meanings.

Unlike the positivist aim of conducting science in natural settings, the interpretive framework is not particularly concerned about uncovering truth so much as getting to understand the multiple realities in which humans are engaged. Consequently, it is prepared to live with ambiguity and to come to an interpretation based on deductions that can be confusing rather than confirming.

Contradictions in meanings are bound to exist amongst a diverse group of people and cultural diversity only increases this reality. This study aims to describe the situation as it exists at Rygaards and to unveil the multiplicity of realities that may or may not contradict one another.

Initially, the interpretive framework focused attention on the descriptive task of presenting the reality of participants from their own perspective. Since this paradigm recognises that observation can be fallible, concern about the researcher's role in the construction of meaning became the focus of attention, followed by an interest in the role that language plays in the construction of meaning. This then led to investigation on the social construction of meaning and the manner in which this knowledge, also referred to as discourse, is maintained. Finally, attention turned to how the meaning of data changes when it is examined critically in terms of its hegemonic role in maintaining the status-quo.

The researcher's role as RRC leader and interpretive task as researcher can be difficult to separate at times. The researcher's ability to make sense of certain phenomenon may be hampered by this fact. However, her experience of living and working in a number of countries and cultures has provided her with practical experience as well as an understanding of some of the connotations of participants' actions and statements, which would otherwise not have been grasped. Furthermore, since the researcher recognises that not everything is as it seems, the study does not simply rely on her observations. Rather it gives participants the opportunity to describe their own lives by completing open-ended questionnaires. Since not all participants are familiar with English and taking into account the fact that language is often a barrier to meaning making, the taking of photographs by parents is recognised to be an invaluable means of providing the researcher with information that words cannot.

Interpretive theory holds that meaning is not discovered but constructed in the process of observing the world of people and describing their values, intentions and self-understanding (Henning 2001: 20). It argues that meaning is multifaceted and being both objective and subjective no single interpretation of reality can provide a completely true or valid picture of reality. Similarly, this paradigm contends that since measurement is fallible, a variety of research data from numerous sources must be sought out using a number of different methods to produce thick and colourful descriptions. The interpretive paradigm therefore insists that in order to understand a particular phenomenon in its totality, a number of researchers have to engage in a collective process to uncover reality by looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives in the hope that a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation may be revealed. This point then draws attention to questions of methodology. The interpretive paradigm rejects the objective experimental approach of positivism and encourages subjective social interaction in which the researcher engages in “the mental process of interpret[ing]” meaning (Henning 2001: 20) while at the same time examining the context in which this meaning is shaped.

It is correct to say that the participants in this study do not represent a homogenous group and that a single interpretation of the reality of RRC is therefore impossible. As a result this study uses a number of methods of data collection and draws on numerous sources to obtain as rich a description as possible. Furthermore, while meanings amongst families may be numerous, the context in which they are examined and interpreted is confined to that of the school environment.

In conclusion, the interpretive framework takes analysis beyond content as reality. Subsequently, since this study acknowledges the limitation of the researcher in interpreting meaning, it seeks to produce a thick description of the phenomenon within the context in which it exists, namely Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular.

4.3.3 Case study design

Research design refers to the plan and structure of an investigation and specifies when, from whom and how the research data will be obtained as well as how this data should be analysed so that the most

valid answers will emerge. However, since there are many different kinds of designs, it is important to match the design with the research questions which in this case are:

- How do globally mobile parents support early learning in an international reception class?
- What difficulties do these parents face in the context of their global mobility?

The term “case study” describes both “what” will be investigated as well as “how” the investigation will take place (Henning 2001:40). This issue, of a so-called “bounded system” (Henning 2001:40) determines exactly which “case” or group of people will be observed, narrows down investigative interest to a specific aspect/unit of the subjects lives and defines the methods that will be employed to conduct the study.

In a case study design located in the interpretive tradition, the researcher approaches content within the context in which it exists and not simply as the only indicator of meaning in itself. In other words, the researcher is interested in obtaining and describing an in-depth understanding of the situation as well as the meanings of those involved in it. Similarly, the focus of a case study design is on the process of investigation rather than the product or outcomes, on discovering and describing reality rather than confirming and constructing generalised laws about it.

Henning (2001:42) suggests that in order to warrant a case study design it is essential that the following questions be answered in the affirmative:

- Does the topic warrant being referred to as a “case”? (that is, is there a clear unit of analysis?)
- Does this study require multiple methods to capture the full case?

In this particular case, Rygaards is an exceptional school. On one hand it has two departments, each presenting a different curriculum in its own language. On the other, the school’s governance and dispersal of government subsidies are subject to a single Danish educational legislation and all of its teachers are subject to Danish employment regulations. Furthermore, while the school is subject to

unifying forces from without, the parent bodies of each department do not share much in common when it comes to country of origin, mother-tongue, religion, international employment status, or education-system experience. More importantly however, until very recently, RRC was a separate institution with its own Board of Governors and system of state subsidy allocation. In addition, it was not subject to Danish education regulations but rather those of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

In addition, this particular study limits a general interest in the lives of globally mobile parents to that of approximately 140 international families within the context of a specific reception class. From amongst a diverse number of possible activities that these parents engage in, the study limits its attention to the support that they provide in terms of their child's early learning. Furthermore, in order to uncover the reality of their lives, data was gathered from sources within the context of a specific site, namely Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular. The methods used to gather data were numerous and included observations, conversations, questionnaires as well as referral to a number of internal and external documents relating to Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular.

In conclusion then, it can be argued that this study meets Henning's criteria for defining a 'case' since it investigates 'a clear unit of analysis', focuses its attention on an exceptional school and it utilises 'multiple methods to capture the full case'.

4.3.4 Data collection in qualitative research

Qualitative studies are characterised by flexibility, in terms of the methods employed as well as the research process itself. Typically, a qualitative researcher uses an emergent design and makes decisions about the data collection strategies as the study progresses. Furthermore, qualitative techniques collect data in the form of words. In order to obtain a detailed overview of a particular "case" qualitative methodology employs a number of strategies for gathering data that will capture the richness and complexity of behaviour that occurs in natural settings from the participants' perspective. The methodology section of a qualitative study includes details of when, from whom and how the data of the study have been collected. Keeping in mind the interpretive framework and case study design of

qualitative research, the strategies employed in selecting participants, gathering data and analysing it, for this type of qualitative scientific enquiry, constitute the focus of the next section.

This study involved the development of a number of questionnaires and increasingly focused observations, which came about as the result of attempts to improve current practices in RRC. In addition, the investigation occurred over a number of years, involved many people in different situations and was an ongoing and refining process. It focuses its attention on the discourse between RRC staff and parents concerning the issue of their support of learning and it is hoped, that as a result of these comments, that a change in the culture of Rygaards will benefit them, their children and the teachers.

The researcher's participant-observer role enabled her to collect data by means of qualitative methods, and an interpretive enquiry enabled her to present a narrative study that contains rich descriptions and which invites further action research. Moreover, the research has progressed through a cycle in which reflective-practice has given rise to changes in the behaviour of RRC staff in relation to the expressed needs of parents. These changes have in their turn provided data, which shed light on the need for further reflection and invites further investigation. Accordingly it can be argued that this study meets Henning's definition of action research.

This study site demands great flexibility considering the mobility of RRC's families. As mentioned earlier, data collection strategies that take cognisance of the barriers presented by a lack of fluency in English as well as cultural diversity are employed.

Who the researcher decides to study is determined by the sampling strategy and sample size employed. In qualitative research, the information generated by the inquiry depends more on the information richness of the case and the analytical ability of the researcher than on the sample size. Selecting an information rich case for in-depth study is termed purposeful sampling. Such sampling increases the utility of information obtained from a small sample when one wants to understand something about the case without needing to generalise the findings to all such cases. Site selection on the other hand

involves choosing people involved in a particular event or activity and where the focus is on complex micro processes. The research problem and purpose define the criteria for site selection.

Comprehensive sampling is interested in the variation to which every participant in a group can contribute to the overall understanding and description of a phenomenon. Sampling by case study refers to a comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon and the case type may be, amongst others, an extreme-case, a typical-case or a unique-case. The people who participate in the case study are reported in such a manner that their identity is protected and the information obtained from and about them is treated with confidentiality.

The participants of this study constitute a group of 140 families whose children have attended or are attending RRC. They constitute a unique case in the sense that they do not share a common culture or language and their global mobility means, that on average, they spend three years at Rygaards School. Since the focus of the investigation is limited to this specific group at the School and the sample is rich in its diversity, a case study design emerges.

How the data that is collected in qualitative research is referred to as data collection and analysis strategies, and occurs in interactive situations and overlapping cycles. (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993:383) These techniques are flexible and are dependent on each prior strategy. As a result, the process of planning is followed by a period of initial data collection, a period of basic data collection, a period of closing data collection and a completion period. In other words, an analysis of the research problem and anticipation of research questions focuses data collection efforts in the initial data collection phase. This, in its turn, focuses attention even more closely on the phenomenon under investigation and the collection of basic data, that finally results in a close to, analysis of and construction of meaning about the information collected.

This study has taken place over a period of five years. The initial stages were practice orientated and during this period data collection was informal and generalised. As the problem emerged, the researcher's observations became more focused and questionnaires were developed to shed light on

them. In the closing phase of data collection analyses of photographs were undertaken and close attention was paid to primary documents.

The manner in which data is interpreted and the extent to which independent qualitative researchers could agree on the description of phenomena is referred to as reliability. Since the qualitative process is personal and no two researchers observe, interview or analyse documents in the same way, there are six aspects that researchers can use to enhance the reliability of their design. These are the researcher's role, the informant selection, the social context of the study, the data collection and the analysis strategies employed as well as the investigation's analytical premises.

In this study the author's dual role as leader and researcher has been one of participant-observer. The researcher has been aware of her dual perspective as reflective practitioner as well as interpreter of meaning. In this regard, it is impossible to ignore the fact that meanings have been numerous and that this is the consequence of the social construction of meaning that characterises the phenomenon of multi-culturalism as it exists amongst RRC families. Consequently, the author acknowledges that while she has made every effort to provide a reliable description of the site and its participants, another researcher might have produced an entirely different interpretation.

The social context in which the investigation occurs must be described in detail to assist with data analysis. Accordingly it is recognised that the researcher's social relationship with participants limits reliability and that an "outsider" who observes and an "insider" who participates in the same situation will "see and hear" its complexities very differently. Finally the descriptions of the inter-relationships between participants can provide useful information for explaining their actions and meanings.

This study provides a rich description in chapter 3 of the social and educational context in which RRC exists. More significantly the dual role of reflective practitioner has presented the researcher with a challenging task. Therefore, while the author acknowledges that her participant-observer status has provided her with a unique "insider" view of the subject matter, she has experienced some degree of difficulty in separating her role as researcher from that of leader of RRC.

Details of data collection techniques employed, the variety of observational and interviewing methods used and data recording strategies utilised must be described in detail. . How the data was put together and what strategies were employed in the process of analysis and interpretation must be listed and accounted for. Ultimately the conceptual framework or analytical premises that inform the study must be made explicit so the findings of prior and later studies can be integrated into or contrasted with it.

As has already been mentioned, this project came about by hands-on practice in a specific location. What began as informal observation of parental support of early formal learning, and its' recording, developed into a conscious and disciplined reflection of the reality of this subject as seen by the researcher. The researcher's observations were then dated and recorded in a book. General questionnaires, developed during the initial stage of setting up the RRC project, were refined to obtain specific information relevant to the emerging research problem. Parents were invited to take photographs at home and were given directives, that it was hoped would enable them to capture situations relevant to the study. Documents and references to Websites relating to Rygaards School were identified, gathered and analysed and an overview of the categories selected from collected data for analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Finally, the conceptual framework and analytical premises that inform this study have been presented in 4.3.2 above.

4.3.5 Internal and external validity in qualitative research

Given the premises of the interpretive paradigm that informs this study, the degree to which I, as researcher, offer an evaluation of the meanings of participants, in this case the RRC parents, is an attempt to accommodate the qualitative quest for internal validity. The strategies that will be used in this study to increase internal validity include a lengthy data collection period that provides opportunity for continuous, comparative and corroborative investigation, sensitivity to the language ability and usage of participants, observations and interviews in the natural setting of the study and disciplined researcher self-reflection in terms of self-monitoring, rigorous questioning and evaluation. Furthermore, in order to secure internal validity, the researcher has taken into consideration the fact that events rarely remain constant and time can result in change, that participants may attempt to exhibit exemplary behaviour, that participant selection could present problems later in the study, that

the mobility of participants means that some will leave the site and that other explanations of the phenomenon might challenge that of this study.

When it comes to external validity, as a qualitative researcher, I do not wish to generalise but rather to provide detailed descriptions or interpretations of the phenomenon that may help others to understand a similar situation. Furthermore it is hoped that researchers in a similar field will be able to use the findings contained in this report in comparative studies.

In order to strengthen the study's external validity, the contextual nature of the location will be described in rich detail so as to provide layers to the final interpretation of the phenomenon and the participants engaged in it. The interpretation and description of meanings held by the participants, and the reflective interaction between researcher and the participants, constitutes important aspects of the research method. These methods are suitable for corroborating or contradicting the subjective meaning-making of the researcher thereby strengthening the external validity of the study. Finally, taken the premise that human beings enjoy some degree of individuality and that no group of participants is homogenous, this study may contain important contrasts in terms of language, religion, history and culture that may limit the degree to which it can be compared to others (Schumacher & McMillan 1993: 394-397).

All scientific research is subject to ethical principles. Researchers are obliged to obtain consent to enter the field, to protect the privacy of participants, to treat private information with confidentiality, to avoid deceiving participants or placing them in compromised or harmful situations. The researcher has taken cognisance of these requirements. Permission to conduct the study at Rygaards was obtained. (See appendices). Parents who agreed to submit questionnaires were reassured of the confidential nature of their responses. On the other hand, the observations that were conducted took place in the public sphere of the classroom and school and parents were unaware of the research.

The qualitative research methods and strategies described above take cognisance of the interpretive framework's premises that the aim of research was to understand and described the multi-facetedness of reality, that meaning is constructed within a social context and that the researcher's perspective is fallible and has limitations.

4.4 Research methods employed

Schumacher and McMillan (1993:374) argue that, “learning to read, ... occurs in the contexts of schools, families and other institutions of prior learning and instruction, and involves personal and interpersonal histories, [all of which] influence the process of learning ...” Subsequently the researcher looked at a variety of behaviour, using a number of different data collection methods so as to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation as it exists in the specific study site.

4.4.1 Observations

Interactive observation and participation relies on a researcher’s seeing and hearing things, over a period of time, and recording his/her observations of people in a particular context, Within the framework of the interpretive paradigm this involves all inclusive investigation to uncover not only the content that is observed, but also the particular context in which it emerges and the meaning that participants attach to it. Since this particular context of observations is important, the researcher took care to document his/her role in the situation as well as the effect that it may have on the findings.

It was incidental observation that first drew the author’s attention to the phenomenon of family mobility and its impact on parental support of early formalised learning as it presented itself in RRC. Having become aware of problems on the ground, interest in thorough investigation began to emerge and observations became more focused on parents’ ability to support early learning. The time period of the study, namely five years, provided a long time to observe emerging patterns of behaviour and the increasing impact of global mobility on education.

In order to direct the observations, a preliminary literature study was undertaken to highlight the phenomenon and significance of parental support on early, formalised learning. In the process of reading about research that had been undertaken on the phenomenon, the problem of mobility emerged. All the studies consulted, without exception, had taken place in the context of schools with multi-cultural, relatively poor, inner city populations who were citizens of the country or immigrants

planning to stay, while the population of this study was educated, middle-class and globally mobile. The observations of families passing through RRC, were therefore influenced by perspectives pertaining to parental support of early, formalised learning in general, but emerging patterns of behaviour made it necessary to re-direct the focus of observation to specific factors that impact on parents' ability to support early learning. The combination of the researcher's observations of parental support and her investigation of the impact of global mobility on their ability to do so, constitute the groundwork of this study.

Observations were informal and they occurred at all times of the school day, both within the context of the classroom as well as the broader school environment. At no point were parents informed of the observer's interest in their behaviour. Since the class was often invited to children's birthdays and cultural festival celebrations, spontaneous observations occurred within the context of some family homes as well as sites in the city of Copenhagen. Record keeping of observations involved simple note-taking in an ever-growing folder. In addition, observations of the educational scene in Denmark itself, as well as the world in general, were noted and these also impacted on observations of the small and changing group within the study site.

Surveying interactions between staff and parents were interesting and evidence of the phenomenon of 'parents-as-clients' or 'parents-as-consumers of education' began to emerge. These re-directed observations to the problem of school facilitation of the parental task of supporting and participating in early, formalised learning.

Observations of parent volunteerism, both within RRC and Rygaards School, became noteworthy as patterns of behaviour began to emerge of former RRC parents who moved up through the school with their children. The level of their participation on the parent committee and School Board was recorded. The question then arose whether their participation at the level of the reception class had been the impetus for their continued volunteerism and support of learning in the school in general.

Rygaards encouragement of parent involvement also began to emerge. Direct scrutiny of interactions that occurred in parent committee and School Board meetings were not possible, however close attention was paid to the minutes of these meetings and the resulting activities. .

4.4.2 Conversations

In order to ascertain the meaning that participants attach to their lives, the researcher has to interact with them. Interviews and conversations are invaluable ways of extracting this meaning. These interviews can be structured, in order to uncover a specific area of understanding, or open-ended with the aim of gathering a general overview of the situation and the meanings attached to it. An interview should be taped, supported by field notes and transcribed at a later stage so as to obtain common themes or results. However, no formal conversations about the phenomenon under investigation were conducted but aspects of informal conversations took part between RRC staff and parents. These were written up and provided a wealth of information. Furthermore, these conversations, referred to throughout Chapter 5 as comments, contributed to the process of investigation as well as the thickness of the description that emerged from the study.

4.4.2.1 Formal and informal conversations with RRC parent

Formalised parent consultations and meetings are planned at the beginning of the school year and take place in October and February respectively.

The progress of each pupil is observed from the first day of school and noted at the end of every week. The formalised parent consultation in October was based on these observations. Each RRC family was allocated 45 minutes, as opposed to the fifteen minutes allocated in Rygaards school, and parents were presented with a record of the meeting in which details, of both RRC staff as well as the parents' contributions, were minuted. A suggested plan of action was drawn up by RRC's staff together with the parents, the details of which were presented in the minutes of the meeting. Parents were presented with a duplicate copy and asked to return one of them signed for their child's progress file.

The parents meeting, held each year in February, is a collective and more generalised get-together with parents in which the progress of the class as a whole and plans for the remainder of the year are presented. The meetings provide an opportunity for parents to engage in s relating to shared issues, for example, discipline problems and children's eating patterns as well as issues relating to the preservation of a mother-tongue or the cultivation of a particular cultural or religious tradition. In addition, the RRC leader always used this meeting as an opportunity to lead s in which parents became aware of the extremely wide set of expectations that they had as a parent body as a whole, in terms of their children and the services that they expected the staff to provide for them as parents. The class parent was asked to record the minutes of the meeting and all parents were presented with copies of these meetings, the idea being to provide a record of s for those parents who had attended the meeting as well as a summary of proceedings for those who had not been able to attend.

Informal discussions with parents took place almost daily when they dropped their children off at school or collected them in the afternoon (see Table 3 in Chapter 5 for examples of conversations). It was during these informal contacts that RRC staff were able to share details of children's progress and where parents spoke of problems at home and sought advice on child-rearing. As a consequence a great deal of information was gathered on the support that parents seek and expect of teachers as well as the problems that mobile families face.

Rygaards School has a policy of allocating a set period each week for parent consultations but the leader of RRC made herself available to parents at their request. Similarly, she would invite parents in for extra consultations when the need for communication arose. These consultations were usually called when a problem presented itself and were the most difficult to conduct when taking parents' anxieties around parenting and concern for their child's well-being and progress into consideration. As a result, it was policy for the leader not to conduct these meetings alone with parents but to invite the head of department or class assistant to attend as an observer and witness.

4.4.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a valuable means of obtaining information on a particular aspect of a study. Depending on whether they are open-ended or not, in terms of their formulation, they give participants the opportunity to express an opinion and thereby provide the researcher with the meaning that partakers ascribe to particular aspects of their lives.

In order to obtain specific information pertaining to the research aims, a number of questionnaires were prepared for parents over the years (see Table 1 below). Initially these questionnaires were designed to ascertain the level of parents' satisfaction with the practicalities of RRC. Action was taken on many of the suggestions to improve the services that were offered, amongst others, the after-school care and staggered starting time.

As the author began to see patterns of behaviour emerging, the questionnaires began to take on an exploratory nature to determine what went on at home and how parents saw their own role in the education of their children. This interest then developed into a closer examination of the interaction between the school and the home and what exactly it was that parents and teachers expected of one another.

As the consequences of globalisation became evident and families began to come and go, the questionnaires turned their attention to the topic of mobility. The impact of mobility on the support that parents give early learners then began to determine the focus of the study's questionnaires.

It was recognised that many second-language speakers would have difficulty with written material like questionnaires and so help was offered to those parents who had not mastered English. After the monthly coffee morning, time was allocated for either RRCs' assistant or leader to go through a questionnaire to explain its aim and to answer any questions that parents raised. Similarly, once the questionnaire data had been collected and analysed, written feedback was provided for all parents and this was explained and discussed with second-language parents at the following coffee morning.

4.4.4 Photographs

Early on in the RRC project, use was made of photographs taken in the course of the school day, and displayed on the classroom notice board, to give parents an “eye” on the daily activities of their children. As a follow on from this idea, the researcher decided to make use of disposable cameras as a means of gathering data from parents. Since parent support of learning is an activity that takes place in both school and home, parents were invited to take photographs that they felt depicted the support that they offered their offspring at home and elsewhere outside of the school environment. Guidelines for the type of situation required for the study were provided to parents and an incentive for completing the exercise, namely two adult tickets and two children’s tickets to the local cinema, was offered as the prize in a draw for those participants who took photographs and handed in their camera. It was hoped that by providing parents with a mechanism for recording their activities that the meaning that they attach to the concept of “support of early learning” would be captured visually. Furthermore, this data collection technique took into consideration the language barriers that second language speakers might have faced in completing questionnaires and participating in informal conversations with the researcher.

4.4.5 Reference to documents

In this case the documents that have been consulted contain a wealth of information about the phenomenon under investigation. They include an International Independent Schools’ Inspectorate Report, Gentofte municipality’s inspection report, Danish Education Ministry policy papers relating to private schools, parent governance and participation in education, Rygaards administration and governing body mission statements, policies and directives of the international parent committee as well as their meeting minutes, all of which deal with RRC directly or indirectly. In addition, reference was made to the report of the community pedagogical consultant who made a considerable contribution to overall efforts to engage parents in the life of RRC. Finally the Website for Rygaards international department provided information relating to policies and rules on parent participation. In the process of analysing these documents, the researcher used the information to explain and clarify current practices and issues of importance to the school.

4.4.6 Meetings

4.4.6.1 Official school meetings

Routine meetings, amongst others, RRC Board meetings, Key Stage 1 meetings, pedagogical committee meetings and staff meetings, provided information relating to interactions between parents and teachers in Rygaards School as well as RRC. This information was not gathered in any formalised way but note was made of incidental issues and comments relevant to the focus of this investigation.

4.4.6.2 RRC staff meetings

Daily contact, between RRC's leader and assistant, involved close communication with pupils as well parents. Staff observations were recorded confidentially and informally in a file that was kept for staff use only. This data provided valuable information on the issue of 'parents as clients' as well as an overview of the concerns that they expressed and the initiatives that they took to contribute to their own child's welfare or that of the group as a whole.

4.4.6.3 Meetings with Copenhagen's pedagogical consultant

The pedagogical consultant attended the regular monthly coffee mornings and used this opportunity to establish closer contact with the parent body. Her "outsider" position and professional approach gave parents the confidence to approach her with issues related to parenting in general. In meetings, held later with her, RRC staff were presented with information that would otherwise have gone unnoticed. These meetings thus produced data that added to the general picture of parent participation and the final description of the case study.

4.5 Ethical measures taken in this study

The author of this study acknowledges responsibility for the ethical standards of the investigation as set out in the ethical principles concerning educators and published by the American Psychological Association in 1983 (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:182).

4.5.1 Permission to conduct research in Rygaards School

The primary investigator of this study obtained informed consent to carry out the study from the head of Rygaards international department. He has also granted permission for the researcher to return to the study site if necessary. (see Appendix 2)

4.5.2 Informed consent and protection of informant privacy

The aim of this research was made clear to parents when presenting them with questionnaires. Completion and submission of these questionnaires has been completely anonymous and voluntary. All parents were presented with feedback and an analysis of the responses received, regardless of whether they submitted a response or not, The Rygaards governing body and the head of the international department were included. Furthermore, these feedback reports were presented as group results, thus protecting the identity of individual respondents and maintaining standards of confidentiality. Sometimes feedback occurred during incidental conversations with parents as well as informal coffee morning meetings and planned teacher/parent meetings.

4.5.3 Sharing of findings with informants

Once questionnaire responses had been analysed, comprehensive feedback was provided for all parents in the class, regardless of their participation in the relevant data collection activity. Furthermore, on receiving permission to conduct the study at Rygaards School, a commitment was made to provide the administration with a copy of the findings of the study.

4.5.4 Confidentiality

As a member of Rygaards School's teaching staff, the researcher was legally and professionally bound to a code of confidentiality as regards parents and their children. This included any information pertaining to them that the researcher may have had access to. In addition, according to the school's policy on communication between parents and the school, the researcher refrained from discussing other teachers with parents and requested parents to consult the school leadership on issues that were considered to be outside her jurisdiction and line of authority.

4.5.5 Anonymity

The outcome of the research includes data gathered over a five year period from approximately one hundred and forty families. There was no labelling of questionnaires, so every attempt was made to ensure that the respondents remained anonymous. Some parents made themselves known in the questionnaires by naming their child. The responses gathered from parents during this time were analysed and presented in a generalised form that makes it impossible for any particular parent or family to be identified. The photographs that were taken by parents contain material that they consented to. This material will be used solely for the purpose of this study and the principles of confidentiality and anonymity will be applied to it.

4.6 Time frame of this study

A key focus of the study is the issue of family mobility. Consequently, the research design for this study takes into consideration time, as a defining framework for the investigation.

4.6.1 The history of RRC

RRC was established in August 2000 under its own independent Board of Governors. In August 2002, it moved out of a rented classroom in Rygaards School into a prefabricated building that was purchased with the aid of a bank loan financed by fees collected from parents since that date.

During the five-year time frame of the study, approximately 140 families have passed through RRC, one family was asked to remove their child from RRC and three agreed to their child repeating the Reception Class year following consultation with the RRC Leader and head of the international department. To date there are still a few children from the RRC intake of 2000 attending Year 4 of Rygaards School. In this regard, they represent the exception to the majority of children whose families are globally mobile and have therefore left Rygaards School and Denmark, for other postings.

In August 2005 the Board of Governors was disbanded and the responsibility for administering RRC was taken over by Rygaards School's Board of Governors and administration.

4.6.2 Time frame of data collection

Data for the case study was gathered over five years (August 2000 – October 2005) in the author's capacity as the leader/founder of RRC and staff member of Rygaards School. The author of this study resigned from her position as leader of RRC in October 2005 and daily contact with the study site ceased. Since then, communication with the study site has been via email communication with the head of department, RRC assistant and parent committee members.

Pupils attend RRC for a single school year, running from August to June and then pass on to Year 1 of Rygaards School. During the years between 2000 and 2005, 3 pupils repeated the reception class year after consultation with their parents. In 2005, the new leadership determined that all children in RRC, regardless of ability, should continue up through the school, until Year 2, where formalised testing occurs.

Approximately 140 families have passed through RRC during its five years of existence and because of the demands of the global work place, they arrive in Denmark after the beginning of the school year, transfer to new postings throughout the year and leave the country before the end of the academic year

RRC's opening hours are 8.50 until 13.50 from Monday to Friday and its pupils attended class for a total of 200 schools days as per Danish school legislation. An hour's after-school care is provided, at extra cost, to those families whose older children finish school at 14.45 and who wish to avail themselves of the service

Pupils enjoy a week's mid-term break in October, the Christmas and New Year break, a week's winter holiday in February, the Easter holiday of 10 days, gazetted public holidays and a summer holiday of 6 weeks beginning mid-June. However, the costs of travel and the distances involved have resulted in families taking holiday's outside the designated school holiday schedule. While RRC is unable to prevent family travel outside of school holidays, it discourages the practice and staff are not obliged to provide extra work for children who have missed lessons.

RRC teacher-parent contact involved daily communication, often with both parents. A RRC staff member received parents and their children at the beginning of the school day and handed pupils back to the responsibility of their parents at the end of the day. In many cases, one parent may have dropped the child off in the morning while the other, or a child-minder, collected the child in the afternoon. In addition to daily communication with parents, contact occurred at informal monthly coffee meetings, monthly newsletters, birthday and cultural celebrations, a parent-teacher consultation in October, a Xmas party, a class meeting in January, an Easter party, a summer party and a written report at the end of the academic year. Over and above this contact, parents were encouraged to make an appointment to meet with RRC's leader if they felt the need and she, in turn, called parents in for extra consultations, if such action was deemed necessary. These opportunities for contact provided an on-going communication with parents as well as a relatively long and intensive period of time for gathering data.

4.6.3 Mobility and data collection

The research design takes into consideration the high level of family mobility. All families, regardless of their time of arrival in or period of departure from RRC, have been included in the study.

The fact that families pass through RRC in a relatively short period of time added to the urgency of investigating the present culture of parent participation in early, formalised learning so that the habit of participation in learning continues throughout their child's schooling or at least into the upper primary level of the school. In addition, while more specific data, relating to global mobility, mother-tongue usage at home and the level of parental interaction with children at home was collected in 2005, the data collected over the entire five-year period, will be analysed and presented as representative of the site population.

As regards the management of RRC during its five years of existence, the research design takes cognisance of the impact of the yearly changeover of parent representatives on its Governing Body as well as the six week handover period between each Board, in the study's final analysis. In addition, the study includes observations on those parents whose participation on the Governing Body might have been limited during their first child's stay in RRC, but who were then more confident to participate during their second child's reception year.

While many families, who have passed through RRC, have left Denmark, a small number still attend the lower grades of Rygaards School. The research design includes observations of parent support amongst the families whose children still attend Rygaards School as well as relevant details of communications with families who have left Denmark but with whom RRC Leader is still in contact. Finally, the researcher, who has lived a globally mobile life, took a leave of absence from RRC from Oct 2003 – Oct 2004. During this time RRC's assistant was also away on maternity leave and a qualified teacher and replacement assistant ran the class. This meant that in my capacity as leader, I began a school year with one group of children and their families, left them to the care of a replacement teacher who saw this group to the end of a school year, began a new school year with a second group and then handed this group back to me, after my return from a year of theoretical study in preparation for final data collection in 2005. During my absence, I maintained contact with Rygaards School, the head of its international department as well as the pedagogical consultant from Copenhagen municipality, the replacement teacher and a number of parents in the group, as well as parents whose children had either passed on to the higher grades of Rygaards School or who had left the country to

attend schools elsewhere in the world. In addition, the school's web site made it possible for me as researcher to follow events that might have been of relevance to the study.

4.7 Participants

The information that constitutes the body of this case study has been gathered on site, that is, within the context of RRC and its establishment as a new addition to Rygaards International School, in August 2000, as well as the international department of Rygaards School in general. The participants in the study include all RRC parents whose children passed through RRC from August 2000 until October 2005, RRC staff, Key Stage 1 teachers, Copenhagen Municipality's pedagogical consultant, the headmaster of Rygaards School as well as its' international department head, parent members of Rygaards School Board and Parents Committee as well as so-called outsiders with an interest in Rygaards School in general, for example inspectors from the Independent Schools Inspectorate as well as Gentofte Municipality, and RRC in particular, for example, Copenhagen's pedagogical consultant.

4.7.1 Parents

A total of approximately 140 families have passed through RRC during the five years of its existence, some of them leaving after one or two months of attendance. Data for the study has been collected in observations of, conversations with and questionnaires directed at, all parents whose child passed through RRC from August 2000 until October 2005, regardless of their time of arrival or departure from the class. As mentioned earlier, parents were invited to participate in the celebrations of their child's birthday and to organise events that highlighted their cultural heritage. These events provided invaluable opportunities for data collection within the home or outside environment. Furthermore, conversations with parents whose children had passed out of RRC and into the primary classes of Rygaards School or further to other schools throughout the world, contributed to the information gathered for this study. The findings of this entire group of families will be presented in the final analysis of the study.

4.7.2 RRC staff

The pupil-staff ratio at RRC is two adults to twenty children. Besides the leader, an English woman in her early thirties, who has a British qualification in nursery nursing and working experience in Britain as well as an international school in Brussels, is employed as the class assistant. Information was gathered during casual conversations between the leader and the assistant, who enjoyed a congenial relationship.

Since the international department follows the British system, grades are divided into Key Stages and teachers within these stages co-ordinate their activities. Since RRC forms part of Key Stage 1, information was gathered from teachers, all of whom are women, participating in Key Stage 1 meetings. One had worked at Rygaards for over twenty years in Key Stage 1; another had eight years experience at Rygaards at both Year 1 and 2 levels. Two were relatively new to Rygaards and to teaching; one was trained in the USA and had no previous experience of the British system. A number of these women fell pregnant and were replaced by temporary staff. The comments of temporary staff were also noted in the data gathering stage. Regular international staff meetings also provided a forum for the leadership of Rygaards School to communicate policies and co-ordinate activities throughout the school. These meetings often provided insight into the running of the school, the leaderships' expectations of staff as well as the prevailing attitudes of teaching staff to parent involvement at class and school levels.

4.7.3 Copenhagen Municipality's pedagogical consultant

While every municipality, whose children attended RRC, were obliged to send a pedagogical representative to visit and maintain contact with its leader, only one pedagogical consultant maintained a consistent and engaged collaboration throughout the five years of the study. A qualified and experienced nursery school pedagogue, she visited the class on a monthly basis and made use of the coffee mornings to make contact with parents from her own municipality as well as those outside her formal area of responsibility. While she was Danish, the consultant made every effort to communicate with parents in English and was instrumental in resolving a serious conflict that the RRC had with one

family. Consultations with this public servant provided RRC staff with much needed support, especially in the early stages of the class's establishment and proved to be an invaluable pedagogical support to RRC's leader as well as a mine of information when it came to supporting parent efforts and initiating parent involvement in their children's formal learning.

4.7.4 The leadership of Rygaards School

The international department head was the prime mover behind the establishment of RRC and was, up until her retirement in December 2004, a major player in Rygaards School and RRC's administration. She provided guidance in the interpretation of the school's policies on and practices related to parent involvement in the school but entrusted the responsibility for implementing a parent involvement programme to RRC's leader. As a consequence of new educational legislation on the inclusion of nursery school provision by schools, that came into effect in January 2005, the new department head and school principal took over and involved themselves more directly in the management and administration of RRC, tasks previously carried out by me in my capacity as leader. Furthermore, documents and policy papers developed by Rygaards School and the governing body of RRC, as well as the school's Website, have been consulted to collect data.

4.7.5 Parent members of Rygaards School Board and Parents' Committee

Communication with parent representatives on the school's governing body as well as parents' committee has occurred throughout the existence of RRC. In addition, approximately ten informal conversations occurred with former RRC parents whose children have progressed through Rygaards School. These conversations were not recorded but comments relating to the investigative focus of this study were recorded in writing. Spontaneous emails from parents who have left Denmark have provided also information that has provided a broader background against which to view short term stays and family mobility.

4.7.6 Stakeholders in Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular

The final ISI Report on Rygaards School's international department was studied in depth, as was an inspection report by Copenhagen Municipality's pedagogical consultant and the Director of Gentofte Municipality, the municipality whose educational directives, Rygaards School is subject to. These documents provided valuable outsider perspectives on the school in general and RRC in particular, since they highlighted the problem under investigation and provided suggestions for a potential parent involvement programme in Rygaards School. Examples of these reports can be found in the Appendix at the end of this study.

4.8 Barriers presenting difficulties for data

4.8.1 Language as a barrier to data collection

In the main, the majority of families attending RRC have been second-language English speakers with a wide range of abilities. An important aspect of the research design has therefore been sensitivity to language barriers that arose in the course of conversations with parents and the questionnaires directed at them. There were situations in which a mother had little or no English when extra family consultations were necessary and where translations could be undertaken by the English speaking parent. Consequently extra time was allocated for the actual consultation with families with language difficulties. There were also cases where older children in Rygaards School, as well as other parents in RRC, were asked to act as translators in incidental situations. Use was also made of letters addressed to English speaking parents when time allowed. Moreover, at the beginning of the academic year, parents who spoke English or who had lived in Denmark for some period of time were asked to assist those parents who were new to Denmark or who had difficulties with understanding messages on the class news board. This exercise in no way removed the overall responsibility for communication with parents from RRC staff.

Questionnaires presented a special problem for data collection for participants whose language skills were limited. Consequently, a number of efforts were made to reach out to these parents. One member

of RRC took time during the informal coffee mornings, to go through the questionnaires (see Table 1 below) with those parents who felt that they needed extra help and to respond to any queries that they might have had. Lots of time was allocated for the return of the questionnaires and parents were invited to seek further help from staff when completing them. Furthermore written feedback on questionnaires was presented to parents so that they could solicit help to decode the information and take their time to absorb it. What should be noted here is the fact that parents coming from cultures, in which the democratic process of expressing an opinion is not encouraged, found it difficult to return comprehensive and critical responses to some questions.

Table 1

Time period	Time of school year	Focus of questionnaire
Dec 2000	end of 1 st term	parents' and children's 1 st experiences of RRC
April 2001	towards end of school year	parents' overview of the school year
Jan 2002	beginning of formalised curriculum presentation	parents' expectations for their children
Sept 2003	six weeks after beginning of school year	parents' comments on the settling in period
August 2005	beginning of school year	family mobility and parents' as first educators
Sept 2005	six weeks after beginning of school year	family mobility and its impact on parent support of learning

Catalogue of questionnaires from 2000 –2005

Much of the communication with parents relied on the spoken and written word. Extensive use was also made of photographs taken by RRC staff during the course of the year. The purpose of these was to present parents with a visual record of their child's participation and progress. One exercise involved parents being provided with a disposable camera and then requested to take a series of photographs to depict their support of early learning at home. These photographs inspired comments from parents that would not otherwise have arisen in more formal communication situations and opened channels for unexpected data collection.

An activity was designed to encourage positive classroom behaviour as well as language development. A disposable camera was sent home with a child each week, so that parents could record a family activity that occurred over the weekend. This provided an unexpected window onto the family life of the children as well as the quality of outside school exposure that parents made available to their children.

4.8.2 Mobility as a barrier to data collection

Because the families under investigation are globally mobile, the participation of parents in their child's learning as well as their involvement in Rygaards School in general and the reception class in particular, took some time to establish and made data collection somewhat difficult.

Parents who travel away with their children for extended periods of time engage with their children in ways which are impossible to document. In addition, contact with the working parent, whose work takes him/her out of Denmark on a regular basis, impacts on close co-operation between home and school and makes incidental data collection difficult and in some cases almost impossible.

Since families arrive throughout the course of the year, they might not have participated in introductory meetings held at the beginning of the academic year. In these situations, the families might not have participated in all the coffee mornings, parents meetings and questionnaires dealing with parent support of early, formalised learning and so their input throughout the remainder of the year is affected and the data available from them is incomplete.

There have been a number of cases where children were registered to attend RRC and did so for one or two months before the family was compelled to move to a new posting elsewhere. While the information gathered in these situations has been enlightening in terms of the pressures of globalisation, it is incomplete in terms of the completion of a full school year.

4.9 Data processing

4.9.1 Trustworthiness of the research design

The aim of qualitative research is the extension of understanding about a particular phenomenon, subject matter or problem. Consequently, a number of strategies were employed to reduce threats to the design validity of the investigation and to ensure the trustworthiness of its findings.

In order to achieve this goal, every attempt was made to gather data that could be used to describe the case as accurately as possible and thereby provide a credible overview of RRC. Accordingly a number of different data gathering methods were employed. While no conversations were taped an observation file was started early on in the RRC project and any interesting or relevant comments from parents, teaching colleagues and Rygaards leadership were written down in note form. Where possible the words of the speaker were written down. Observations of parent-teacher co-operation and parent-child interaction were jotted down. Documents produced by others, such as inspectorate reports, minutes of staff and Parent Association meetings, school policies and email communications, were collected. Articles and cuttings from newspapers and magazines, relevant to the study were gathered. Informal home visits were made whilst relevant observations and comments were recorded in the observation file. Parents participated in class activities such as festival and birthday celebrations. Any observations of interactions and comments made during these events were recorded in the observation file. Parents were also invited to join the class on school outings such as museums and farm visits. In order to share the experience with working parents, the participating parents were asked to share their thoughts on the outings, in writing. These written reports, as well as letters, emails and thank you cards were also used as data sources. Parents were invited to take photographs of activities that they undertook with their children at home and this material provided valuable information for describing the informal learning support that parents provide in the home environment. Furthermore, once access to the study had ceased, I continued to communicate by email, with the international department head, RRC's assistant, parent members of the Parents' Association, parent members of Rygaards School Board and former RRC parents who had re-located to new schools.

How much transferability exists in terms of applying the information gained in this study to that of another similar site cannot be stated; except to say that it is hoped that the findings of the investigation of RRC can be applied to other international reception classes as well as the wider context of Rygaards School itself.

A lengthy data collection period of five years, within the natural setting of RRC, has afforded the opportunity for investigation of a real life situation, giving rise to increasingly refined thinking about the problem. This resulted in a continual process of data analysis.

A single researcher has been involved in this study. Self-monitoring to ensure subjectivity has therefore been an issue of concern. However, in developing the questionnaires from 2003 and onwards, constant reference was made to literature dealing with school-home interaction, such as Epstein (1987a & 1990); Dunst et al (1992) and McAllister Swap(1993). In addition, before any questionnaires were issued to parents, a copy was issued to the head of department and the assistant in RRC as well as the class parent, for their comments on the nature, focus and tone of the questions. In addition, these people were asked to comment on the wording and language level of the proposed questionnaires. Furthermore, informal comments from the respondents about their experience of the questionnaires were noted during informal coffee morning meetings and used to refine the relevant questionnaire that was presented to parents during the following school year, in terms of format, language usage, focus of attention and tone, before presenting it to the following year's group of parents.

In order to engage parents in casual discussions, examples of handicrafts and written exercises produced by the children as well as photographs routinely taken of the children participating in class activities, either as individuals, in small groups or as a whole class, were displayed on the class notice board. Similarly, a disposable camera was circulated from one family to the next on a weekly basis, for parents to take photographs of their child participating in activities within the home-setting. The aim of this exercise was to record data that would give rise to the sharing of information between the school and the home. At the end of the 2004-2005 year, parents were presented with a CD-Rom containing

memorable events from their child's stay in RRC as well as a small photo album containing the photographs that they themselves had taken at home.

Mention has been made of the language barriers faced in this study. Photographs were therefore considered a helpful method of overcoming some of these barriers. However, the interpretation of visual data presents its own problems. Bogdan and Biklen (2003: 132-141) provide useful reference with respect to using photographs. They suggest that while "photography is virtually useless as a way of objectively knowing because it distorts that which it claims to illuminate", they also argue that photographs "allow researchers to understand and study aspects of life that cannot be researched through other approaches." (Bogdan and Bilken 2003: 133) It can be argued therefore that photographs are taken for a particular purpose and from a particular/subjective perspective. Furthermore photographs can be divided into those "that others have taken and those that the researcher has had a hand in producing." (Bogdan and Bilken 2003: 133) However, photographs can provide a sense of particular settings and interaction between the individuals portrayed and that used in conjunction with other sources they can also offer factual information.

In this study, on a number of occasions, parents were asked to take photographs of their children in relation to early learning in the home. In the process of interpreting these photographs the author took into account the fact that "photos can represent the photographer's own view of what was important" (Bogdan and Bilken 2003: 135) and that the visual data produced by RRC parents gave clues as to how they liked to be pictured as parents and what they considered to be important in terms of supporting their child's learning at home.

Bogdan and Bilken (2003:141) argue that "photographs must be understood as a a producer of culture." In an attempt to create awareness amongst parents of their role as co-educators, the researcher took photographs of RRC children within the setting of the school environment. The aim of these photographs was to draw parents' attention to photographs as a means of recording as well as aspects of learning that parents could encourage at home such as

- Social contact and the development of friendships

- Focus on the developmental stages of 4-5 year olds
- Ideas for activities that could be engaged in at home at a different level
- The child's present interest in a particular activity
- Motor skills that could be supported and extended at home

Similarly, Bogdan and Bilken (2003:141) suggest that “photographs are a cultural product” and it is interesting to note that a number of parents enclosed written explanations of the photographs that they returned. Furthermore, in analysing the cultural products produced by parents, it was considered important to direct parents in their endeavours to record their child's activities in the “out of school” environment. Consequently, the choice of settings and situations was limited and in a letter they were asked to record their child in a specific setting, situation or time of day/night. An example of such a letter is included in the Appendix.

After an initial examination of the photographs returned by parents, they were analysed according to the following criteria:

- Similarities in difference in terms of the types of toys children had
- Organization of play and study areas at home
- Situations that parents described as presenting them with parenting challenges
- Recreational activities that parents shared with their children

An example of a directive letter as well as a few photographs are included in the Appendix.

4.9.2 Role of the researcher

Throughout the five years of data collection the researcher was an active participant on location. Permission to conduct the study on site was obtained from the administration of Rygaards School (see Appendix 2). Initially this participation was not directed by research concerns or interests but aimed at the setting up of the reception class project at Rygaards School during which an awareness of and interest in the phenomenon of family mobility and its impact on early formal learning began to emerge.

This prompted a more deliberate and focused observer-participant role. Consequently a directed investigation began to emerge out of the researcher's professional experience, theoretical study and personal interest.

The researcher, who, as already said, has lived and worked in a number of countries and who, has herself been globally mobile, is sensitive to the personal and social implications of globalisation on families. The international nature of the school provided an environment in which the researcher felt competent to expand a growing interest in the mounting impact of global mobility on both families and early formal learners. As a result sensitivity is shown in terms of the needs of the home-based parent, the non-English speaking parent, the second language speaking parent, the family newly arrived to Denmark, the single parent or family whose bread-winner lived outside of Denmark for longer or shorter periods of time.

Finally, a professional relationship has always been maintained by the researcher with the participants, even when communicating with parents whose children have left Rygaards and who have moved to other parts of the world. It can be mentioned here, that the researcher, together with the class was invited home by the majority of parents for birthday celebrations and "privately" by approximately ten families for an informal meal or cup of tea, but at no point did any of these invitations developed into anything other than a professional relationship.

4.9.3 Informant selection

Regardless of the length of time of their attendance, data for the study has been collected solely from parents whose children have attended RRC. In other words, this was the criterion for selection. The term parent denotes a biological or legal guardian. Mention must be made here of families who for one reason or another were separated from one another. The sample of informants includes two families who had to deal with issues of divorce, a single mother who was never married, a father-run household where the mother lived and worked elsewhere, a step-father who adopted children abandoned by their father, a family who adopted a child from another culture, a so-called "reconstituted" family consisting of parents from different nationalities together with the children from both of their previous marriages

as well as a shared child and 22 families whose breadwinner lived and worked outside of Denmark for longer or shorter periods of time. In all these cases, data was collected only from those parents who had direct contact with RRC staff.

In one case, a single mother relied on the assistance of her elderly father to fetch her daughter from school. The gentleman could not speak English and so communications sometimes relied on written notes. The same applied in situations where au pairs were employed to collect children from school. Because of the age of the children concern was high amongst RRC staff that communication was between themselves and parents. Unfortunately, no data was collected from au pairs, since interest was focused on parents as primary educators; though a subsequent literature study (Ender 2002) shows that local care-givers can be instrumental in assimilating children, and their parents, into the dominant culture.

It was common for families to receive visits from extended family members, including grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as friends from around the world. It was also usual for these people to visit RRC. Grandparents were always invited to visit the class for the day. It was therefore not uncommon for RRC staff to engage in conversations with these visitors who provided unexpected perspectives on the phenomenon of globalisation and its impact on extended family contact.

As mentioned earlier, contact was maintained with those families whose children had passed on to the primary classes in Rygaards School as well as thirteen families who left Denmark for other parts of the world. This group of so-called “outsiders” provided invaluable hindsight information on RRC as well as the impact of the family’s departure from Denmark. In addition the pedagogical consultant from Copenhagen municipality provided an invaluable “outsider’s” perspective on RRC as did the observations of the Independent Schools Inspectorate and Gentofte Municipality’s inspector.

4.9.4 The social context of the study

During the period of data collection, RRC was established within the physical confines of Rygaards School. Later it was moved onto its own independent premises on the school’s grounds. Initially the

responsibility of the now retired head of department and administration of an independent governing body, RRC was subsequently taken over by Rygaards School Board in January 2005. At its establishment, the leader of RRC had the task of direct involvement with the independent Board of RRC. As a result of Danish legislation however, and the inclusion of a pre-school in Rygaards School, a parent representative now sits on the school's parent committee. As a result the contact between RRC's leader and the governing body has been entirely distanced.

Initially, the leader of RRC was given extensive administrative, managerial and educational responsibilities in setting up the Reception Class Project. This provided me, in my subsequent position as researcher, with a very wide understanding of the historical, administrative, social and educational development of the research site.

With the legal and administrative take over of RRC by Rygaards School, the administration relied heavily on the expertise and experience of its leader. In the process a number of frustrations and misunderstandings occurred as the balance of power changed hands. This led to a number of functional changes towards the end of the data collection period, October 2005. However, it is doubtful whether these changes in any way affected either the reliability of data collection or the subsequent data analysis as the primary informants were parents and not the new members of the school's administration.

4.9.5 Data collection strategies to overcome limitations

As already stated, the impetus for this research project arose out of a directly experienced situation. Consequently, initial data collection consisted of incidental observations and informal conversations. Once the reception class project was making headway, and the first group of children had passed through the year, it was evident that the service offered to parents needed to be assessed. The custom of issuing questionnaires, with the aim of receiving feedback and encouraging the exchange of communication between the home and school, began then. It was only in 2004 - 2005 that any attempt was made to obtain information from parents regarding their support of early formal learning and the impact of family mobility on their ability to do so.

A number of factors made data collection relatively easy. These were daily contact with parents, the annual number of only twenty families and only two staff members to consider. This meant that the leader/researcher had a constant overview of the whole group. Communication between the leader and the class assistant was therefore on-going throughout a typical day.

On the other hand there were factors that made data collection more complex. The time pressures that working parents face often made it difficult for the researcher to engage them in a casual conversation. Those parents who lived and worked outside of Denmark visited the class when the opportunity arose but the lack of daily contact made it difficult for the leader /researcher to develop a relationship of trust with them. Language barriers often resulted in parents avoiding direct contact with the staff and it is well documented that on their part, staff also avoid parents with whom language barriers exist. Furthermore, cultural norms and attitudes to teachers resulted in parents either dominating the time available for informal communication or assuming a passive role. In both cases, the leader/researcher was presented with challenges of obtaining informal information.

The multi-cultural make-up of the group presented the researcher with a number of challenges in the data collection process. As mentioned earlier, language barriers were sometimes so that parents were unable to complete the questionnaires unassisted, although at least one of the parents, usually the father, could speak English. This factor also made it difficult to develop a relationship of trust with the parent with whom the staff had daily contact, and that could allow for informal data collection.

Issues of gender often arose when it came to communication with the home. In many of the Asian families, it is the custom for the mother to accompany her husband to meetings, but as was often the case, she would not express an opinion in this kind of forum. This made it difficult to assess the joint efforts of these parents in assisting their child at home. Consequently a concerted effort was made to engage these mothers in informal conversation on a daily basis.

The status that Asian parents accord teachers can make communication with them rather complex and can thus affect the quality of data collection. Unlike their western counterparts, Asian parents are very

deferential towards teachers and are unlikely to raise their dissatisfaction since they regard the teacher as the primary educator, this despite the fact that like their western counterparts they are highly educated and hold influential positions in the companies that they represent. A closer look into their home however reveals that the children in these families are expected to complete formal learning activities, usually set by their mothers, when they return from school. Their parents have extremely high expectations for them, albeit they are four years old. The work that the child had completed at home was often presented to the leader by the parents when they brought them to school the next day. These “products” were noted by the researcher as signs of parent support for early formal learning, though little about their content or the standards achieved were discussed in any detail.

Questionnaires, containing a covering letter that highlighted the focus of each one, were printed in English and handed out before the weekend to accommodate the needs of working parents. A time limit of ten days was allocated for the completion of the questionnaires as it was felt that this would allow sufficient time but still encourage completion and submission. In one of the questionnaires the questions were directed specifically at the primary bread-winner, the secondary bread-winner or the parent who was primarily responsible for the daily care of the child. The different roles that each category of parent plays in the support of early learning were recognised. In addition the aim of approaching the problem from this perspective was to ascertain the quality, rather than quantity of support of early formal learning. Furthermore assistance was accorded second language speakers by a RRC staff member so as to clarify any difficulties or queries that these parents might have. Parents were invited to complete the questionnaire of their own free will and the anonymity of their return was ensured by a post box for all completed questionnaires. The anonymity of respondents was at all times respected even in cases where parents made themselves known in the process of completing questionnaires. Feedback material was provided to all families, regardless of whether they had completed a questionnaire or not.

4.9.6 Data analysis strategies

Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising information into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among them. Schumacher & McMillan (1993: 383-385) argue that

during the qualitative research procedure categories and patterns emerge from the data as it is gathered, that an abstract synthesis is generated as the data is collected in several cyclical phases and that an interim analysis of this data runs parallel to further data collection. Consequently they suggest that one activity informs and directs the other during the process of qualitative data analysis.

In this investigation, a project in the field drew the author's attention to the phenomenon of parental support of early formal learning. In trying to understand how best to establish a relationship of support between the school and the home in her capacity as teacher, the problem of family mobility and its impact on parental support of early formal learning emerged and the idea of conducting this research study emerged.

As the researcher became aware of the complexity of the problem of assisting parents in their supportive task I began to read about the issue and take note of its mention in the media. Information gleaned in informal conversations with parents prompted questionnaires designed to probe deeper and uncover the problems that parents as co-educators face. Consequently one activity informed the directed the other. Participation in the field drew attention to the research problem and as an awareness of the problem emerged, the author's attempts to "solve" it became more conscious and formalized. Informal conversations with parents led to a formalised reflection of the problem. Literature that could shed light on the problem was consulted and this resulted in further reflection, increased focused in data collection and recognition of emerging patterns that could be used to explain the research problem.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003:147) describe data analysis as a systematic process in which the organization of data enables the researcher "to come up with findings." Consequently, they suggest that data analysis involves breaking data up into units, coding it, finding its patterns and then synthesizing these emerging units, codes and patterns into "understandable" findings in papers, books and research plans. However, they draw attention to the fact that making sense out of collected material is a challenging task, since it is difficult to separate data analysis and data interpretation in the qualitative research process.

The interpretative approach was applied in this study and the following topics emerged during the refining process:

- generalised global and cross-national attitudes towards families in the 21st century
- RRC parent's perspectives on the world, education in general and their parenting tasks
- the Danish social and educational model and its impact on Rygaards School
- Rygaards School's impact on parent involvement in general
- parent-teacher supportive relationships and initiatives at RRC level to involve parents in the life of the school and support their parenting and educative tasks.

Given that this study emerged out of a actual situation in the field, and one in which the researcher was an active participant, it is a complex exercise to describe the strategies that were adopted and the phases that define its analytical investigation. However it is true to say that the process has been a continuous one in which data collection, analysis and literature study have informed and driven one another in turn and constitutes the foundation for the final report of this study.

Henning et al. (2004:104) view data analysis as a process of “reduc[ing], condens[ing] and group[ing] collected material. Their approach to transcribing texts corresponds to the process referred to by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) above, in as much as they subscribe to the method of breaking data into segments/units of meaning, looking for groupings amongst these meanings/codes and then relating these codes to the research question.

At each stage of this research process informal notes were kept and a number of literature studies undertaken. These studies prompted analytical questions that served to focus the researcher's attention on data collection.

Information shared during informal conversations with parents prompted a number of questions. Despite the language barriers that existed in RRC's multicultural parent population, questionnaires were viewed as a suitable means to find answers to some of the questions that arose during periods of reflection. As the author began to see patterns of behaviour emerging, the questionnaires began to take

on an exploratory nature to determine what went on at home and what form parent support of learning took. In attempting to analyse and interpret their responses, the author looked for:

- shared similarities and differences in responses
- exceptional responses
- explanations that parents gave for a particular response
- patterns of non-response to an entire questionnaire or parts of it

After parents had submitted their questionnaires, an analysis, similar that described above, of their responses was undertaken a summary of the feedback was presented to parents. These summaries however, presented an overview of what parents had said but did not include the researcher's own reflections and interpretations. The notes that were collected, the preliminary analysis of questionnaires and the thoughts that were generated in the process, were randomly collected into a single file.

Once data collection had ceased, the author referred back to data file. The collected material was sorted into the following sections

- Observations made over a 5 year period
- Notes on informal conversations with parents
- Written communications from parents relating to their support of early learning
- Communications from parents who had left RRC
- Preparatory drafts of questionnaires
- Comments from colleagues and parents during the draft stages of questionnaires
- Questionnaire responses from parents
- Summaries of feedback on questionnaires from the author
- Policy documents relating to Rygaards School and RRC
- Minutes of Governing Body meetings
- Inspection reports

- documents and letters received from individuals and groups with an interest in Rygaards School and RRC

Having organized the data into the above categories, the author read through each document, making notes on

- Emerging categories
- Points of interest
- Hitherto unseen connections between information
- Strengths in Rygaards support of teachers and parents
- Weaknesses in Rygaards support of teachers and parents
- Contradictions in Inspection reports
- Recommendations

Having organized the above mentioned categories, the following focus topics emerged

- The relationship of support that exists between the school and the home
- A multi-cultural learning environment
- Parents as clients
- Family mobility
- Barriers to home – school co-operation
- The breakdown of traditional family life with the global context

4.9.7 Analytical premises

This study was initially informed by Dewey's theory that emphasises the view of the child and the meaning of the home context in learning. Epstein's (1987a) framework of six categories that defines parental support in children's learning achievements provides guidelines for assessing the degree to which parents are involved in RRC.

Families do not exist in a vacuum. Global and cross-national attitudes have an impact on early learning achievement. The school's task of involving parents and the parental task of supporting early learning do not occur in isolation but are complementary and occur within the global, national and local context. Gordon (1978: 79 -81) suggested that studies of parent involvement in pre-school programmes show that there are significant long-term effects for learners whose families participated in these programmes, that the effects of parent involvement in early learning may last as long as ten years after the programmes ended and that the quality of the school is also positively affected by parents' participation. Consequently the assumption that parental support of learning in general has a positive effect on the school as a whole has directed the focus of this investigation.

The concept of parents as “clients” and “consumers” of education is not new to the field of education. It is a concept that contributed toward a number of questionnaires aimed at determining parents' perspectives on the world, education and their parenting task.

Globalisation is a reality of the 21st century and one that has implications for family mobility as well as an impact on teaching and learning achievement. The individualisation and fragmentation that occurs as a result of global mobility creates barriers that affect parent involvement in early learning. Denessen et al (2001) suggest that differences in cultural attitudes have an impact on parent involvement thus challenging Epstein's notion of partnership between parents and school. Both streams of thought constitute important analytical premises of this study.

McAllister Swap (1993: 111 -113) points out that there are powerful barriers that inhibit educators from reaching out to parents. She suggests that while diversity is enriching to the class, the teachers and the curriculum, the extent and range of differences make it difficult for teachers to cope. A premise of this study is that family mobility has implications for teachers and families, impacts on parent involvement in and support of early formal learning and increases the barriers to constructive co-operation between the home and school.

Mobility of families presents major challenges to the place called school. It sharpens issues concerning how well schools are able to utilise the human capital that international parents represent. Furthermore, family mobility challenges a school's ability to deal with, even promote, diversity and increases the range of family expectation and aspirations regarding what schools should achieve. One can then ask what the implications of 21st century transitions are for schools in general and international schools in particular? The OECD Secretariat (2001: 52-53) reasons that multi-culturalism is a norm of contemporary school systems and sees schools as centres where "sociability is made easier through children's connections... and the platforms for a variety of neighbourhood [international community] issues". Increasingly, questions arise about what "communities" are. Martin Carnoy (2001:119) suggests that this reality provides "a crucial additional role for schools to play as key community institutions in societies that have lost so many of their traditional sources of social interaction". The question, raised in this paragraph and the research findings mentioned here, forms the basis for the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

Following a preliminary literature study it was assumed that RRC in particular and Rygaards School in general have a central role to play in terms of parent and community participation within the context of an international learning environment. Epstein (1980) and Dunst et al (1992) emphasise that genuine partnership takes time and places the responsibility on the school to develop policies and plans for involving parents in their children's education. An essential assumption of this study is that RRC, and its staff will increasingly be called upon to provide social support for families and that policies dealing with this phenomenon will have to be thought through and developed throughout Rygaards School.

Finally, the interpretive framework of qualitative research methodology assumes that meaning is constructed and that the researcher plays an active role in interpreting the meanings held by participants in the study. As a participant researcher, my own experiences of re-locating have sensitised me to the impact of global mobility on families and having specified my assumptions, I am aware of the fact that my own personal experiences, values and beliefs could have impacted on my interpretation of the data.

4.10 Conclusion

The information provided in a research design description should make it possible for other researchers to conduct a similar investigation and support the findings of the former.

It is envisaged that the information, contained in this research design would provide data that can be used to make a tentative causal analysis of parent support of early, formalised learning within RRC. Furthermore, since RRC has become fully integrated into the body of Rygaards School, and that its families pass on through the school's lower primary classes, it is hoped that the findings of this narrow study will prompt on policies relevant to parent support of learning not only within RRC but throughout Rygaards School as a whole.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, focuses attention on the research findings of this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion of Data Analysis: Emerging Preliminary Findings

5.1 Introduction

Everything these days seems to have relevance for the research problem of this study. For instance in an article that the researcher recently came across entitled “They came in dhows and left in jets”, Ramnik Shah relates that, “a large scale migration of East African Asians has taken place over the last 30 years from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to the UK, North America and Australia [and that these people] carried their distinctive identity with them”. Inevitably outside factors pulled them into the wider world but the glue that binds people like these together is identification with the place of their origin and recognition of certain characteristics and points of reference common to them. However, Shah (2006:31) suggests that “those who left during the pre-school stage have no memories and nothing to connect them with East Africa except vicariously through family and folk-lore or what they may have learnt later in life”. What is immediately interesting and relevant about this article is the fact that the movement of people is not a new phenomenon. However the speed, at which it now affects families, is.

The researcher began this study assuming, not unreasonably taking their diversity into account, that RRCs parents do not share a common identity with one another in terms of place of origin, cultural practice and language and that this meant the degree to which they shared common points of reference is reduced. What was not immediately evident is the fact that the same may be said of the relationship between parents and their 4-5 year old children, who have little, and in some cases, no experience of their parent’s/parents’ country of origin. Furthermore, while some of them understand their parent’s mother tongue they do not speak the language themselves. Consequently, the child’s immersion in an international school, as opposed to the isolation that their primary caregiver may experience, reduces the common points of reference between parent and child.

As a RRC parent commented:

I spent the first eighteen years of my life in one town; it was only when I went to university that the world got bigger for me. My children have a very different experience. Life's very different for them.

The picture that emerges from a comment such as this is a reminder that an interpretation of RRC parents' support of learning must be seen in the light of the fact that cultural diversity and particular experience, determined by self-concept within a specific national and ethnic identity, a childhood shared with parents, grandparents, other family members and a close community network and attendance at their own local primary and secondary school, is drastically different from that of their own children. Furthermore, since RRC children are simultaneously unconnected to their parents' national and community origins and strangers in a new society with different culture and social groupings, the consequences of these children's lives as "global nomads", (Ender 2002: 2) has bearing on the manner in which parents are able to support learning.

Keeping this in mind, it is valuable to note that a closer look at the collected data reveals a number of factors that must be taken into account when interpreting the information collected from parents. These include the concept of "attachment", the relationship between 'the global and the local world' in which families live, the impact of macro-education systems, micro-level policies, attitudes and expectations as well as the practices of parents, teachers and Rygaards school in relation to parental support of early learning.

5.2 An overview of the analysis strategy: emerging categories

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the methods of data collection used in this study, included questionnaires, observations and conversations, which together shed light on various aspects of the research problem. During data collection the researcher has been aware that parents are influenced by the value system and cultural attitudes of the companies in which they work, the culture in which their own upbringing was embedded and the society from which they came. These issues influence the way they look at their own situation and the international setting of Rygaards which is itself subject to cultural and

normative influences and attitudes. Therefore, in interpreting the actions and statements of parents, serious consideration will be given to the broader context in which they find themselves, which means that the author intends to make a connection between their living world and the wider world of multinational business culture, parents' educational expectations and learning culture as it exists at Rygaards.

Data was collected making use of questionnaires, conversations and observations. Tables 2, 3, 4 (see appendices 4, 5, 6) provide an overview of these methodologies and outline the time period of collection, the focus of the methodology and the situation in which the data was gathered.

The families involved in this study, live their lives within the context of larger social and cultural influences, practices and attitudes. In order to highlight the impact of these factors and to make connections between 'the world of work' and 'the worlds of home and school', interactions that occurred between RRC staff and parents employed in multinational business will be presented. The analyses will show how the work culture and ethic impact on the way parents view their parenting task, the expectations they have for their children and of teachers including their understanding of their role in supporting learning.

It would be incorrect to assume that parents fit into homogenous social, economic, cultural and religious groupings. Consequently, in order to shed light on the realities from which RRC families have come and to make a connection between these and parental support of early learning some of their perspectives on 'the social world' around them and its impact on parents' ability to support learning will be presented for analysis.

The task of parenting is a complex and demanding one. In this regard, one of the premises of this study is that parents are co-educators and that the school and its teachers are obliged to support parents in their task. Consequently in the process of gathering data for this study, parents' perspectives on their parenting task emerged as an important source of information. Families who relocate arrive with particular values. The new country in which they find themselves however has its own values. These impact not only on parents' lives and that of their children but also on the ability of teachers to fulfil

their expectations. Consequently, while Rygaards is a private school, it operates within the context of Denmark and its Scandinavian social and educational model. In order to draw a connection between the impact of the Danish system on the existing parent governance at Rygaards and the extent to which this body serves to support parents in general, a critical examination will be made of Rygaards international Parents Association.

The Scandinavian model has an impact on Rygaards School. In order to make a connection between this macro perspective and that of the school milieu, Rygaards' mission statement, its policy on communication with parents and their communication with the school, its Board and parents, as well as the support of its teaching staff will be analysed to determine the extent to which the culture of the school, as reflected in its policies and practices, encourages and nurtures parent involvement.

And finally, closer examination of the existing situation at RRC level in terms of parent-teacher support relationships, parent involvement in the daily activities of the class and their support of learning at home as well as the support that they would like to receive from RRC in particular and Rygaards in general, will be made to establish to what extent RRC supports parents in their educative task.

5.2.1 The 'world of work' and its impact on the worlds of 'home and school'

Bronfenbrenner (1979:319) places human interaction within a multi-level ecological system in which "the macro system influences the interaction at the core or micro system". The following focuses its attention on 'the world of work', that is work culture and ethic and how it impacts on that of 'the world of school'.

5.2.1.1 *Work culture and ethical impacts on parent-teacher relationships*

A British RRC parent, the director of Hyundai, a leading Japanese car manufacturing company, in Denmark, made an appointment to see the RRC leader after he felt that his wife had been put under undue stress as a result of the leader's expression of concern about their child's progress during an

earlier parent consultation, which he was unable to attend because of work demands. At the conclusion of what could be described as an angry one-sided conversation, he concluded by saying:

In our company, the client is always right and in the event that an employee caused a client this amount of anxiety, the client would be well within their rights to take legal action against the company and its employee. In such a case, I would have no hesitation in firing the employee. In this case you are lucky that I'm leaving the country otherwise I would have taken you to court for causing my wife a great deal of unnecessary concern and lack of sleep.

In a telephone conversation with RRC's leader, the marketing manager of a multi-national company, Nestlé, was relating the state of his young son's unhappiness in one of Rygaards competitor schools and was enquiring about the likelihood of a place for his child in RRC. In the process of this conversation he said:

I'm a busy man and while my wife has tried to keep me abreast of the situation, I've not been able to follow all the details. Needless to say we are very unhappy about the situation. We've heard good things about Rygaards and I'm hoping that you can solve our problem for us.

An initial analysis of these case study examples lead the researcher to suggest that the level of parent involvement in the daily life of the school is central to a mother or father's awareness of their child's progress and the development of their relationship with the teacher. More importantly, day-to day interaction with their child, within the context of 'the world of school', has consequences for parents' understanding of their educative task as well as the quality of their support of learning.

A closer examination shows that in both cases, the primary bread-winner has been the primus motor behind initiating the interaction with the school; that language usage reflects the culture, attitudes and practices of big business in which both parents operate on a daily basis; that work demands have removed them almost entirely from any involvement in the day-to day life of 'the world of school' and their child's progress and that there is a similarity in the way that they view their own role in supporting learning.

As regards parents' position in the family as well as society, the examples reflect that 'the world of work', specifically that of occupational position as well as gender, influence the way individuals view themselves in relation to others. This then influences the way that they award themselves a particular social standing and impacts on the level of their ability to influence the world around them. In this regard, reference is made to the relationships that exist amongst RRCs top business leader parents and its teachers as well as the gender roles that exist amongst its parents.

As already mentioned, the teaching profession no longer enjoys the social status that it once held in society in general. The case study examples given above lend themselves to a closer examination of the way in which parents view teachers as well as their own understanding of their role in the educative process. In the first example, it is suggested that the father's choice of words reflect the social and power-related position that he accords himself as business leader and parent in relation to that of the teacher. In this regard it can be argued that while his words reflect his weakness in relation to his role as educator-parent, they also reflect his knowledge of the law in relation to business practice and willingness to utilise it in the context of his role as parent of a young learner. In other words, 'the world of work', that is the culture of international business has had a bearing on 'the world of school', indicated by the manner which this parent views the problem, his own role as well as that of the teacher's in it and in how he sees conflict resolution between the home and school and the nature of his role in supporting learning.

The two situations under scrutiny highlight the fact that the 'status' of stakeholders is inextricably connected to the issue of gender and gender roles. In both cases, there are clear distinctions between the occupational and gender roles of parents and teachers and between those of parents as primary breadwinners and primary care-givers in the life of their family and the role that each assumes in relation to the support of learning. In both examples, the primary breadwinner's work demands removed them almost entirely from any involvement in the life of the school. In the first situation, the primary-carer's daily interactions with RRC staff and other parents were very low key. And in the second, although it was the primary carer who had their finger on the pulse of the child's unhappiness, it was the primary breadwinner who despite the fact that his contact with one school was extremely

limited assumed the task of contacting another school in an attempt to solve a problem of which he had little understanding. In other words, the nature of their work and gender role, such as, male managerial decision makers accustomed to initiating and dominating, dictating terms and planning outcomes, influenced their attitudes towards the ‘world of school’ and the manner in which both men approached RRC’s female leader, the level of respect that they accorded her occupation, the tone of their conversation, their choice of words and nature of their problem solving skills.

5.2.1.2 Parents perspectives on ‘the world of work’ and its impact on ‘the worlds of home and school’

What parents themselves have to say about ‘the world of work’ and its impact on ‘the worlds of school and home’ highlights their perspective on the research problem. In this regard, breadwinners and caregivers see ‘the world of work’ from different perspectives.

Two breadwinners, both men, made these comments about their place of work:

In Indonesia, there is a debate going on about the introduction of values education in our schools. I work in the environment of a multi-national company and I wonder whether what children learn at school really prepares them for the pressures I face. Not only is the work demanding, but there is a lot of travel involved and I’m expected to keep up with the latest information and technology. Sometimes I wonder if anyone at work has noticed that I also have a family and children to raise. It was never my intention that this task should be left entirely to my wife.

These days the conditions of employment are not what they used to be. I’m in middle-management and on the one hand our company lays off workers and on the other the top executives get really well paid. This makes me somewhat insecure and I have to be careful about not passing these concerns onto my children. They have their own battles to fight.

On the other hand, the perspectives of caregivers, who operate within ‘the world of home’ and ‘the world of school’, provide a different view on ‘the world of work’

My husband's company paid for our re-location but we were pretty much left on our own when we arrived. The expectation from day one was that my husband owed his job to the company and that I would find out about establishing a home and settling the kids into school.

I never intended to be a single mother, but my husband's career path has meant that our children do not get to see him enough and J. was so disappointed when her dad couldn't make it to the nativity play. That was when I realised how much his work has moved into our lives and taken it over.

Many countries in the world have and are experiencing rapid economic growth and the modernisation that has accompanied this has introduced values otherwise held by 'the world of work' such as individual accomplishment, competitiveness and goal setting into 'the world of home'. In addition, it appears that despite women's entry into the workplace the division of labour between 'the world of work' and 'the world of home' continues to be largely gender based. The quotes suggest awareness amongst parents that these values have consequences for themselves, as employees, partners, parents and as primary educators.

Long and Hoghughi (2004:381) suggest that big business has moved away from the informal social contract that employers had with employees in past generations. Their suggestion appears to be confirmed in the recounted comments, where parents express a sense of 'loss'. In one, there is the sense of loss associated with not having time to parent his child, in another the reality of having to support his family, in an atmosphere of job insecurity impacts on his relationship with his children. A caregiver feels that she has lost her husband to 'the world of work' and that this has left her with the responsibility of managing 'the world's of home and school' and another expresses a sense of loss of her partner and her children's father to 'the world of work'.

The breakdown of multi-generational family units is well documented and is attributed to market forces where big business views people as production units. The outcome of this reality is increased economic and time pressures on adults struggling to be better parents. As Morrow and Torres (2000: 316) comment, since the conditions of employment have changed, the old attitudes of commitment, caring

and trust have been replaced by the cynicism and self-centredness of big business and are in danger of percolating their way down to the level of families.

As a whole, these comments reflect the experience of most families at Rygaards regardless of where they come from in the world or the nature of the breadwinner's workplace. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the demands of 'the world of work' mean that a whole sector of service companies have shot up to provide 'service products' for families on the super highway of life. Re-location companies, hired by business to provide the kind of services that they themselves are not able to provide their employees, are now common in many countries. Help, at a price, is therefore provided to new employees about to be re-located to Denmark and includes assisting them to find accommodation, identifying potential schools and forwarding details of life in Denmark to them prior to their move.

However, having observed the fact that re-location services are bought in by multi-national companies for their global employees, there are two notions held by some, though not by the researcher, that 'the world of home' falls within the so-called private sphere of life and that 'help' can also be bought into this domain. On the contrary, the researcher concurs with Bronfenbrenner (1979:319) who argues that "the parent-child bond is at the heart of humanity and parenting is the most powerful means of inculcating respect for social norms and cultural values" and that any suggestions that services can be purchased on the open market to fulfil the requirements of both children and schools for ongoing parental support, are naïve, shallow, expedient and without foundation.

5.2.2 Parents' perspectives on 'the social world' and its impact on their ability to support learning

The term 'the social world' is used here to include the social network of families, the society from which they originate, as well as the provisions made for or by parents in their respective situations to raise children and support their learning.

5.2.2.1 Relocation impacts on family/friend networks and has consequences for parents' ability to support learning

Bronfenbrenner's 'attachment theory' (1979:319) encompasses the notion of social support systems or networks that constitutes a person's immediate circle of contacts and it is of significance to the research of this study.

A mother of three children, whose family had recently relocated to Denmark, and who confided in RRC's leader about the loneliness that she was experiencing in Denmark, commented that:

It's become really hard for me as a wife and mother. There really is very little support for my family and I, and since my husband has to travel a lot, I feel like I'm a single mother. It gets lonely when there's no-one familiar around and when the kids get sick I really miss my parents. (Begins to cry) These days I'm so stressed. My children seem to be happy in their new school but I don't think that I'm doing a good enough job as a wife or mother in a foreign country.

A mother who had already spent some time in Denmark and whose child had settled in at RRC stated that:

I know that my family is not an island – though when times are tough it's easy for me to feel isolated in Denmark and when I see how easily my children have made friends, that they are like sponges absorbing things Danish and putting their own mark on them, I begin to miss my own family and friends and the values we share as Australians. On the other hand I am comforted by the thought that, 'You can take the girl out of Australia but you can't take the Australian out of the girl!' I know that I will pass on Australian values to my children without really thinking about it and with or without the help of my family.

An initial analysis of caregivers' comments draws to mind Cohen's (1971:117) anthropological perspective on education which points out that "it is the wider social structure that provides the setting in which socialisation and education processes can be played out". So while these remarks underscore the fact that these parents see themselves as the bearers of a particular culture, an interpretation of their

parenting is meaningless unless the broader context of their social support network and cultural allegiance is acknowledged. Recognition is therefore given to the fact that the particular cultural values that parents wish to impart to their children, are inextricably linked to the support network that they themselves enjoy and that this factor has a significant impact on the type and quality of learning support that they can provide for their children.

When it comes to family and local community support, we know on the one hand, that neighbourhood ties among families have been eroding as families become increasingly mobile and on the other, that, “individuals are typically able to cope with a limited number of stressors but as the number of stressors they are exposed to increases, their ability to cope effectively decreases” (Long & Hoghughi 2004:383). Consequently, while the values and attitudes that emerge from social and cultural systems have an influential impact on human interaction in an international environment such as RRC, the absence of a support network constitutes factors that influence parents’ self-worth and ability to support learning. Furthermore, in the 21st century we will probably witness a continuing shift from multi-generational family units to increasingly varied social groupings, some of which are not traditionally given family status, and this will probably result in greater isolation and alienation, decreasing both the practical and emotional support available to parents.

A closer examination of the circumstances in which RRC caregivers find themselves indicates that as a consequence of international re-location and the subsequent separation from their support network and normative culture, a growing number of them confront increasing stress. In the absence of adequate support they feel that their effectiveness in supporting learning is severely compromised. Significantly, our attention is drawn to the fact that a lack of a social network impacts on the degree to which RRC parents are able to support their family in general and the learning of their young child in particular and how a recognition of this inability has an effect on the self-worth of caregivers in their capacity as mothers and wives.

Furthermore, keeping in mind the schism between the reference points and demands made of globally mobile parents and their children, (refer to the case of East African Asians in the introduction to this chapter) parents display an awareness of the fact that their children have been able to adapt to their new

environment. In addition the family as a whole does not develop independently of the new prevailing culture, and that the prevailing culture of Denmark, as well as that of Rygaards, make demands of them as parents, that they sometimes feel they are unable to meet.

Finally, the networks that children establish also suffer as a consequence of their global mobility. This topic is often dealt with at RRC coffee mornings, and parents are reminded that children need help to maintain their social networks. Parents' attention is drawn to the fact that since young children are unable to write, send an email or pick up the phone, it is important that parents to do this on behalf of their children. This situation is not limited only to family, but also includes friends at the child's old nursery school and other playmates. Furthermore, in relation to both their children's and their own needs, parents are introduced to Bronfenbrenner's 'attachment theory' (1979:319) that indicates that families should move with the whole house and not just a suitcase, so that children develop a sense of 'home' as opposed to a sense of being a 'global nomad'.

5.2.2.2 The provision of economic support has implications for relocated families with children

The burden on families has not been lessened by the fact that women continue to join the work force in increasing numbers. In addition, while there are discrepancies in the worth of families in different societies and the availability of resources to meet their needs, there will be implications for the development of child-care policies which, in one way or the other, will affect families and the resources that they have at their disposal to support their children's learning.

A newly arrived RRC mother said:

We struggled when I went on maternity leave at only 60% of my salary, but I can't imagine how it is for families who don't have this option.

A Turkish family with five children was forced to remove their child from RRC due to economic constraints imposed by the social policies of Turkey. Like her son, the mother spoke no English and the father reported that:

We are so sorry that we have to take J. out of the class but our Embassy will not cover the fees. Now both my wife and J. will be alone in the house and this is not good for their English.

The economic consequences of social support can have wide reaching effects on families with young children. These include some degree of hardship for the whole family but more pertinent to this study, is the isolation that occurs for caregivers. Furthermore, this isolation has consequences not only for the child whose access to a formalised learning environment has been denied, but also for the parent whose ability to support learning is hampered, not only by economic considerations but also, by cultural and language barriers.

If we look at how states support families with children, it seems that most developed countries acknowledge and to some extent, compensate parents for the expenses incurred in having children. Bronfenbrenner (1992:281-282) found that American, Canadian and British coverage of child-care is not encouraging when compared with other modern nations. Maternity leave on average in Scandinavia is 34 weeks. In Britain maternity leave is only six weeks. Denmark also provides low fee, public subsidised child-care programmes for children of six months to school age. In addition, a child-benefit or family allowance, either as direct cash benefit or a refundable tax credit, is in operation in Denmark (Bronfenbrenner 1997). These statistics seem to indicate that families with young children in English-speaking countries live under conditions of greater environmental stress than their counterparts in other developed societies. Green (1997) suggests that this situation is brought about as a result of low priority accorded to families as compared with other developed countries.

It is apparent that parents experience a lack of moral support in the society around them.

5.2.2.3 While parents value moral support, society provides little in terms of social virtues.

During a conversation on why they sent their child to a Catholic School, a Singaporean couple reported:

We are concerned about going home, since the kinds of values, that the society has, are not really what we want for our son.

A visiting RRC father commented that:

My parents were born and raised in a village in the south of India. In those days, all the adults took care of the little education that children received. I was raised in Madras and went to the local government school, where the department of education decided what we learnt. Now my own children are going to school here in Copenhagen and I'm not sure whether the system is compatible with Indian education demands, but I do know that I am responsible for passing on values to my child and making sure that they have access to a good school. We all have to look after ourselves these days. There are pressures on me as a parent and my children have to achieve higher and higher grades to stay in contact with the demands of the world's economy.

If we take a closer look at cross-cultural attitudes towards families in the context of education in general, it becomes clear that while society views education as a valuable source of national cohesion and a key tool for economic development, it provides little in the way of moral support to parents. In Asia, for example, "there has been a reduction in the importance attached to the human, cultural and ethical values in education in favour of a utilitarian and economic perspective" despite recommendations concerning 'Education for International Understanding', 'Co-operation and Peace and Education' relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms adopted by the general conference of UNESCO in 1974. (UNESCO Bulletin 1990-1991)

Hilary Clinton made an African saying famous when she said, "It takes a village to educate a child." But Long and Hoghughi (2004:342) argue that the global village appears to be crumbling and that "it is difficult to inculcate socially necessary virtues such as tolerance, helpfulness, fairness, caring, courage,

respect, loyalty, honesty, responsibility, self-reliance, trustworthiness and self-discipline when wider political, social and corporate forces flout them”. In this regard it is evident that the school’s virtues programme serves a deeply felt need by RRC parents since they constitute a large percentage of participants who attend presentations.

5.2.2.4 Society’s provision of resources for pre-schoolers influences parents’ ability to support learning

The allocation of resources for pre-schoolers is an indication of the importance accorded to this level of learning as well as the level of social support that parents, with young children, enjoy.

A look at state provision for pre-schoolers in countries, from which some RRC parents come, sheds some light on the reasons that societies have for supporting pre-school education and the consequences of this support for parents. RRC parents commented that:

Parents in Israel have had to give up a lot and in some ways it has been our children who pay the price. Their early life is spent in day-care and then they land up in the army!

Because children don’t vote, politicians use their interests to woo parents to join the work force, but parents loose out on their children and the education isn’t all that good in the end.

Societies have differing reasons for supporting parents. China provides child-care as a way of liberating parents for socio-economic purposes. Japan’s provision came about as a response to national economic stress and Israel utilised early-care provision as a way of freeing parents in the name of economic development and as a powerful means of developing the Jewish state (Broberg & Hwang 1992:77).

The allocation of resources reflects the quality of child-care that society wishes to provide, in terms of the ratio of children to adults and the level of staff qualification requirements. However, the cost of this care may not always be entirely covered by society which means that the economic burden falls on

parents. Prospective parents always ask about the ratio of children to adults in RRC but then find it difficult to accept that the fees, although relatively lower than those of Rygaards competitors, will make severe inroads into the family's disposable income.

Hidden agendas often inspire society's support of pre-schoolers. In this regard it is interesting to note that Japan passed legislation at the end of April 2005 in response to anti-Japanese riots that took place in China in 2004, the sentiments of which pose a threat to Japan's economy. Resources have therefore been made available for Japanese teachers to inculcate patriotism into students as young as four years old (BBC news 30.4.2005).

The ages at which different societies accord pre-school status and educational support to children vary. Children coming from the UK join the so-called reception class level when they turn four. Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish children join an equivalent educational level at seven years. Indian children have their first experience of "school" at three to four years old (Broberg & Hwang 1992 :93). These statistics shed light on society's allocation of resources for child-care in general and they influence the attitudes of RRC parents about how their children should spend their time from 9.00-14.00.

5.2.2.5 Diversity in educational focus gives rise to variation in RRC parents' expectations

If we examine the focus of the education provided by different societies, we find that it is varied and this is reflected in the conflicting expectations of RRC parents. Their comments at a class meeting indicated this. A range of views is reflected in the following:

Our eldest daughter went through the reception class in England and while we appreciate the benefits that R will get from this international environment we are aware that she may have some catching up to do when we return to Britain.

We were surprised when you sent a 'reading book' home with S. We were hoping that the demands would be less formal.

A recurring point of discussion amongst RRC staff has been the differences that RRC parents voice when it comes to their expectations of teachers and their hopes for their children. Meeting these expectations can be an impossible task when considering the assortment of education systems to which RRC parents have been exposed.

In the USA education is seen as a means to promote individualism, freedom, religious practice and socio-economic mobility. In France the focus is on intellectual development whilst in the UK it is on educational orientation. In Sweden and Denmark it is on socio-emotional development and in developing countries it is on health provision (Bronfenbrenner 1979:760-761). Consequently, RRC parents did not share a common set of expectations and this resulted in a multitude of unfulfilled expectations on the part of parents on one hand and undesirable pressure on RRC staff on the other.

5.2.2.6. Society's understanding of the term 'family' impacts on 'families who are different'

A closer examination of the term 'family' and the way it is used is relevant to the way society sees itself, the manner in which it supports 'the family' and the degree to which it makes resources available to it. Over the years, there have appeared a number of variations in the structure of RRC's families ranging from a gay couple, to a single mother and parents of mixed ethnicity. The attitudes that they have to endure as parents are:

There is the argument that children can only have a normal development if they grow up with a mother and a father. This argument assumes that there is only one 'real' family form and ignores the realities of today's family groupings. Like other parents we [lesbian couple] need support from the outside, but unlike heterosexual parents we also have to deal with society's bigotry against us and our children

I never intended to be a single mother. People find it difficult to think of A. and I as a family, but single mothers are becoming the norm.

If racism is to be broken down, someone has to take the lead. Some of the parents in this class are already a lost cause, so it's up to the children. If tolerance begins in childhood, then childhood is the best place to start!

The words we use reflect the nature of our attitudes and values. A closer look at the way in which RRC parents use the term sheds light on their experiences as members of 'families who are different'.

The use of the term 'family' no longer applies in the traditional sense to include a mother, father and children. It now covers a wider range of combinations than it previously did. However, while parents use the term 'family' to describe their own particular situation, that is themselves, their partner and their children, society sometimes overlooks them as such. This oversight impacts on the support that these parents can expect, and receive from the society around them. Furthermore, these comments draw our attention to the reality of families who suffer the added isolation that is brought about by the attitudes around them. These viewpoints compound the sense of isolation created by their global mobility.

Teachers are increasingly faced by the needs of families who do not fit the norm. It is therefore essential that their use of the term reflects inclusiveness in all senses of the word. This means that teachers need to ensure that these parents are not overlooked within the context of 'the public sphere' of the school. By doing so, teachers can reduce the stress and isolation that the customary definition of 'family' can cause.

In conclusion, parents' comments indicate that 'the social world' around them has an impact on their ability to support learning. It appears that the characteristics of globalisation that most closely affect parents are new pressures on workers and consumers in society, the erosion of the nation-state and the weakening notion of 'citizen' as a unified and unifying concept. Morrow and Torres (2000: 111) suggest that, "neo liberalism promotes less state intervention, greater reliance on the free markets and more appeal to individual self-interest than to collective rights". However, despite these socially erosive influences, parents are still bearers of the dominant culture of their societies and this gives rise to conflicting expectations amongst RRC families.

Additionally, increased out-sourcing of jobs, the increasing number of private schools, the extension of the EU and falling membership of trade unions in Denmark lend weight to the argument pertaining to influences of globalisation and neo-liberalism. Consequently, as the state withdraws from its responsibility to administer public resources, so calls for choice and the introduction of educational vouchers emerge and families are left increasingly to fend for themselves. Whereas schools, or before that tutors, acted in *loco parentis*, preparing learners for a relatively predictable range of future opportunities and challenges, today they are confronted with a series of conflicting and changing expectations from parents who are more than ever in need of help and direction.

When it comes to the teachers at Rygaards, they are faced with the challenge of showing sensitivity towards the special needs of families. However, it seems that while each family has a range of special needs, some more than others, teachers themselves are without support and as a consequence these families are left to deal with their problems within the ‘private sphere’ of the home, which leads to increased isolation in an already stressful situation.

5.2.3 Parents’ perspectives on their parenting task

It is in talking to parents that the complexity their task is comprehended and how little support they receive to achieve it. Their comments give a glimpse of the way they see their lives and that of their children in the global village and it seems that in the most developed industrial societies, the interplay of pressures of the market economy and increasing isolation have fuelled many of their opinions and remarks. However, in attempting to interpret these culturally pluralistic remarks, it is, as Berlin (1998:34) suggested, important to remember that “the earlier idea of dominant culture organised around a core of shared values and surrounded by a few dissenting voices on the fringe has given way to the idea of a *thick* pluralism that sees divergent creeds, beliefs and worldviews as matters of first importance in a group’s self-understanding”.

5.2.3.1 Parents' ideas on parenting

A closer examination of parents' ideas on parenting highlights some of the factors that affect their ability to support learning.

In market-driven Western societies, full employment and expected high standards of living pressure parents to work even harder. Women have joined the work force but this has not taken the pressure off men and it has placed greater demands on women. The child, who continues to demand attention from parents, does not understand the demands of the work place or the consequent fatigue. Parents' awareness of their own needs and the different needs of their children create a conflict of priorities. The resulting guilt and frustration, sometimes compounded by difficulties with a partner, do not improve matters:

Since I spend so little time with the kids, it does not seem right that it should be spent on insisting on things. I know that my wife has a problem with this and she says that I often contradict what she says, just to keep the peace.

Sometimes it would be useful to have the opinion of an outsider because, when my husband and I find ourselves in a conflict situation around the children, it is not always easy to find a solution in the heat of the moment.

It appears then, that time constraints give rise to low tolerance levels and result in aggression or avoidance. Neither response is conducive to developing a healthy relationship of trust, authority or understanding with the child. The responses given here by breadwinners seem to show they are willing to realize their parenting role but are only available when life is less stressful and when free time allows them to take up a full-time relationship, 'the battle', with the children and that they do not consider the responsibility of parenting to be the sole responsibility of the primary carer. Furthermore, it appears that parenting gives rise to conflict between parents themselves which has consequences for the family as a whole and learning support in general.

From the above, it is evident that the pressures of work make an impact on the quality of parenting that children enjoy. The support that parents can expect from the school in this regard is somewhat limited except to say that the primary carer, who is shouldering the major share of parenting and who is in contact with the school, could benefit from the availability of a counselling facility. While the Assumption sisters offer their services in this regard, it could be argued that the school community deserves access to a professional counsellor.

5.2.3.2 Parents' perspectives on and attitudes towards reception class level education and their role in supporting it

James (1997:39-40), argues that, "home is a constant backdrop against which all of the child's other experience's need to be viewed [and] that much of their learning does not take place in school after all, but in the home and in other community contexts". In addition he believes that "children who have had a rich educational experience before they attend primary school, will already have mastered a range of skills which will enable them to benefit more easily and efficiently from the learning experiences provided by the school". (James 1997:39). These arguments are supported by a RRC parent who suggested that:

...a lot of what my child knows, she learnt before she came to RRC.

However, having said this, parents' comments reflect an understanding of reception level education in relation to their child's development:

Children who attend a reception class are better equipped to meet the challenges of big school, especially if they have to learn English.

My oldest child did not go to nursery school. I felt that I could give her what she needed but I subsequently realised that my company was not enough. They learn so much from the other children at pre-school.

And a father's belief that accent matters in the international labour market expressed his gratitude by saying:

You've given M your accent! She doesn't have an Indian-English accent anymore. We are so proud of her.

If we take a closer look at responses received from RRC parents on the issue of reception class level education and their own role in supporting it, patterns emerge that shed light on their attitudes and practices. Core values constitute the primary values promoted by a particular culture and become the basis for the standards with which the major institutions of the dominant society evaluate their members. However, experience at Rygaards indicated that while its complex family community share a number of common or core values, differences are evident and this has resulted in the rejection of a single set of values for the entire community.

However having said this, an overwhelming majority of parents share the value of preserving of their native tongue at home while at the same time encouraging the inculcation of English at school. (see Table 4 in Appendix) The grounds for them doing so are numerous.

It appears that an overwhelming reason for parents to preserve language is because they regard it as an important tool for maintaining communication in their country of origin and as integral factor in continued contact with their extended family. Furthermore, the psychological implication of passing on a particular language is reflected in the comment:

I want him to have the gift of my language since it is part of my cultural identity and he has to have one also.

Not only do RRC parents share the value of passing on their mother tongue but they also share the belief that care-givers are not primarily responsible for the education of young children. (see Table 5 in Appendix) This belief is supported by the fact that only three of the total number of breadwinners, reported that they do not speak their mother tongue to their children. All three spent approximately 15 waking hours with their children during the week as opposed to primary care-givers who reported that

they spent more than 30 waking hours with their children during an average week. The reasons that they gave for non-usage of their mother tongue were:

Since I spend so much time away from the children it seems pointless to use a language that even their mother also does not know.

There are several languages in Uganda. In my immediate maternal family the language spoken is different from my paternal family but both families speak English in common, therefore it was the obvious choice.

My son does not respond back in my mother tongue. Very few things he will speak.

Consequently, while the transmission of language is important to parents, time constraints and the consequent lack of interest on the child's part, the fact that the care giver did not speak or understand the mother tongue of the breadwinner and that family 'back home' did not speak a common language so English was preferred, constitute factors that prevent the passing on of a mother tongue.

A third shared value amongst RRC parents is the expectation that the school will inculcate English in their children. Having said this however, it is evident that parents recognise that English is a must if their children are to be successful in the future labour market. While their responses to questionnaires indicate that they only speak their mother-tongue to their children at home, observations, conducted by RRC's leader while on home visits, indicate that English is also used by parents and that they actively support the development of English. This is evidenced by comments such as:

When living in Slovakia I always spoke English to help the kids and then after a while I spoke Danish but we always practice our English during the holidays.

For children who don't have English as mother tongue, it is important for parents to support children in English when reviewing what they have learned at school that day.

While second-language parents expect the school to teach their children English, it is evident that they themselves do what they can to support their child's progress in English, as was observed during home visits. When celebrating children's birthdays, the hosting parents spoke English to them, as this was obviously the *lingua franca* common to the whole group. Furthermore, it was evident that parents had purchased English books for themselves and their children. In addition, in the majority of the homes visited, videos, DVD's, tape cassettes and CD's in English were in evidence and photographs of children taken by parents, whose homes were not visited, also testify to this.

It is noteworthy to mention that while parents value the transmission of their mother tongue, they also recognise that the English environment of the school, as well as the usage of English by siblings may result in the increased usage of English at home as is reflected in the comment

We communicate only in my language, but I think that as she gets better at English this will change and both we and her older sister will use more English at home.

All parents, however, do not share the advisability of the use of many languages in the home. On the one side are a majority of parents who value the importance of supporting the rich multi-lingualism that their global mobility has exposed them and their children to and which surrounds them in the international world of the school. On the other hand, there are parents who are adamant about the use of their mother tongue with their children. This difference of opinion is reflected in the following opposing comments, namely:

M replies in Danish when Danish is spoken and in English when he is asked in English. He is not aware of that he knows two or three languages.

We communicate only in my language. French is threatened by English so we only use French at home.

It is noteworthy that while children belonging to the group of families in which a number of languages are used, use these languages interchangeably and with increasing fluency. Children who are not exposed to English in the home take longer to use it at school.

Parents' views on parents' support of the development of social skills are now discussed. Comments such as:

My company is no longer enough for her.

Being the youngest child in the family, he has never really had to wait his turn.

reflect parents' sensitivity to their child's social development and the benefits of the pre-school environment in supporting and promoting this development. There is some discrepancy in terms of the importance they accord to the learning of social skills at school and the degree to which they are aware of their own responsibility of inculcating these at home.

However, recognising the role of the school in the development of social skills and participating in the process themselves results in some interesting observations about what parents say and what they do. In a questionnaire parents were asked to rate a list of ten different learning skills in order of the importance that they attach to them. An initial analysis produced a result that was heavily biased in favour of intellectual learning skills. (see Table 6a, Appendix 8) A second analysis confirmed this finding and indicated that parents value the intellectual and cultural streams of learning. (see Table 6b, Appendix 9) However a closer look at their responses indicates that a majority of parents rated the skills of learning to share and showing concern for others as more important than spiritual development or learning to write. (see Table 6c, Appendix 10)

Finally, it was noteworthy to see what parents thought about their child's acquisition of social skills and their role in supporting these at home. Parents were given a list of learning skills and asked to rate them according to the degree of importance that they attached to them. In addition, they were asked to think how they assist their child's formal learning at home and to list them. Table 7, Appendix 11, provides an overview of their responses. The findings of the questionnaire revealed that parents value the development of social skills in their children. However the manner in which they believe this is achieved and what skills should be included in this aspect of learning show some diversity concerning parents attitudes towards teachers

A shift of focus in this section of the study reveals findings on parents' attitudes towards RRC staff and their expectations of the British style reception class curriculum. An understanding of parents' attitudes and expectations is central to understanding the quality of their support of early formalised learning and the relationships with teachers.

Asian parents in general are very deferential towards staff but have high expectations in terms of their children's intellectual development. Parents from the west on the other hand, are not always respectful of teaching as a profession and exhibit less urgency about the speedy delivery of intellectual skills to young learners. In addition, a number of Scandinavian and North European parents felt that the intellectual demands of the curriculum were excessive and more than one parent in this category had expectations that matched the provision of child-care at Danish nursery schools, where social competency features high on the agenda and where the presentation of letter and numbers does not occur formally. Feedback that was commonly received from parents whose children had attended Danish 'børnehave' (day-care centres) or who were themselves products of the Danish system, reflect their concerns about, and difficulties in supporting the formal nature of the reception level curriculum. On the other hand Asian and British parents expressed concern about what they considered to be a conservative curriculum for their child. British parents whose older children had attended a reception class in Britain, as well as Asian parents whose children had already been introduced to the alphabet from the age of three, were concerned that their children were falling behind the standards expected at home. These contrasting expectations are reflected in opposing statements such as:

L says that he wants to go back to his old børnehave because he can ride the bikes all day because the others are much better than he is at the letters. I can see that he is beginning to be resistant at home when trying to practice them.

I'm afraid that she's going to lose her motivation when it comes to reading. She was expecting a reading book on the first day of school.

Children have such a short childhood, I feel really sorry that C is already under pressure to perform. Can I continue with the letters at home as he is already able to recognise some words that he learnt at his last school?

Needless to say, meeting the diverse expectations of this body of parents was impossible and after two years of trying to do so, the issue was taken up at a parent class meeting. Parents were invited to express their hopes for their children, and their expectations of RRC staff in the hope that they would become aware of the problem from the staff's perspective. This objective was achieved because as the meeting was ending, the following comments came from parents:

Yes, I can see that you have an uphill job, not only with our children but also with us!

I would appreciate it if you could give us some ideas of extension activities that I can do at home with H because I can see that different children are at different stages of learning.

The problem is that we are all coming from different places and going to different places and you can't possibly provide our children with all they need.

Another observable difference in parental attitudes is that of gender as reflected in the comment:

In Japan, boys and men are treated like little emperors.

Furthermore, stereotypical attitudes in terms of gender persist when it comes to what is considered to be appropriate dress, toys and books for boys and girls and parental approval of play activities:

It's so embarrassing that he likes to dress up.

She is a real tom-boy and we can't get her to wear a dress.

When it comes to the issue of gender amongst parents themselves, a small number of parents continue to believe that mothers are primarily responsible for child-care and early education (see Table 5 in the Appendix). Interestingly, despite claims to the contrary, a closer look at the number of parent requests for extra meetings with RRC staff, showed that while mothers constitute the main source of contact between RRC staff and the home, fathers attend meetings when mothers express dissatisfaction with

some aspect of provision of care by the staff and bring with them their management and business attitudes (see 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2 above).

Discussion on the value that parents attach to spiritual development

Finally, while parents have sent their child to a Catholic school, they are divided about the value that they place on the spiritual development of their children (see Table 6c, Appendix 10). It was noted with interest that a majority of parents who participated in the first family virtues programme run by the Catholic Families Association at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, were all Christian and conversant in English. However, while non-Christian parents expressed their approval of the non-denominational virtues programme that was being carried out in the classroom with the children, they did indicate that their own religious practices took precedence at home. Interestingly it appears that the age of the children attending RRC accounted for the lack of Muslim parental demands for separate toilets and changing facilities for boys and girls.

An examination of the above data leads us to conclude that while there are a number of core values that international parents share, RRC parents do not attach the same emphasis to shared spiritual values. Identifying shared values for parents and making them aware of their diversity in others, is an important way of drawing their attention to their own educative role and to the tasks that they have to assume, at home, if their children are to assimilate particular values that are not shared by other families.

5.2.3.3 Parents' suggestions for support that could be provided by Rygaards School

If the argument that the school and home share the task of education is correct, then parents are within their right to expect some level of support from teachers and the school itself. When asked what support they felt Rygaards School could provide, parents were quick to answer. Flexible opening and closing hours were mentioned by an overwhelming number of RRC families. A Danish newspaper article supports this request since it suggests that child-care provision and job demands are out of sync with one another (see Table 8, Appendix 12). In response to the first RRC questionnaire of December

2000 after-school care was mentioned by parents as a way in which RRC could improve its service. Initially individual parents requiring this service took it in turns to look after one another's children but later, RRC's Board attempted to meet this stated needs of parents and approved the provision, at an extra cost, of an after-school care service by RRC staff which parents could make use of.

The issue of fees often presents parents, who are not eligible for a Danish state subsidy, with serious considerations when choosing RRC. While Rygaards offers a reduction in fees for families with more than two children, it is unable to offer the same at the reception class level, as the finances of the school and the reception class are completely separate because of the separation of provision by the department of education (Rygaards School) and the department of social welfare (RRC). Consequently a number of parents were unable to send their child to RRC as a result of financial constraints.

At a Parent Committee Meeting, held on 10 October 2005, a request was made for the school to look into the issue of providing cooked meals at school. As a result of this request, pupils now have a daily choice between two cooked meals, provided by outside caterers. Parents availing themselves of the service cover the costs of these meals.

In response to a pre-inspection questionnaire produced by the independent schools inspectorate, a significant minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the information provided about their child's progress and the opportunities to discuss it with teachers. However, despite this complaint, the inspectors found that many opportunities are available for parents to talk to staff about their children. In this regard, at a class meeting in 2003, RRC parents requested greater flexibility in terms of times allocated for parent consultations so as to accommodate working parents and parents whose work took them out of the country. While every effort was made to accommodate this request, meetings with parents continue to occur within school hours and requests for evening consultations have been turned down, since the planned activities of RRC's staff's yearly work plan does make provision for after-hour consultations.

In terms of assisting parents to support children's learning, families travelling abroad with their children during school term made requests for 'extra work' for their children. However, in order to

dissuade parents from taking holidays when tickets are cheap, it is Rygaards School policy that teachers are not obliged to provide extra work as this is seen as taking time away from the preparation of class lessons. In addition, the annual work plan or contract that is signed by teachers does not make provision for time to plan and present 'extra work' for children missing scheduled lessons.

When it comes to questions concerning emotional aspects, the following comments seem to confirm Bowlby's (1969:75) attachment theory assumption that parents need to be "assured that they are cared for and important, since emotional support is related to people's need for attachment".

Parents need to be praised for their efforts and not just told about problems with their child.

We deserve more consideration when it comes to talking about our feelings and insecurities.

Significantly the emotional expectations of many parents extend to long after their departure from RRC and Denmark. A number of parents are eager to exchange email addresses in order to maintain contact between members of the staff, themselves and their children and many of them continued to correspond with RRC staff around re-location issues affecting their children. This group of parents often belonged to families who had previously moved and had seen the worth of maintaining contact for their child's sake.

It is not uncommon for parents attending a parent consultation to ask the question, "So what can we do to help?" This same question arose continuously in informal conversations and towards the Christmas break a parent suggested that parents be given some direction about activities that they could work on at home to reinforce skills that their own particular child needed to master. From these remarks it was evident that parents actually need practical examples of learning activities and approaches to "learning at home". As a consequence, RRC staff prepared a list of the kinds of activities that parents could work on at home to support their child's learning and parents were also provided with updated recommendations of the specific activities that they needed to work on with their child. They are appreciative when teachers do provide them with this kind of support.

On the issue of informational support parents, new to Denmark, made a number of suggestions about how the school could assist them. Something as simple as an informational brochure on clothing requirements, use of the public transport system to get to school and how to handle new situations in Denmark, can relieve parents of a great deal of stress and serve a very basic need for security. From minutes of a meeting held in October 2005, it appears that this request was passed on to the family facilitator and it appears that the Parents' Association has taken measures to prepare an information brochure for new parents.

It is evident that feedback from parents is integral to knowing what their problems are and finding ways of supporting them in solving them. However, such support is not school-wide and is dependent on the initiative of individual teachers, which means that parents could experience variations in the quality of support that they receive from year to year. A school wide programme to establish the needs of parents would be a start to becoming aware of them and beginning to plan ways in which the school that supports parents to assist their children's learning.

5.2.4 The Danish social and educational model and its impact on Rygaards School

5.2.4.1 The role assumed by Danish media in the lives of parents

It seems then, as a consequence of globalisation, nation-states have increasingly withdrawn from their public responsibilities and that other interested parties have emerged to take over the task. In this regard, privatisation and the concentration of media ownership and control, as well as the hegemony of its discourse, have a significant influence on the lives of families with children.

Since the media functions as a partner in the lives of parents it must be considered a potential provider of support. Talking about locally based print media in Denmark, we find lively debates on social and political issues relating to families. Many of these issues were raised with both teaching colleagues and RRC parents.

Table 8 (see Appendix 12) presents an overview of newspaper articles dealing with parenting issues or directed at parents. These were largely published in a Danish daily newspaper, *Politiken Weekend*, over the period 30.1.2005 to 20.11.2005 and which illustrates the media's attempt to cover the issue. In the author's professional capacity *Politiken* stands out as an adequate example of a newspaper that eagerly debates issues relating to the research topic. Additionally *Politiken* issues a special supplement on Saturdays that dealing s with children and parents. Note should also be made of the fact that weekend editions of similar international newspapers exist and that the researcher assumes that RRC parents have access to these and that they read them.

While parents have a need to discuss the demands of parenting, it is debatable whether the majority of RRC's parents were able to read the articles mentioned in Table 8 (see Appendix). However, keeping in mind the influence of globalisation it could be argued that similar articles appear in other newspapers around the world and that RRC parents are aware of much of the international debate going on around education. Danish society, whether in the family, school, university or workplace is characterised by debate, debate and more debate. The public service media in particular, serve an important role in keeping social discussion alive in Denmark. Following the election of the present liberal Danish government, some of the vibrant debates that have been going on in the country include the issue of working families with children and the standards achieved in education, as revealed by the latest PISA results, in comparison to other countries both within and outside the European Union. This debate, emphasised by the media, is often inspired by educationalists. The outcome of a number of debates has resulted in teachers' unions supporting labour laws that protect the rights of teachers many of which are not enjoyed by teachers in other parts of the world. At the beginning of each year teachers, including those at Rygaards, sign a work plan/contract with their governing Boards. This includes the various tasks that they are expected to carry out, such as, parent meetings and consultations and the number of hours for the tasks are specified. In this regard, parents are often surprised when teachers ask them to make an appointment to see them and are not available for informal and unscheduled consultations. In addition, an important aspect to remember in relation to this study is that matters concerning children under the age of five lie within the domain of the Ministry of Social Welfare and not the Department of Education. Child-care is a controversial source of debate at present because of the election of a conservative government. Furthermore, since RRC parents receive subsidies from

their local municipality, the Ministry of Social Welfare has some say in what provision is made for these children, some of which, may not fulfil the expectations of international parents' with four to five year olds.

RRC parents were overheard talking about commercial television programmes like BBC prime's 'Super-nanny', 'I want my mummy' and 'The house of tiny tearaways', in which, for instance, various experts and child psychologists advise parents on how to discipline their four year old, establish a bed-time routine or overcome their five year old child's aversion to food.

Moreover this media trend is not limited to TV or to developed countries. The author wrote the results of this study while in Nairobi, Kenya. Here one can buy any number of magazines directed at parents. Titles include 'Parents' (a ten year old publication), 'Mums and dads' and 'Moms and babies', 'The Nation' which publications came onto the Kenyan market in December 2005. The weekend newspapers, 'Saturday and Sunday Nation' and 'The Standard', also contain articles on children, their health and child-rearing issues, all of which are directed at the growing middle-class.

The contribution of media in supporting parents is debatable, but what is certain, is that they are vital in supporting or challenging existing national and global attitudes concerning families with children. On the global level they influence the opinions and attitudes of voters and on the local level, they appeal directly to the feelings and experiences of parents who find themselves juggling their time and energy between home and work. Consequently, I suggest that while the messages may be mixed, the media may well provide support to parents that is lacking as a consequence of reduced social networks and reductions in the allocation of public resources.

5.2.4.2 The social welfare and education system

Since the Nordic countries view the family as the core unit of society, mention is made here regarding the Danish government's attempts to improve support to families with young children. Maternity leave in Scandinavia is, on average, 34 weeks. Pregnant women in Denmark receive 90% of their salary during this period. A further period of three months is guaranteed for those women who can afford to

receive only 70% of their salary. In addition, fathers have the option of taking paternity leave for a period of ten weeks while receiving 70% of their salary. A flexibility clause also allows those fathers, who do not take the ten week period, to use this time to take care of the child in times of ill health. The obvious economic consequence of paternity leave for the family goes some way to explain why the majority of fathers only take a fraction of paternity leave due to them. Another reason for this situation could be because men who take paternity leave often lose out when it comes to being promoted since male-culture still looks on child-care as a 'soft value' and not conducive to the realities of life, that is, economics.

In a country where the majority of women join the labour market, Denmark provides public subsidised child care programmes for children from six months to school-going age. In addition a child-benefit or family allowance either as direct cash benefit or a refundable tax credit is in operation in Denmark. Parents are guaranteed institutional care for their children when they return to the labour market. However, having painted this rosy picture of conditions in Denmark, it should be noted that cuts in social welfare have occurred and that family support is continually under threat from economic considerations.

The degree of national responsibility is reflected in differences in child-care and educational goals. In countries where there is a strong emphasis on educational goals for four to five year olds, the institution tends to fall under the Dept of Education and in countries where the emphasis is on social development, care falls under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare, as is the case in Denmark. This emphasis has implications for the type of support that a society offers parents, the experiences that their four year olds receive, as well as the level of formal education sanctioned by the Danish authorities.

A closer look at the education system in Denmark reports that "in 2000, the average grant towards the operational expenditures per pupil per year amounts to about DKK 34,000 and the average fees paid by parents amount to DKK 8,000" (The Danish Ministry of Education Website on private education www.uvm.dk/cgi/printpage/pf.cgi). In addition special grants are provided for children with special needs. As regards the subsidy allocated to RRC pupils, municipalities pay up to 70% of the fee of DKK 2,500 per month.

The Danish Ministry of Education Website (www.uvm.dk/cgi/printpage/pf.cgi) mentions that Danish education legislation “contains rules about government financial support [for private schools] but only the most general rules about the educational content”. It continues, “it is parents themselves who must choose a supervisor to check the pupils level of achievement [but that] schools may always come to the Ministry for advice if and when they need it” (see issues raised by headmaster at Parents’ Association meeting of tenth October 2005 below and The Independent Schools Inspectorate Report and Gentofte Municipality’s inspection report on Rygaards Website (www.rygaards.com)). When it comes to parent governance in private schools in Denmark in general, mention is only made of the fact that, “the school must be a self-governing institution with a board of governors responsible to the Ministry of Education” (www.uvm.dk/cgi/printpage/pf.cgi) but no other mention is made of the expectations of parents in the life of the school. Accordingly constitutions governing the rights and responsibilities of Rygaards School Board, RRC Board and The International Parents’ Committee were drawn up in accordance with Danish legislation.

Under Danish law, unlike children attending RRC, young children of four to five years do not learn to read and write. The working parent is the norm in Rygaards Danish department and this seems to have had an impact on the school’s attitudes towards and expectation of parent involvement in general. Consequently, parent involvement seems to be limited to volunteerism and participation in governance with very limited inclusion at the classroom level. The limited time that working parents have with their children means that they are often loath to tackle ‘problems’ and would rather spend ‘quality time’ with their children, which means that teacher’s are often left to sort things out in the classroom. The same observation can be applied to international parents whose work takes them away from home for longer or shorter periods of time. A combination of career demands and family planning results in a ‘golden child’ mentality amongst parents, many of whom only begin families in their late 30’s. Children are then considered sacrosanct and given the kind of preferential treatment at home that their parents expect will be repeated in the classroom, and which often gives rise to conflicts between parents and teachers. As a Key Stage 1 teacher commented:

Parents are the hardest part of my work. They think that their child is the only one in the classroom and that we share the same kind of emotional relationship with their child, and then so many of them just pull their kid out of school for a holiday without even giving us a chance to say good-bye. It's such a contradiction.

The next question to ask, is how the Danish model impacts on the ability of teachers to provide parents with the kind of support they need?

No testing occurs before the age of seven which is the age at which Danish children begin formal schooling including children with special needs who enter RRC and the national year 1. However, since RRC falls outside the jurisdiction of the very limited support of psychological and speech therapy services provided by the municipality, RRC teachers are obliged to struggle along in the classroom and parents are left hanging on a limb until these children are eligible to be tested and their special needs identified. This can take up to two years. In this regard, the pedagogical consultant proved to be an important resource person since the RRC leader was able to share her observations with a professional person who had experience with young children and who was able to provide support in meetings held with the concerned parents. While she was unable to provide therapy assistance, she was an invaluable source of information in terms of what parents' rights were and where they could go for outside assistance.

After analysing 139 responses from parents to a pre-inspection questionnaire and conducting 22 discussions with teaching staff, the Independent Inspectorate noted that, despite complaints to the contrary, "parents have good opportunities to discuss their children's progress with teachers ... only reports in Key Stage 1 clearly state the work that pupils have covered, as well as their strengths ... and only few reports give any advice to parents or pupils for improvement or development of work". Again, the development of reports has been left to teachers in the various Key Stages, based on the Danish concept of working in teams. Consequently, there has been no co-ordination between 'teams' to determine the objectives of producing reports for parents, one of which could be to assist them in supporting their children's learning and the result is uneven quality of parent support in the school as a whole.

5.2.4.3 Danish legislation and the rights and responsibilities of parents in relation to education

Danish legislation stipulates the rights and responsibilities of parents in relation to education (www.uvm.dk/cgi/printpage/pf.cgi). As a way of determining the degree to which parents at Rygaards assume their task in this regard a critical examination of existing parent involvement in Rygaards international Parents' Association, ensues.

The International Parents' Association constitutes an important body of parent representatives, amongst them – the recently affiliated RRC parents, and reflects the aims and concerns of parents as well as the activities that they initiate to support learning in RRC as well as throughout the school.

In accordance with Danish legislation, the rights and responsibilities of Rygaards international Parents Association as well as the Association's objectives, are specified in its rules of April 2003 (Rygaards International Parents' Association rules as of April 2003:1 see Appendix 1).

The Associations objectives are to:

- Achieve the best possible understanding between its members and the school's management and teaching staff.
- Arrange and encourage class meetings of parents and teachers, so as to facilitate communication, understanding and the solution of mutual problems concerning the school and its pupils.
- Arrange meetings and social activities of educational and general interest to further the members' or pupils involvement with the school
- Arrange and encourage fund-raising activities in support of school purposes such as provision of a library, reference books, educational aids, equipment or facilities or other charitable projects which the school, teachers, pupils or association members may wish to support.

Discussion: Rygaards international Parents' Association

Significantly if I refer back to Epstein's categories of parent involvement (Epstein 1987:97 -101) the association's first two objectives refer directly to parent governance, the second to educational and social activities and the fourth to fund-raising.

While one of the objectives is to promote understanding between parents and teachers, there seems to be little evidence of how this is to be implemented at Rygaards, since the association's rules make no reference to meetings between each class delegate and class teacher, the role of the teacher's representative who attends the meetings, how parent representatives can utilise the presence of the teacher at these meetings, when and how class representatives will consult with class parents before such meetings, how they can assist in class disputes or how teacher's interests and concerns can be presented to the association.

These observations are supported by comments made by staff members of Key Stage 1 who felt that contact with the Parents' Committee was poor due to the fact that little communication occurred between themselves and parents' delegates prior to or after committee meetings. Furthermore, teachers remarked that the parents' representatives' contact with class parents was difficult to detect and that as far as they were aware neither parents nor teachers were ever asked to contribute points for the agenda of the associations' meetings.

It is also questionable whether parents really enjoy the support of teachers who commented that:

Parent representatives. seldom step in and arrange a class meeting when parents express dissatisfaction and teachers are under fire. Sometimes they even join in the slaughter!

The fact that international parents are always on the move means that they are not fully aware of Danish law in relation to parent governance or their power in relation to the school's management and that this makes for a parent body that is toothless and regards the headmaster as boss. It is just pro forma democracy.

These comments smack of disenchantment with the present level of communication and information between teachers and parent representatives. In addition the Independent Schools Inspectorate Report,

January 2005:5 (www.rygaards.com) supports the frustrations expressed by staff members and mentions that the governance and management of the school:

lack of any specific middle management roles within the school, as is common in Denmark, inhibits the sharing of good practice.

An initial examination of the minutes of the international Parents' Association meeting held on tenth October 2005, (see Appendix 13) sheds some light on the nature of parent involvement at this level of the school. The issues that were dealt with at the first meeting of the new school year are an indication of the concerns and interests of the school's administration as well as parents in relation to their children in particular and the school as a whole.

The first point of interest is which parents volunteered and were elected to participate in the association for 2005-2006. Unlike in other classes, a class representative and a deputy were elected to represent RRC. As the class representative travels a lot it was felt that two people could share the task and cover for one another. The RRC deputy representative was also elected as the association's family facilitator. She is a new parent to Rygaards and has an older child in the school. Further investigation of parent membership of the Parents' Association revealed that of the twenty elected class representatives eligible to vote, twelve were former RRC parents, three had held positions on the now defunct RRC Board and four were former RRC fathers, one of whom had sat on RRC's Board. Furthermore, of these twelve, one is presently an elected member of Rygaards School Board, a second serves as vice-chairperson on the Parents Association, one is now a class representative for Year 7 while another is a class representative for Year 5.

These observations can be interpreted in a number of ways. Firstly they indicate a high level of involvement by parents whose children have attended the recently established RRC. Secondly, the parents who were elected to the Parents' Association are all conversant in English (though some of them were not proficient during their initial RRC year). Thirdly, they constitute a group of well educated adults, amongst others a lawyer, a medical doctor, an antiques auctioneer, a banker, a TV journalist and two economists. Fourthly, their penetration into the higher grades may be an indication

that attempts by the RRC leader to make new parents feel welcome in the school at an early stage, was sufficiently successful to have engendered and encouraged their continued and more governance oriented involvement in subsequent years. Lastly the statistics indicate that parental experience of governance at the level of RRC has resulted in involvement in school-wide projects and at higher levels of governance in the school.

A second look at the minutes of the Parents' Association meeting draws our attention to the nature of issues raised by the school's leadership and parents themselves. The issues raised by the headmaster and head of department, dealt specifically with educational issues relating to Danish inspection requirements, Danish language examination results and information about the building extensions to the school. The procedure of communication between school and home was raised by the departmental head, as this is a pivotal part of his task. It should also be mentioned that item 5.27 of the Independent Inspectorate Report states "the [school's] provision of a meeting room for parents encourages close links between home and school". However, it is difficult to ascertain the basis for this finding and while it is possible that this provision puts parents in touch with one another, it is questionable whether a room in the school's attic increases links between teachers and parents, since no staff of Key Stage 1 ever met with or held a meeting with parents in this room.

Issues raised by parents on the other hand, highlight that they are aware of the needs of internationally mobile families and that when given the opportunity, they made suggestions, took initiatives and implemented projects to meet these needs. However, as the deputy chairperson noted in an email correspondence:

Of course the success of the programme depends on the individual class representative.

It is evident that new families at Rygaards receive a large amount of the association's attention and parent representatives are keen to make new families feel welcome and at home. The Independent Schools Inspectorate states "the committee runs an effective welcome programme for new families" (Independent Schools Inspectorate Report 2005: 4 www.rygaards.com). On the other hand the school itself does not receive recognition in this area and it is noteworthy that under the heading "What the

school could do better” in the Independent Schools Inspectorate’s Report of January 2005:2, it is observed that “there are no formal induction arrangements to provide support for those new to teaching or those new to the school” (Independent Schools Inspectorate Report. 2005: 2 www.rygaards.com).

The association’s organisation of social events for both parents and children is an indication of an awareness of the importance of creating a sense of community for transient families. Supporting cultural events is also high on the association’s agenda and initiatives taken by the Catholic Families’ Association are evidence of a strong commitment to fostering spiritual values throughout the school’s community. Interest is high in promoting better communication between home and school and providing sufficient and safe playing areas for pupils.

5.2.5 Policies traditions and practices relating to parent support of learning at Rygaards School in general

Having examined the global and social environment within which Rygaards School exists, an examination of its mission statement, its policy on communication with parents, its governing body’s contact with parents and the findings of the independent schools inspection undertaken in October 2005 will shed light on the general level of support that Rygaards provides for its parent body.

5.2.5.1 *Rygaards mission statement*

In its mission statement, Rygaards pledges to “work together with parents to provide schooling which is in accordance with Danish law ... to strengthen pupil confidence ... develop personality ... impart ethical awareness ... provide a broad-based education using modern methods [and] develop a sense of responsibility for fellow beings and respect for all people ”.

(www.rygaards.com/international/Visitors/mission.htm)

At no point in this mission statement is any mention made of the school’s globally mobile and multi-cultural population. The only reference to its ‘multi-national population’ and their ‘global mobility’ to be found in an accessible school document, occurs on Rygaards School Webpage where it is stated that,

“The International Department caters – irrespective of creed and nationality – for those who are only in Denmark on a temporary basis.”(www.rygaards.com/international/Visitors/visitors.htm)

A critical examination of the school’s mission highlights some noteworthy observations in this regard.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate Report mentions the high rate of mobility amongst families at Rygaards. “Some 25% of pupils change during each year as they move with their internationally mobile parents” and “staff turnover is inevitably rapid from time to time” (Independent schools inspectorate 2005:6). As regards the cultural make-up of its family population, the report states that, “only about 25% of the pupils have English as their first language” as well as “the Danish school system includes no tradition or expectation that staff will run extra-curricular activities for their pupils”. (Independent Schools Inspectorate 2005: 6). If we examine the mission statement from the perspective of family mobility, it could be argued that the provision of flexible hours for care, home-visits or parent-teacher support programmes seem to be excluded from Rygaards mission of working with parents.

The inspectorate report also makes mention of the school’s links with parents and the community and comments that “there is a strong belief that education is a partnership between school and parents” (Independent Schools Inspectorate Report 2005: 12 - 13). Keeping Epstein’s categories of parent involvement in mind, namely “supervising and guiding their child and providing needed learning materials, communicating with the school about their child’s progress, initiating learning activities at home that complement those learnt at school, volunteering their time, attending school functions and participating in decision making in schools and collaborating with the wider community on educational matters” (Epstein 1987: 97-101) it is noteworthy that the Inspectorate Report uses the following examples of activities carried out by parents in the school, “hearing reading, helping on outings and those with special skills gave talks and demonstrations to pupils. For example a Japanese parent demonstrated the art of origami and how to put on a kimono. Parents are currently planning a series of talks to give to older pupils on ideas of what particular jobs or professions are like.” If we relate these aforementioned activities referred to in the report to Epstein’s categories of parent involvement, they

appear to meet her categories of parent involvement except the activity of classroom penetration by parents.

While there is a pledge “to work closely with parents”, the lack of an induction programme for new teachers and parents, as well as a staff development plan, must have an impact on the manner and degree to which teachers and parents are able to assist one another in supporting learning within the classroom as well as the home.

Key Stage 1 teachers appear to face special challenges. These challenges appear to go unnoticed and unsupported by the school’s leadership apparently because of the lack of middle management and the fact that both the head of department and headmaster have their teaching roots in secondary school teaching. Teachers at the Key Stage 1 level face anxious parents with young children. During the period of the study, of the six teachers in Key Stage 1, three were under the age of 33 and relatively new to teaching and the researcher was completely new to teaching the British curriculum. Two of these worked together without the support of a mentor. The salary scale for teachers at the reception and year 1 level is determined by the Danish system that categorises them as pedagogues and not teachers. This makes year 2 a much more attractive and lucrative option. The positions at this level were filled by experienced and more mature teachers who had managed to work their way up from the year 1 level leaving a vacuum of experience at the lower level of the school. Of the six Key Stage 1 teachers, all three under 33 fell pregnant within a short period of one another, two from the same class had a year’s leave of absence that fell outside the parameters of a school year, another teacher was asked to take five weeks sick leave after her assistant had a similar period of illness earlier in the year. This meant that parents in the reception and year 1 classes experienced a change of eight teachers over a period of eighteen months. This is not conducive to establishing absolutely close ties of support between the school and home

The following comments made by key stage teachers reflect the effect of the absence of middle-management support at Rygaards:

Sometimes I can't sleep at night worrying about parents' complaints and the worst is that there isn't really anyone I can talk to about it.

I've learnt to pack things in. It really doesn't pay to upset parents about their children because at the end of the day we can't be sure of support from the top.

The consequences of the management structure were plentiful during the period over which the study was conducted. There was a high rate of absenteeism amongst Key Stage 1 teachers. Furthermore, the RRC staff had no access to counselling support, the headmaster and departmental head failed to support requests for assistance from both the RRC leader and assistant in resolving a conflict crisis between them and the demands made by parents were at times overbearing. This resulted in the stress-related departure of both RRC's leader and the replacement assistant before the end of a school year.

Key Stage 1 meetings were attended by the international head and focused around sharing of dates and recording of children with problems although help from the outside in assisting these children was not available. A review of the minutes of these meetings revealed that focus on educational topics was rare. This may be due to a number of reasons. The two hour monthly meeting was dominated by organisational matters pertaining to the whole international department and lacked any discussion of parent involvement. The new teachers used the meetings to clarify their uncertainties about school procedures and the more experienced teachers, who had been at Rygaards for a long time, one for almost twenty years, had got used to the status quo, and were somewhat resistant to the suggestion that time could be set aside for educational discussion led by appointed mentors.

The independent schools' inspectorate noted that, "the staff development programme was approved by the governors but lacks a clear structure" (2005: 5 www.rygaards.com). During the five year duration of this study, the RRC leader and assistant attended three first-aid courses, two courses related to the virtues and one on the introduction of the school's intra-net system. At no point were they invited to attend yearly appraisal meetings with the departmental head or members of the then governing body. Furthermore, the Inspectorate report mentions that, "the Danish emphasis is on teamwork, rather than

hierarchies, but teams need to work together to be effective” (2005: 16 See www.rygaards.com). It was therefore interesting to note that only the experienced Year 2 teacher volunteered a week of her holidays each year to attend a reading course in Britain, but the information gained was never formally shared with colleagues in Key Stage meetings, confirming the Inspectorate’s comment that the lack of middle-management “inhibits the sharing of good practice” (2005: 5 www.rygaards.com).

The independent inspectorate also noted that, “the school does not have a merit system”. When it comes to teachers however, the governors recently announced that teachers who undertake further teaching study while working will receive a small financial reward. Consequently, two secondary teachers were awarded Dkr 3000 each when they completed their Master’s degree. Whether the same is applicable to the RRC leader, as author of this Master’s dissertation, is not known.

It should be noted, that following the, the new departmental head asked teachers to submit points for the development of a mentor checklist, the idea being that it would provide the mentor with information and practices that needed to be brought to the attention of all new staff members. A similar suggestion was made by Parents’ Association’s family facilitator for new parents.

Very importantly, at the Key Stage 1 level of school, the issue of ‘parents as clients’ takes on its own particular meaning. Mobile parents find themselves confronted by the demands of re-location and their own sense of security is challenged, even more so when their young children find settling in at school difficult and begin display changes in behaviour at home such as wetting the bed. Interestingly two separate inspections concur on the provision of teaching at RRC level. An inspection carried out by Gentofte Municipality, the municipality in which RRC exists, reports that “teachers are competent, positive and committed, [that] the allocation of teaching hours at state schools shows that Rygaards, especially in the younger class, provides more tuition than the guidelines for allocation of teaching hours at state schools decree and statistics show that the number of students in the class is lower than that in Gentofte Municipality’s state schools”. (Gentofte Municipality inspection report of 23rd June 2005: 1 www.rygaards.com) Similarly, the Independent Inspectorate report makes the observation that, “RRC teachers have high expectations of their pupils and know them well... and provision for the children’s personal, social and emotional development is very good” (2005: 16 www.rygaards.com).

In other words, both reports suggest that the needs of parents and pupils receive adequate attention from RRC staff. Parents however, are not always convinced of this.

I'm not sure that you really understand my child, he's not used to this system.

We feel that you make too many demands of children this age.

During the five years of this study, RRC staff accommodated the needs of a child with a life threatening heart condition, two children with serious life threatening food allergies, nine children suffering from asthma and four children with delayed speech development. In addition, they had to accommodate families who arrived or departed mid-term, those who spoke little or no English, a family where the parents left their children in the care of a new au pair for three weeks while they travelled to Vietnam to receive an adopted baby, a family who went through a very disturbing divorce, the anxiety of parents whose child underwent open heart surgery twice in six months, a single mother trying to juggle work and parenting demands and a divorced mother who feared that her estranged husband would kidnap her child. These instances demonstrate the level of special needs amongst RRC families. Most demanding however, were the demands of a mother, who continually found reason to take her daughter to medical specialists and who make increasing demands on staff to take special care of her daughter. Unfortunately, no time is scheduled in a teacher's annual plan for accommodating anxious parents with a range of different educational and cultural expectations and as one teacher said:

I'm just too busy trying to cover the curriculum, prepare for and conduct parent consultations, keep records and write reports, to spend the time they demand of me, talking to them and listening to them blaming me for the problems that they and their children are experiencing.

In general, the children came from privileged homes and they arrived with a solid foundation of learning. However, children are still busy developing and parents forget this and that change is inevitable. Ironically, parents are dismayed when their child begins to want to decide what clothes to wear, which peers they want to establish friendships with and which learning activities they like to do

over and over again. Parents often become distressed when their child's level of independence increases:

My baby isn't a baby anymore. That makes me sad.

I'm not planning to have any more children and I was hoping to have a baby for a little longer.

Returning to the school's mission, it mentions the pledge to provide "a broad – based education". The use of social and cultural capital, as represented by parents, seems to be limited to volunteering to help out when a teacher is away and on UN Day. The Independent Schools Inspectorate Report, January 2005: 1-26, (www.rygaards.com) states, amongst other things, that:

- pupils and teachers co-operate well
- links with parents are strong and parents are closely involved in the life of the school
- curriculum provision is sound, but it is uneven and not broad and balanced for pupils of all ages
- little use is made of knowledge gained from assessment to adapt the curriculum to pupils needs
- pupils are not provided with sufficiently demanding material or suitable extension tasks ... and the teaching does not provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils.

A critical analysis of these features, however, seems to support the observations that Rygaards mission statement does not make sufficient provision for the school's globally mobile population and that the school is presently unable to provide the degree of flexibility that parents need. Furthermore that the social, intellectual and cultural capital, resources represented by the parents, do not really penetrate Rygaards classrooms in any meaningful way, that there are no induction programmes for new parents and that parents of young children have special needs but teachers at this level are given little assistance by the school to support them in their parenting and educative tasks.

5.2.5.2 *Rygaards policy on the method of communication between parents and school*

Rygaards policy on communication between the school and parents draws attention to Danish legislation requirements pertaining to private schools (Appendix 14):

- It stipulates that “according to Danish legislation on private schools, parents have the right of educational quality control” and it goes on to describe the role of the Parent’s Association as a forum for dialogue between the school and home.
- It mentions the requirement of “an annual external inspection”, a report of which must be presented to the Parents’ Association.
- It states that, “parents must keep themselves informed about their own child’s progress” by attending parent-teacher consultation and class meetings”.
- It notes that, “parents may sit in on lessons after obtaining permission from the Departmental head”.
- It refers to the “line of authority” in the school in the event of a problem and urges parents to “consult the class teacher, approach the departmental head and then headmaster, and failing this in writing to the Board of Governors”.

A critical examination of this document highlights a number of problems. Firstly, it came as a surprise when, in reply to a series of questions about parent involvement in the Parent’s Association from the researcher of this study, the deputy chairperson, in email communication of 27 October 2005 said:

I have not read the COBISec inspection report but I hope that I have answered your question.

This comments draws attention to the fact that carrying out required inspections is one thing, but whether parents read its findings is questionable.

Secondly, despite the school's attempts to be inclusive of and transparent to families, parents are unaware of their rights, as reflected in the comment:

I've never really had any feedback from the class representative about what goes on at the Parent Association meetings:

Moreover, information does not reach them, as reflected in comments such as:

We heard about the 'welcome barbeque' after it had happened. That was a real pity.

I knew that a decision had to be made about how the funds raised at the bazaar were going to be spent, but the class representative didn't really go around and ask what we thought was needed for RRC

Additionally, and more serious in terms of parent-teacher communication and co-operation in situations when cliques of parents meet and do not consult the class representative., the class teacher or departmental head but take their grievances directly to the headmaster, they dis-empower the teacher. The responsibility for resolution of the conflict is placed on the shoulders of someone who has no contact with daily happenings at the classroom level, and in the case of RRC, where no staff appraisal meetings have taken place.

5.2.5.3 Communication between Rygaards governing board and parents

On 1 November 1 2005, Rygaards School Board addressed a letter to parents (see Appendix 15), informing them about proposed building renovations in the school. It should be noted here that such direct communication between the Board and parent body and teaching staff was unusual. Additionally, while the chairperson and other members of the Board attend public functions in the school, whether new parents would recognise them or know about the governance post they hold, is

debatable, unless parents had attended the particular function, “The Board meets the parents, evening” held on February 22nd 2005 - a meeting that never came to the attention of RRC staff or parents. In general it could be said that the channel of communication from the Board is generally via the monthly “*Rygaards News*”, and is ineffective.

An examination of the December 2004 issue of this school newsletter shows that it contained a letter of farewell from the outgoing head of department and news from the Board about her replacement. In its March 2005 edition, one of the outgoing parent representatives advertised her position to the parent body. In her concluding remarks, she stated that, “It is hard to explain why, but I have really enjoyed my time on the Board and am sorry to be stopping. I have learnt much about the running of the school and have enjoyed working together with the other Board members and heads in contributing to improve Rygaards School. In short, I can highly recommend the post! Moreover, the new parent representative can look forward to exciting decision making in relation to the planning of the new school buildings and to hearing about how the responses to the Independent Inspectorate Report are progressing.” (*Rygaards News* March 2005: 5) The September 2005 edition, the first of the new school year, contained nothing from the School Board.

It would seem, therefore, that the Parents’ Association elects a parent representative to the School’s Governing Board, but that communication between the Board and the parent body as a whole is somewhat sporadic and distant. Furthermore, considering the distance between the Board and the individual teacher, as well as parent representatives to the Parents’ Association and class teachers, the likelihood of the Board being able to assist teachers to support parents is rather remote.

5.2.5.4 Rygaards support of parent involvement in governance

Moving on to the question of actual parent involvement in governance, as a way of supporting learning, the parents at Rygaards are elected to a number of parent bodies, amongst others the International Parents’ Association, The Catholic Families Association and the Rygaards Board of Governors. The responsibilities of the first two bodies are limited to “but not final decision making in terms of educational issues”. (rule 3 of the International Parents’ Association, see Appendix 1) while the Board

of Governors has the executive power concerning dispersal of state subsidies and fees and the headmaster is responsible for making decisions relating to all educational matters.

Following the Inspectorate's Report (2005: 2 see www.rygaards.com) on the "lack of any induction programmes" it is evident that there are also no policies in place for the training of parent members of these bodies by either outsiders or insiders. Here I refer back to the minutes of the Parent's Association meeting of 10th October 2005, (Appendix 13) where the family facilitator made a suggestion to introduce an activity that the association was already undertaking, but she was not made aware of it. Similarly, there is no training programme in place at Rygaards, for training those parents who participate in voluntary activities in the classroom. For example, parents who 'assist' in the classroom very seldom, if ever know what the objective of the lesson is, nor are they aware of principles of teaching methodology. Consequently, these parents are expected to carry out activities for which they have received no training. As a Key Stage 1 teacher commented:

I've got enough to do without also having to train the parent who's supposed to be helping me.

A dissatisfied parent complained, when a parent came in to assist while a teacher was away sick:

We are paying school fees for our child to be taught but Mrs G has no teaching qualification and she speaks English with a terrible accent.

Similarly, the hand over of power between elected members of the school's various associations and s seems to involve individual parents meeting one another informally in order to hand over files and explain the contents thereof, as was the case with the now defunct RRC Board and the present Parents' Association.

When it comes to monetary compensation most parents are volunteers and only in situations where parents have working permits, and are called in as supply teachers, do they receive compensation for their efforts. Most parent volunteers indicated that monetary compensation is not the primary reason for their continued participation:

Helping out has helped me to make new friends.

Whenever I'm asked to help it gives a sense of well-being...I feel accepted and appreciated.

Coming in to help has really improved my English. The children are so patient with my poor English.

In its description of the task of the class representative, rule 6 of the Parents' Association (see Appendix 1) specifies that "[he/she] is encouraged to help establish contact between families joining their class and where possible match them with families already present in the class that are compatible, in terms of language, country of origin etc". No similar statement exists in any public document for Rygaards teaching staff in terms of making sure that new families are introduced to others who are more experienced. Similarly, it goes on to say that, "the class representative is encouraged to liaise between parents and the class teacher where issues arise that concern the class". However this has never happened in the history of RRC despite a conflict that arose involved two opposing groups of parents in the class.

5.2.6 Parent involvement and parent-teacher support in RRC

5.2.6.1 *The demographics of RRC's parent body in 2005 – 2006*

Taking a sample of twenty families who attended RRC in the school year beginning August 2005, the responses to a questionnaire of that time, show that the breadwinner in six families had changed his/her place of employment in the last six to twelve months, that seven families had moved to Denmark in the last six to twelve months and five in the last six months. In addition, it was revealed that ten breadwinners regularly spend short periods of time away from their family and five have been separated from their family for longer periods of time during the last six to twelve months. It appears that only four respondents had not changed employment, moved or been separated from their family in 2005. Finally, one family would leave RRC after only ten weeks to take up a new posting elsewhere and a second would arrive to take the place after three months of the school year had passed.

Additionally, eleven families had lived in more than one country, fifteen spoke more than one language at home and the same number had had contact with grandparents in the last three months as a result of the opportunity afforded by the summer holidays. Fifteen of the children in this intake, were born outside of Denmark, twelve spoke more than one language, eleven had attended pre-school care in another country, seven had older siblings who had attended schools elsewhere in the world and nine had older siblings in Rygaards School.

Finally, a closer look at the parents themselves shows that they came from a variety of countries and cultures, namely, Spain, Norway, Bolivia, Britain, Denmark, Uganda, Egypt, Japan, America, Australia, Germany, France, China, Brazil, Holland, India and Korea. Each of them came from a particular educational system of learning and teaching and each with a specific set of expectations for their children. In addition, they did not share a common religious and spiritual background and their gender perspectives, influenced by cultural traditions and beliefs, showed wide variations.

The high degree of breadwinner mobility amongst RRC parents is obvious in the statistics given above. Mobility at family level is generally less hectic, but nevertheless caregivers and children in RRC families are subject to regular re-location. Additionally, while all members of the family are subject to the cultural challenges of their new environment, the children have to adapt to a new learning environment and make the language of this environment their own. This ever-changing milieu is constantly producing challenges for the RRC staff. The daily level of parent involvement is also affected, as well as on the relationship of support that may develop between parents and RRC staff.

5.2.6.2 The development of communication and parent involvement practices in RRC

An examination of RRC's procedures in dealing with new parents shows that the initial contact with the school was by telephone or email and that they had little if any knowledge about the reception class.

In response to an October 2000 questionnaire about the availability of information relating to RRC, a parent wrote,

For those parents who are looking for information about the reception class, before they re-locate to Denmark, it would be useful if some information was posted on the schools Website.

Consequently, in 2001 a page was set up specifically for RRC on the school's Website. The information was drawn up by the RRC leader in co-operation with the class assistant, parent representatives to the RRC Board of 2000 and the technical assistance of the teacher responsible for IT in the school.

Once an initial contact had been established between RRC and families, interested parents were invited to make an appointment to visit the school. This meeting was undertaken by the international department head who took parents for a tour of the school and then handed them over to the RRC leader to answer questions related specifically to the reception class. As a result of the experience gained in meeting a number of parents, a check list was prepared by the RRC leader as a quick reminder of relevant points that should be brought to interested parents' attention. These points included school opening hours, holidays, details of fees, registration fee and state subsidies, clothing requirements as well as relevant details of the demographics of the families in their particular RRC intake.

An application form was prepared by RRC's leader in co-operation with the departmental head, a copy of which appeared on the class's web site, and which requested information relating to the child's health, competence in English, previous pre-school experience and the parents reason for selecting Rygaards School. Once these applications were processed, parents were contacted by the RRC leader, by telephone, letter or email, advised of their successful application and requested to pay a non-refundable registration fee.

Taking the patterns of family travel during the summer holidays into consideration, the special needs of non-English speaking families and those new to Denmark, as well as the anxiety that young children often face on the first day in a new environment, a letter was posted to new families, before the summer holidays, giving details of a time slot that had been allocated to them and their child for a small group

meeting with RRC staff, together with 3 other children and their parents, on the first day of school. Parents seemed to appreciate the letter as is reflected in their comments:

It was very useful to know what type of clothing you wanted. If I hadn't got this information I don't think that I would have put thought into the fact that the choice of shoe fasteners would assist G in the development of his independence.

Coming from a different country, it was especially useful for us to know what types of clothing we could be expecting to use in Denmark.

We were so relieved to know that our child would not be the only one who could not speak English. This made us feel that we could concentrate on preparing her for the social challenge of her new school instead of teaching her some English words.

In addition, a letter of welcome was addressed to the child and posted in a brightly coloured envelop, the idea being that this would establish a connection between the teachers and the child, help the child to bridge the gap of leaving one country or institution and arriving in a new one and most importantly, to provide parents with a tool that they could use to settle any fears their child might have. This initiative seems to have been useful, since parents reported that:

PJ was so happy to receive his letter. He walked around with it for the rest of the holidays.... I even think that he brought it to school today!

F asked me to read the letter to him over and over again and each time he would ask a new question about his new school. We really found it useful when it came to reassuring and encouraging him.

On the first day of school, groups of four children and their parents were welcomed into the classroom for refreshment. The children were shown around the classroom by the RRC assistant and the parents were invited to complete a contact list and to update any relevant changes on their original application form. In addition, this meeting provided parents with the opportunity to meet one another in a personal setting and for the leader to answer questions that were of concern to them all. Moreover, where

possible, the groups were organised in such a way that a family, new to Denmark, was paired up with a family who had more experience of the country and the school. Consideration was given to language ability and shared cultural roots when planning these combinations. Feedback from parents shows that they appreciated the attention given to them in a small group:

I was so happy to be introduced to some other parents. This made it much easier for me when I arrived with my child the next morning as there were other children and other adults that I could talk to.

The whole move has tested us, but having the help of a parent who knows the school and can give me tips about living in Copenhagen, was especially useful. Who knows she may even turn out to be an important friend in Denmark.

A monthly newsletter was drawn up by the RRC leader and parents were invited to make contributions to it. In addition, parents were invited to regular monthly coffee mornings, where the leader took the opportunity to lead an hour's discussion on topics as diverse as the goals of the reception class, the development of the will, parents as co-educators and the literacy programme at reception class level.

When it came to encouraging parents' support of learning at this level, RRC's staff took active steps to encourage parents to participate in the life of the class. Volunteers were encouraged to stand as members of RRC's Board of Governors as well the class representative to the Parent's Association and previous Board members and class representatives were invited to share their experiences with parents at the first coffee morning of the school year. Secondly, parents and children were met by a member of staff on their arrival in the mornings and parents were invited to come into the classroom to settle their child, to view the activities planned for the day and examples of 'work' produced by their children. And thirdly, use was made of coffee morning meetings to introduce parents to the new reading book that their child would receive. The following responses from parents about the coffee mornings, reflect their feelings on their participation:

The coffee mornings give us an opportunity to meet with one another. Discussing our child and sharing our experiences in Copenhagen are important to us.

I have learnt so much from the discussions. When H was first born I read tons, but as she's got older I've stopped, so these meetings remind me of the development of my daughter

The Minutes of coffee morning events were prepared for all parents and one parent who could not attend mentioned that:

The minutes of the coffee meetings make me feel less left out. Thank you.

In order to provide parents with information about the classroom activities and to encourage children to share their formal learning experiences with their parents., a song and poetry folder was prepared for each child and sent home on the weekend so that parents could 'learn the words' and children could practice what they knew at home. A father, rather bemusedly, remarked:

While I don't know the tune, its great to hear D sing and to help him out with the words.

A notice board specifying daily activities was placed in the arrival hall of RRC and parents were invited to use a second one on which to communicate with one another or with the teachers.

Furthermore, parents were invited to join in classroom activities. With the support of RRC's staff, they were asked to inform the staff of their special festival and then invited to plan and lead activities to celebrate festival such as Diwali, Halloween, St. Patrick's Day or the Japanese carp festival. Birthdays were given special attention and parents were invited to celebrate their child's birthday at school or at home or to invite the class to a celebration 'in town.' Parents were particularly pleased about the opportunity to invite the class home and felt that it had given them the opportunity to witness their child's social skills with peers. Interestingly, during two such visits, the mothers felt sufficiently secure to reveal personal information that shed important light on themselves and their families. A Rwandan mother shared her agony at the loss of her 5 children and parents at the hands of Hutu militia during the genocide and this explained her over-anxiousness about the safety of her daughter. Another mother, a

Muslim, shared her sorrow caused by the atrocities committed in Bosnia towards members of her extended family and the effect that this had had on her personally and her ability to parent well.

In order to share the Danish experience with newcomers to the country, each Xmas, parents were invited to contribute 'a page' towards a Christmas Book in which they shared their particular Xmas traditions and a family outing was planned whereby all the children and their parents met to cut down a Xmas tree for the class Xmas party and to enjoy a warm drink in one another's company. The Xmas party itself followed Danish tradition and families new to Denmark were introduced to the tradition of decorating the tree with live candles and dancing around it while singing carols. Similarly parents were invited to the Danish festival of 'Fastelavn'. Their comments express the meaning that they attached to being included in these Danish events:

We mix in an international milieu and don't really know any Danes, so it was wonderful to know what goes on behind their closed doors.

I think that we will adopt the tradition of live candles on the tree. It's such a beautiful tradition that we can share with our family and friends back home.

The activities associated with Easter were also new to many non-Christian families and parents were invited to hide chocolate eggs in the school garden and then join their child in the class to decorate a basket in preparation for an egg hunt. A mother was so relieved that her child had joined in the egg hunt and said,

I don't know that tradition and my daughter had heard about it, so I was so glad that you helped me to learn it. She was so happy and said that we must do it again.

The issue of travel is central to international families and although work was never prepared for children missing school, a general list (see Appendix 10) containing ideas of activities that parents could do with their children, was prepared by RRC staff and included games focused on numbers and

letters and activities designed to strengthen and refine motor skills. After the holiday, a father reported that:

We didn't spend hours on it, but there were times when it was really useful to consult your ideas when the kids started to get bored.

After a couple of years experience of parent-teacher consultations, parents were asked to prepare points to contribute to the of the parent-teacher consultation held in October and they were then presented with a copy of the minutes of the meeting. This initiative came about in response to mother's comment that:

I feel really nervous about the meeting. I'm really anxious about what you're going to tell us.

Consequently, in an effort to be more inclusive of parents, an essential component of the meeting revolved around actions to be taken following the meeting, by both the teachers in the classroom as well parents at home, the idea being that teachers and parents are co-educators.

As a way of encouraging parents into the classroom, parents were approached to come in and help with various activities, such as, visits to the library, concerts funded by the Parent Association, weekly cooking days, class visits to places of interest in Copenhagen and gym classes. All parents were welcome to come in to read a favourite book to the children or just to sit and engage in a spontaneous small group activity when they dropped their child off at school. The constraints of time however, made training of parents impossible. However, comments from parents who went on a visit to an art gallery with the class indicate that their participation gives them insight that they would otherwise never have:

At one point, in front of a very colourful picture of a garden with many flowers and some birds, I remembered what the teacher had said, and I knelt down next to the two boys accompanying me to see it from their point of view. The painting was not that easy for them to see.

We arrived at the museum. All our children were so sweet and kind like never at home. Afterwards we had lunch, where the children, imagine, ate nicely and absolutely alone without adults. Then after, they had finished their food they threw their garbage in the bin. Imagine that!

As a way of ending the school year for the children, parents and staff, and of establishing contacts before the long summer holiday when most families travelled 'home' and of saying good-bye to those families leaving the country, a summer-party, held in one of Copenhagen's many parks, was organised at the end of the last term. The little community of RRC enjoyed a meal together, to which everyone had contributed,. A mother's note received in the post sums up her feelings about the year:

Thank you for giving my children their first lessons in self-confidence, for showing me that my 'babies' won't fall if I let go and for making our first year in a foreign country easy in so many ways.

It could therefore be argued that, although there is very little support provided by Rygaards School in general, the staff of RRC managed to conduct a relatively comprehensive parent involvement programme, though penetration of the classroom by parents, many of whom were willing and able to become involved at this level of class life, was weak. The Inspectorate's findings would appear to support the claim of good parent contact, since it reported that, "relationships with parents are good. Very good links support the transition from home to school. Parents receive monthly newsletters ... the notice board advises them of the work covered each day ... and staff are always available to talk to parents and regular coffee mornings and birthday celebrations give parents the opportunity to see the class at work." (Independent Inspectorate Report 2005: 18)

5.2.6.3 Care-givers have special needs

While contact with some fathers was regular, RRC staff interacted for the most part with caregivers, the majority of whom were women. Mothers reported that their re-location had been an emotional roller coaster in which the family had to distance itself prior to departure and then experienced sadness and loss during the process of settling in. Furthermore, they reported an increase in their own emotional distress and some even said that they were depressed. Sadness, loneliness and anger were emotions

that they claimed they had felt at times and almost all of them reported high levels of parenting stress following their move:

Only a mother knows how to comfort an unhappy child, this really made life hard for me.

My child and I really benefited from the group experience since our move meant that he had lost his old friends and he became exceptionally demanding on me at a time when I was feeling lonely myself.

Separation anxiety appeared to be higher for single mothers because they could not rely on a spouse for day-to-day care and they often had to rely on the services of a young girl. As one mother said:

My ex-husband and I are beginning to lose contact with one another and this has increased our disagreements about our daughter.

When it came to the loss of family contact, mothers were aware of the effects on themselves and their children:

I was upset to leave my family behind. I missed them terribly and I think that M. sensed this.

When she visited us B's grandmother thought that he had lost some spark for life.

Fortunately we were able to communicate by .email and this helped us all after the initial move.

It could be argued that when a family re-locates, the breadwinner has to negotiate a new work environment and children have to acclimatise themselves to a new school. Spouses or primary-carers on the other hand, need to negotiate a whole country and society, and sensitivity, by schools, to their experiences and needs is a very specific way of supporting newly re-located families. Having identified this aspect of family re-location, as having a significant impact on the entire family, further study needs to be carried out on this aspect of global mobility if a comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme were to be implemented at Rygaards School.

5.2.6.4 The role of RRC's leader and her interaction with parents

On looking more closely at the researcher's role as leader of RRC, it is evident that while parent involvement is an issue that awakens her interest it also constitutes what she considers to be the most difficult part of teaching. Therefore the researcher took initiatives to engage with parents and to encourage them to engage in the life of RRC. However, because of these initiatives and the researcher's control over the situation, the extent to which parents could assume control, express discontent, criticise and have influence over the expected outcome of events was limited.

While the researcher enjoyed the support and approval of the majority of parents, who felt free to participate in the life of the class by having cultural festivals, celebrate birthdays and take initiatives relating to RRC family gatherings, she also experienced the discontent and anger of other parents who felt that she had been insensitive to their particular life situation and had been too direct about their child's learning difficulties. In a few significant cases the researcher's efforts to draw the parents attention to their child's disabilities,, which qualified as a major handicap, resulted in conflict and finally gave rise to burn out and the researcher's resignation.

This outcome has direct bearing on her desire to improve the manner in which she, as a professional person, would have liked to communicate with parents as RRC leader. It reinforces her insistence on the role of the school and its leadership in providing teachers with the assistance and skills that they need in order to help parents in their task of supporting early learning.

5.3 Conclusion

What started out as informal observations of a group of international parents in RRC, ended up being an interpretative study of the milieu in which they operate as families with young children and the degree to which global, national and local influences effect their ability to support early learning.

It is clear that as a consequence of globalisation, the role of the state, and indeed parents, is changing and with it that of education. The world is being transformed by new global forces and Capella

(2000:228) suggests that “globalisation abolishes time and distance which makes it difficult to critically and precisely regard the process of growing interconnection between societies, [with the result that] the private sphere of the family, encompassing religion, cultural qualification and sexual orientation, is increasingly becoming relevant only for those who take part in it, while the public sphere, or realm of common affairs in the modern society is factually or potentially, the relevant sphere for everyone”.

Since it appears that no society can survive without families, parenting is the strongest possible single influence shaping the values that children adopt. At the heart of attachment theory is the supposition that “humans are motivated to maintain a dynamic balance between exploring the world and staying in close proximity to safety as embodied for an infant by his/her primary care-giver” (Bretherton 1992:759-775). An analogy could be made between the infant – primary care giver and mobile parents in a multi-national economic environment. As a RRC mother remarked:

We run in circles to raise our children, but we get little help to do the job well. It’s a lonely business and even more so when one is away from home. There needs to be much more consideration of families. Paying for the re-location of our things is not enough. The whole social and working culture needs to change.

However, the findings of this study indicate that global and social attitudes towards families with children are biased in favour of economic interests. The consequence of this is a real threat to the provision of early child-care and education and impacts on RRC’s parents’ ability to support the learning of their young children.

It can be argued that a world that enjoys economic prosperity but lacks appropriate values and supportive policies and infrastructures, is unfit for successful parenting. As the state becomes a marginal force in the new world order, so education becomes a consumer product delivered in a global market and national education will eventually cease to exist. Even more worrying is that as society is transformed by the economic forces of globalisation, the resultant cultural fragmentation, individualism and consumerism mean that its’ success is measured more by financial indices than the well being of children and families. As a RRC father remarked:

Sometimes I wonder if my boss remembers that I'm a father. He seems to forget that I have a life beyond my desk.

These factors have an overwhelming consequence for the level of support that can be expected by and of RRC parents, whose absence from their country of origin reduces their access to public resources and support, makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to muster support to change this state of affairs and leaves them subject to the vagaries of international big business and national policies and practices that are insensitive to the concerns of families with school going children.

Personal accounts by globally mobile parents will be familiar to anyone who finds themselves in a foreign land. However, by observing the actions and reactions of RRC parents, by engaging in conversations over issues that concerned them on a daily basis and presenting them with opportunities to share their experiences, they gave expression to the things that mattered to them as parents of young learners. This incidental communication was a way of learning about their perspectives on parenting in general and the handicaps and hurdles that they face in their attempts to support of learning.

An investigation of Rygaards School's support of parents shows that this occurs within the context of the Danish social and educational environment and that while a British curriculum is offered to an international community, Danish criteria determine the content and provision of care offered to pupils and their parents. Practices at Rygaards School are based on the policies and procedural practices developed by its leadership within the parameters of the Danish education system. An examination of these policies and practices highlight that parent volunteerism and participation in governance is supported but that the inclusion of parents as social, intellectual and cultural capital, is ineffectual throughout the school. As a result these policies and practices influence the kind of support that teachers within Rygaards receive, as well as the extent to which they are able to interact with and support parents in their educative task

Furthermore, while the study highlights the enormity of the challenges facing them and their isolated position within Rygaards School, a surprising consequence was the emerging awareness amongst

RRC's staff about their own role as teachers in assisting or hindering parents in the shared task of supporting early learning. Because there is no induction programme for newcomers to Rygaards, the outcomes of actions and activities of RRC indicate that as a result of its efforts, a significant contribution was made in encouraging parents to support learning in RRC in particular and Rygaards school in general.

Finally, the comment of a Canadian father, prompts the question, "So what is the role of education in this present era?"

We move to places our company sends us – but who takes care of determining what our children learn and how they are taught? When we moved to Copenhagen looking for a school, it felt like going shopping – there was education for sale and all we had to do was buy it.

Green (1997: 49) suggests that "postmodernists and globalisation theory argue that the national education system *per se* is now defunct, at once irrelevant, anachronistic and impossible". Similarly, Chubb and Moe (Green 1997: 50) conclude that, "government power is increasingly ceded to international organisation on the one hand and to consumers on the other". Morrow and Torress (2000:21-22) suggest "...educational aims... have more to do with flexibility and adaptability, with learning how to co-exist with others in diverse public spaces and with helping to form and support a sense of identity that can remain viable within multiple contexts of affiliation, all emerge as new imperatives".

Nevertheless while these arguments suggest that global pressures will make it increasingly difficult for societies to maintain their own distinctive national characteristics and that schools and parents will increasingly be left on their own, when it comes to the provision of and mutual support in education, they are valid for Rygaards and RRC itself. The findings of this study point towards limited parent penetration at classroom level in terms of the social, cultural and human capital that parents represent. Therefore the findings emphasise the central role that the primary care-giver in re-located families plays within the context of a generalised lack of support. One of the aims of this study was to present material for further investigation. This is considered in Chapter 6, where suggestions on how a

comprehensive parent involvement programme that takes cognisance of primary care-givers as well as the untapped human capital, could be introduced into Rygaards School.

Chapter 6

A Summary of the Study's Findings and Recommendations for the Development of a Comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme at Rygaards School

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this study has been the issue of global mobility and its effect on the early learning support of parents in the multi-cultural environment of RRC and Rygaards School. Its interpretative approach to understanding the reality of their lives has taken into consideration the impact of the broader global, social and local environment on parents' ability to carry out their educative task within the context of RRC and Rygaards.

Interest in this research topic arose out of the researcher's personal history and professional experience and as a consequence of her observations as the leader of RRC, the desire to conduct a qualitative investigation of the phenomenon of globally mobile families within the context of a specific international school. Furthermore, since the researcher has reached the so-called 'glass ceiling' in the teaching profession, it is hoped that the study will provide Rygaards School, and other similar international schools, with information that might make them more knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, the needs of their globally mobile families and teaching staff.

In order to refresh the reader's memory and to provide a backdrop for this Chapter, a brief overview of the study is provided below.

The main aim of this study was to investigate the difficulties that globally mobile parents face and how a school environment can assist them to support the learning of their young children. The sub-aims of the study were:

- to describe parent support of children's learning in a multi-cultural school as it exists at Rygaards
- to identify problems facing RRC parents in this task

- to identify the present level of support for parents
- to gather information on and identify strategies for the development of a comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme in Rygaards School.

Having identified the topic of family global mobility as one that was worthy of investigation, it was necessary to formulate the research problem:

- What are the difficulties faced by globally mobile families?
- How do parents support early learning and how do teachers support parents in this task?
- How can the school environment help teachers to assist parents in their task of supporting the early learning of their young children?

In Chapter 2, an initial literature study revealed that parental support of early learning is not only crucial to the learning achievement of individual children within the family, but also to the quality of education provided by the school . Much of the literature consulted however, focused on parental support of early learning within the context of schools attended by homogenous family populations. In addition, while this literature encompassed the phenomenon of cultural diversity in education, much of it was focused on multi-culturalism within the context of the dominant culture of local schools. Consequently, it became evident that the phenomena of global mobility and multi-culturalism with an international school, as they exist amongst families at RRC and their impact on parental support of learning, gave rise to a special case and example of a contemporary phenomenon that deserved further investigation.

Chapter 3 provided a thick description of the research site of Rygaards School in general and RRC in particular. The international and national educational context of RRC was described and detailed information, about persons with an interest in RRC as well as parent involvement in Rygaards School and RRC, was provided.

In Chapter 4 details of the case study design was provided. The phenomenon of parent support of learning was described within the context of:

- a group of families from all over the world, whose children had or were attending RRC
- a newly established reception class at Rygaards International School.

Since the context in which RRC parents carry out the task of supporting learning is a central aspect of this study, the investigation encompasses the effects on them of the global labour market, social attitudes towards families with children, Danish legislation on education and its social norms, as well as the culture of Rygaards School itself,. In addition the study examines the parenting skills employed by parents as well as their attitudes toward education and other relevant perceptions.

Data relevant to the study was gathered from sources both within and outside Rygaards School and RRC. Chapter 4 contains details of the research methods namely, observations, conversations and questionnaires, as well as strategies that were employed in collecting data.

The global mobility of RRC's families and the multi-cultural nature of its teachers, parents and pupils represent an exceptional research case. Consequently, taken the specific nature of the site, the complex context in which it exists and the diverse meanings within it an interpretative approach was employed. This is used in Chapter 5 to make sense of the actions and statements of RRC parents emerging from the process of data analysis.

Finally, while Chapters 1-5 of this study have provided an overview and rationale for this study, uncovered information about related studies found in literature, provided an overview of RRC within the context of Rygaards School, detailed the research design of the study and described the research results of its investigation, the aim of this final chapter is to come to some conclusions about the needs of RRC families and the present level of their support of learning. Furthermore, it will highlight some of the lessons learnt in the RRC project that have relevance for Rygaards School, suggest some strategies for improving the present level of parental support of learning and make some recommendations for developing a comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme at Rygaards School.

6.2 A summary of the study's findings

In the process of conducting this study, a number of questions have arisen. These questions have been reviewed and three relevant aspects of the situation at Rygaards, that are separate but closely connected to one another and which relate to the research problem of this study, will be highlighted. The three aspects include:

- the challenges that each member of a re-located family faces and the impact of these needs on both families and teaching staff at Rygaards
- the absence of an induction programme for new-comers to Rygaards
- the issue of parent involvement in curriculum provision at Rygaards.

The study has shown that global mobility presents parents with unforeseen challenges that impact on their ability to support early learning. In addition, the environment within which families with children move is not particularly sensitive to or supportive of parents' educative task. Accordingly the difficulties that they experience give rise to special needs, the impact of which is felt in an international learning environment like Rygaards. These institutions will have to develop new ways of meeting these needs if they are to succeed in their task of educating children.

Stakeholders in Rygaards have provided 'outsider' insight into the present environment of the school and these can be used as guidelines by Rygaards, to provide parents and teachers with the kind of support that they need. In this regard, the observations of the Independent Schools Inspectorate identified major weaknesses in Rygaards accommodation of mobile international families and new staff, namely, the lack of an induction programme for new comers to the school as well as the absence of a professional middle management structure in the school. This has an impact on the level of understanding and degree of support that teachers can expect to receive from its leadership (see 3.2.1).

The question of curriculum provision in an international school is of major concern to parents whose children have English as their mother-tongue and who envisage that their children may, in the future, return to very different educational traditions than that offered at Rygaards. Furthermore, in its

inspection report, the Independent Schools Inspectorate observed that while provision of the curriculum at Rygaards is generally good, there is almost no extension for the more capable students.

Finally, in this chapter, these three issues will be examined and the connection between them identified. In addition it will be shown how the present practices of parent-school co-operation in RRC, and the school in general, form the basis for developing a comprehensive and long lasting PI Programme at Rygaards. These would address all the major issues identified in this study and which would then provide the support and flexibility that globally mobile parents and pupils need from international school environments.

6.2.1 Each member of globally mobile families requires special support from Rygaards School

How are Rygaards families' self-confidence and sense of control over their environment affected by their mobility and what can Rygaards do to support them?

Being globally mobile means that each member of the family faces specific challenges and experiences some or other form of loss (see 5.2.2). For all of them, extended-family connections are broken, social networks are lost and emotional ties are cut. It is therefore true to say that new families arrive at Rygaards with severely diminished social support, many of them with very little proficiency in English and all of them to a new and foreign country, culture and school.

The findings of this study indicate that not only does each member of the family have to deal with feelings of loss when they arrive in Denmark, but that each one is simultaneously faced with particular challenges (see 5.2.63). Furthermore, it is evident that each parent, the breadwinner and primary caregiver including children, at RRC level, have particular needs that make increasing demands of Rygaards.

6.2.1.1 The needs of breadwinner parents require recognition and flexibility

Breadwinners face the challenge of negotiating their new work place and all that this demands, and for many RRC parents, this means being separated from their family for extended periods of time throughout their stay in Denmark. These demands reduce the opportunities for contact between breadwinner parents and teachers. Experience in RRC shows that these parents are used to scheduling their time, and an invitation from the teacher, for them to visit the classroom almost always resulted in a positive experience for the parent as well as the child and provided both teacher and parent with the opportunity to establish rapport. This is a RRC practice that showed sensitivity towards the work demands of breadwinner parents and is one that could easily be introduced throughout Rygaards School.

The scheduling of parent consultations requires long term planning and flexibility. New parents have to be advised of the practice of holding parent consultations in October; they have to be given the opportunity to select a suitable date and time within a relatively broad time-frame and in the event that one parent is not able to attend the consultation, written minutes of the meeting should be provided to keep them within the 'circle' of adults supporting the child's learning. Rygaards needs to recognise that there is a need for greater flexibility in this area of co-operation with parents and funds have to be allocated to pay teachers to work outside of the so-called 'normal school hours'. This recommendation makes financial demands on the school, but it is not one that is impossible to address.

6.2.1.2 Re-located children require shared adult support

Children on the other hand have to face pressures associated with starting at a new school. Their self-confidence may be affected by language barriers as well as the personal developmental challenges that they face when they arrive at Rygaards. For many children the change of environment brings with it a great deal of stress in relation to language barriers, emotional insecurity and the social task of making new friends, all of which can result in a loss of focus and ability to concentrate. Young children regress and may begin bed-wetting or display changes in their general behaviour, while older children

may withdraw. Whatever the case maybe parents need to be made aware of what signs to look out for and what action to take. The development of an information brochure, that draws parents' attention to possible behaviour changes in their newly re-located children will help to give parents the sense that the school is aware of the challenges of their re-location and cares about their parenting task as well as the progress of their children. Similarly, such a project could increase parents' and teachers' awareness of one another's educative task and thereby create opportunities for them to co-operate in terms of a mutual support of early learning.

6.2.1.3 Primary care-giver parents require special consideration and concerted school support

The challenges faced by the primary care-giver are also numerous and extremely complex. The care-giver is not only dealing with his/her own sense of loss and the challenge of making new contacts, but is also charged with the responsibility of making a home and supporting the other family members, within the context of what can be described as a whole new country and all that that implies.

Since this study focuses its attention on parents and their ability to support learning, special attention needs to be paid to primary carers in RRC, the majority of whom are women and who constitute the primary supporters of early learning. Observations conducted during this study indicated that following their re-location the changes in mothers' social and emotional networks often leave them feeling unhappy and isolated, and in many cases, depressed. This condition was frequently experienced by RRC mothers, in connection with pregnancy and the lack of opportunities that they had for social contact with other adults outside of the home.

The experience as participant researcher, in terms of supporting unhappy RRC mothers, makes it clear that confidential counselling support should be a primary aspect of Rygaards support of parents. There is very little time available for teachers to counsel and their interest and experience may not be conducive to being able to provide this level of care. The costs of covering such a service present a problem, but the multi-national companies, whose employees constitute Rygaards family population, could be approached to support such an initiative on the grounds that families with young children receive relatively little assistance from big business. Funding in this area could have positive

consequences for the mental health of their employees, their spouses and learning children as well as the larger society.

Rygaards Parents' Association has already taken many initiatives when it comes to welcoming parents to Rygaards. The establishment of a parent meeting room, equipped with coffee and tea facilities as well as toys for younger toddlers constitutes a start for including primary carers. However, assuming that schools are responsible for parent-teacher co-operation and communication, Rygaards School needs to play a much more active role in drawing in those mothers who are marginalised by language barriers or whose cultural practices leaves them feeling unable to reach out and establish social contacts within the environment of the school.

In this regard, Rygaards could make use of the lessons learnt from RRC's practice of pairing parents new to Denmark with those who speak English and have some experience of both Rygaards and Denmark. By introducing this practice into all its classes and not leaving this essential task to the class representative much will be done to support parents and alleviate their isolation. This initial one-to-one contact with another family in the class often provides the new family with a feeling of being welcome and of belonging to small manageable class group and could be the first step towards encouraging parent participation in the life of the school. Additionally, it would provide a basis for the development of a school-wide PI Programme.

Since primary carer parents are the point of contact between the school and home, communication is an essential element in terms of co-operation. In the short term, the provision of English classes for second-language primary carers would increase self-confidence, facilitate better communication between the school and home, and in the long run improve parents' ability to support their child's learning. The project itself should be initiated by Rygaards School and could become self-sufficient with classes being run by volunteer parents who are English speaking and who have an interest or qualification in helping others to learn English. A small fee could be charged and channelled back into the project to purchase learning materials that are suitable for adult learners and amateur teachers.

Having acknowledged that the members of re-located families each have special needs, it becomes evident that parents need assistance from the school before they can fully support the learning of their children. The first step in developing a PI Programme, should therefore be that of providing new parents with opportunities to establish social contacts that make them feel welcome and that improve their communication skills, to provide them with information related to the impact of re-location on their children and to show flexibility in terms of giving them the opportunity to join in the life of the school.

6.2.2 Family mobility creates weaknesses and strengths in parents' ability to support learning, Rygaards needs to strengthen and build upon parents' ability

If we refer to Epstein's categories of parent involvement in schools (Epstein 1987a:97-101), the evidence indicates that despite their global mobility, the parents in RRC supervise and guide their children, communicate with the RRC staff and initiate learning activities at home. In other words, within the 'private arena' of the family, parents, in particular primary-carers, the majority of whom are mothers, actively support early learning.

However, having said this, the study shows that these are not necessarily the same parents who participate in the 'public arena' of Rygaards School by volunteering their skills, participating in decision making and engaging with the wider community. On the contrary, the parents who participate in the 'public arena' of Rygaards School have particular characteristics, not shared by all RRC parents. They have free time, a sense of belonging, social confidence, academic qualifications, are proficient in English and have accustomed themselves to the British school system. Most importantly this study indicates that parents who become assimilated into the life of RRC are more likely to engage in volunteering and decision-making within the 'public' arena of Rygaards School than those who do not. Furthermore, this study shows that some parents, who were initially shy, who did not have a sense of belonging, whose social networks were limited or who lacked proficiency in English at the beginning of their stay in RRC, went on to develop the confidence and skills for participating in this 'public arena' in Year 1 and throughout their association with the School..

These findings seem to indicate that RRC plays a special role in the promotion of parent support of learning and the development of their involvement in the life of Rygaards School as a whole. By encouraging the ‘private arena’ of parent involvement and making a concerted effort to improve the skills required for entering the ‘public arena’ of Rygaards School, great strides could be made in engaging parents in the personal task of supporting their child as well as school-wide projects that benefit the school as a whole. Procedures that could be applied throughout the school to support positive parental self-concept and sense of control over their environment at Rygaards could include regular coffee mornings where teachers meet parents in informal settings, the creation of more opportunities for social contact and improvement of parenting competency and an open door policy that invites parents into the classroom as observer, volunteer or festival co-ordinator. Furthermore, closer contact and better communication between parent representatives and the parent body at class level, could result in more opportunities for social contact amongst the parent body, better co-operation between the teacher and parents at class level and improved communication about parental decision-making in the school. All these should result in greater involvement at class level, increased volunteerism and decision-making in school-wide projects.

6.3 Lessons learnt from the RRC Project that have relevance for Rygaards School

Since RRC is a recent addition to Rygaards School a number of lessons were learnt in the process of the project. These lessons are relevant to this section of the study because they involve the issues of parent participation and staff motivation.

6.3.1 Lessons learnt during the ‘independent’ period of RRC’s existence

The term ‘independent’ is used here to describe that period of RRC’s existence which took place under the supervision of the now retired head of department and an independent governing body, consisting of volunteer parents.

Firstly, despite an unsupportive attitude from the then headmaster, the departmental head spearheaded the project with an enormous degree of energy and enthusiasm. Together with the support of a Key

Stage 1 teacher and a small group of parents, whose participation was motivated by their own need for a reception class for their four year olds, the head of department spearheaded the project. Jointly this group raised a donation of Dkk25,000 from a friend of Rygaards and set up a Friends of Rygaards Reception Class bank account, identified a classroom for the reception class, sought municipal approval for the project and employed a reception class leader and assistant. This is a clear example of the need for positive and enthusiastic leadership to make a project happen. It is also an example of the range of skills that parents can contribute to a new school development and mutual co-operation working toward the larger good. Secondly, the departmental head allocated the task of setting up the project to the RRC leader. While she acknowledged that this level of education was not within her domain of experience, her support was ever present and she gave RRC staff the space and control over finances to set up the project.

Empowering participants in a project is essential to its success and is an important lesson for Rygaards leadership to consider. The 'glass ceiling' is a reality for all teachers at Rygaards. This situation presents a weakness in terms of providing motivational opportunities for teaching staff. Creative leadership, that acknowledges that motivated staff benefits parents, pupils and the school itself, will look for opportunities to empower its teachers.

Thirdly, since RRC staff was free of many of the old management traditions in Rygaards, they were enabled to develop new practices and traditions. In other words, there was place for innovation. Creative solutions were found to challenges as they arose, challenges related to meeting the needs of new globally mobile families with young children.

Traditionally schools are conservative in nature. However quite often people, who find themselves in a situation, are usually aware of the problems that exist within it and more likely than not are full of ideas on how to solve them. Rygaards is a well established school with a number of traditions, so its leadership and staff have to open themselves and their thinking to the reality of globalisation and its impact on the families at Rygaards as well as the negative impact of keeping up traditions for tradition's sake. Consequently, traditional ways of doing things have to be continually re-examined. The input of newly trained teachers, recently exposed to new thinking in terms of teaching

methodology and educational idealism, must be harvested. Staff who have been at Rygaards for a number of years must be given the opportunity to extend themselves and be allocated time for engaging in activities outside of the classroom, such as, mentoring tasks and preparing talks for colleagues at Key Stage meetings. Their knowledge and experience should be drawn upon to develop a PI Programme throughout the school.

Fourthly, the age of the children in RRC and the reality that most families are new to Rygaards, made a welcoming approach essential. This practice gave rise to intense daily parent-teacher contact. Parents' accessibility to the classroom gave them a feeling of belonging, enabled them to keep abreast of the work their children were doing and motivated them to be active participants in the classroom when celebrating birthdays and cultural festivals.

At the beginning of the second year of their stay at Rygaards, it was not uncommon for former reception class parents, whose children had now graduated to Year 1, to come back to the reception class and to say how much things had changed; how the classroom door was now closed to them and how they missed the monthly social contact with other parents and all the children. Parents felt that they had been excluded by the School at large. This lesson is one which Rygaards must take to heart in terms of developing a comprehensive PI Programme, since a closed door policy is not one which encourages parents to support their child's teacher, their child's learning or the development of the school as a whole. It is also an indication that the staff at Rygaards need help to see the benefits of closer parent co-operation.

6.3.2 Lessons learnt during the initial 'post-independent' period of RRC's existence

The disbanding of RRC's Board meant that decision-making became centralised and the previously direct involvement and participation of parents and the RRC leader ceased. Discussions between Rygaards leadership and RRC's leader, to discuss the take-over, never came about. In addition, the Board was disbanded and long serving parent members simply fell by the wayside.

While RRC had now officially become part of Rygaards and RRC staff were expected to attend meetings and participate in the life of the school, they were not invited to staff appraisal meetings conducted by the new leadership. They constantly heard the refrain, “but you are not really part of Rygaards”. Already demotivated, RRC staff felt increasingly isolated and subject to an impersonal, centralised leadership that was making decisions that affected them without them being consulted.

Plans for a new school building presented possibilities for renewed RRC staff participation and motivation. Enthusiastic discussions about the new building took place between Key Stage 1 teachers, who felt that a new building presented opportunities for new ways of working together. The principal, however, who had no experience with families with young children, or the needs of younger learners, gradually whittled away all RRC recommendations, on the grounds that we were still a separate part of the school. What was meant by this was never indicated or explained.

As regards parents, a RRC class representative was elected to join the Parents’ Association, and this once creative and communicative aspect of RRC staff-parent communication, slowed down. Neither RRC parents nor staff were consulted by the class representative about points for discussion, reminded that a meeting was to be held or given details of the outcome of meetings. Communication was weakened by this development and RRC staff felt that the Parents’ Association had become distanced from the concerns and challenges at RRC level. In addition, the class representative, new to Rygaards and new to the Parents’ Association, failed to call a meeting for the parent body when the conflict situation arose.

The lack of closure and sense of disempowerment, and distance from centralised leadership and the parent representative had a profound de-motivating effect on RRC’s leader and assistant. Poor leadership, in resolving a staff conflict in RRC, reduced morale further, increased the discord which consequently spread to the parents. Finally, the RRC leader, who found herself at a ‘glass-ceiling’ and whose initiatives were no longer seen as an asset to the school, resigned from her position.

The events described above, should sharpen Rygaards leadership awareness of the crucial role that they play in motivating and maintaining participation and involvement from both parents and staff. The

decisive issue here is how well Rygaards School is able to utilise the human capital that international parents and experienced and enthusiastic staff represent to develop a comprehensive, motivational and long-lasting PI Programme.

6.4 Recommendations for improving the present level of support in Rygaards School

According to the findings and lessons learnt in this project, it is possible to make some suggestions that could be utilised to improve the present level of support in Rygaards. Recommendations for introducing a comprehensive induction programme at Rygaards which should help compensate for the absence of middle management amongst its' teaching staff.

6.4.1 Recommendations for introducing a comprehensive Induction Programme at Rygaards School

On the one hand, The Independent Schools Inspectorate praised Rygaards contact with parents, but on the other it noted that no induction programme existed for newcomers to Rygaards. These observations highlight the fact that Rygaards by utilising Danish education regulations and traditions does not provide adequately for the needs of a mobile family and staff population.

What present practices and initiatives can be built upon to develop an induction programme for new parents at Rygaards?

In a pre-inspection questionnaire, a substantial minority of parents felt that communication between teachers and parents was lacking. This complaint may have been based on a number of issues, such as, as newcomers to Rygaards parents need more communication opportunities than they would in a familiar school system, their mobility makes them less secure and more reliant on feedback from teachers and quite possibly they are used to a closer co-operation 'back home'. It could, therefore, be an idea for Rygaards to develop a questionnaire to establish the real reasons for parents' responses and to ascertain what exactly parents mean when they say that communication with teachers is unsatisfactory.

It is clear, that an induction programme for new families and staff could be an invaluable means of assimilating them into school life in a relatively short period of time. The first day of school in RRC provides valuable lessons that could be encompassed into a simple induction programme throughout the school. The International Parents' Association and school leadership should work together to plan and present an hour's talk for new parents throughout the school. During Key Stage meetings teachers should work on applicable suggestions,. In addition, parents themselves should be invited to draw up lists of ideas drawn from their own experience of coming to a new country, thereby drawing on their social and emotional capital. Furthermore, the minutes of a Parents' Association meeting reveal that the association has begun to prepare a welcome brochure for new families which could be used to supplement information provided at a school-wide parents meeting for newcomers. The costs of introducing such a programme are negligible and the welcome brochure under development could provide the foundation stones for such a programme.

Class representatives are an important human resource when it comes to connecting people. A similar induction programme for class representatives could encourage them to be more aware of the special needs of newly arrived families; to the role that they can play in developing and strengthening social contacts between the parents in their class; to their role in resolving conflict at class level and to their continuous updating of a school welcome brochure.

6.4.2 Recommendations for strengthening the absence of a middle management amongst teaching staff

Teachers are the point of contact between school and home. Courses that sensitise teachers to the needs of mobile parents, that give them skills in reaching out to new parents and winning their trust and confidence could be an invaluable way of improving teacher-parent relations, necessary tools for assisting parents in their supportive task. Such courses could be integrated into the School's staff development programme.

A second glaring weakness, noted by The Independent Schools Inspectorate, is the absence of middle management at Rygaards. This has serious consequences for the support that teachers can expect to

receive, as well as their job satisfaction and motivational levels. In addition the Inspectorate criticised Rygaards staff development programme for being unstructured and not yet fully implemented. These observations highlight the fact that teachers are not getting the professional support that they require and this weakens their ability to assist parents in their educative task.

Teachers at Rygaards were overheard to say that the hardest part of teaching is fulfilling parents' demands. From the findings of this study is evident that parents at Rygaards constitute an extremely diverse group of people with special needs. If the same traits are to be applied in the context of the classroom, it is evident that teachers need special training and support to meet the needs of both parents and their children. Teacher training is only the beginning of a career in the classroom, continuous training is a pre-requisite for effectively remaining there. Consequently, in order to meet the challenges presented at Rygaards, the teachers working in this exceptional learning environment, require special training and extra support to provide the kind of accommodating and flexible service that globally mobile parents require.

While classes at Rygaards are relatively small, the various abilities and needs are highly demanding. In this regard, the Inspectorate Report noted that teachers tend to cater for the average child and the more capable children are left unchallenged. Furthermore, not only is there no middle-management at Rygaards, but the support services like speech therapists and child psychologists provided by Gentofte Kommune, are inadequate and untrained in dealing with such a diverse international community. Additionally, children with learning difficulties are only tested when they reach Year 2, which means that in some cases, no real support is provided for teachers or parents until these children reach Year 3, by which time three years of remedial attention has been lost and both parents and teachers have been left to their own, isolated, devices. Accordingly the challenges that the teaching staff at Rygaards face remain hidden and the teachers themselves are left isolated with the problems that confront them.

Certain present practices could be built upon to develop a professional support system for teachers at Rygaards. The co-operation that existed between Copenhagen Municipality's pedagogical consultant and RRC is an example of the kind of support that teachers, throughout Rygaards, could do with in terms of identifying children with special needs, communicating this to emotionally sensitive parents,

identifying the support systems that exist in Denmark and providing information about how to gain access to them. While the new international department head recently introduced a checklist for new teachers, which experienced teachers, identified by the head, go through with alongside new staff, the introduction of a planned and well managed mentoring system could go a long way in bridging the professional and support 'gaps' that teachers endure at Rygaards.

Apart from the newly introduced checklist for new teachers on which to build a professional support programme, all Key Stage meetings, attended by the international department head, could be structured in such a way that the of issues relating to assisting mobile parents to support learning, could become a permanent item on the agenda. Throughout the school year, different teachers could be given the task of presenting something related to the topic.

A mentoring system is an excellent way of accessing resources. In this regard, benefits of introducing such a system would be that there are no demands on the school's budget, that new teachers would benefit from the experienced and they in turn would benefit from the new thinking of teachers just out of college or those coming from other schools or educational traditions. Furthermore a harmonious spirit amongst teachers would be the forerunner of learning how to co-operate in more constructive ways with parents. In this situation, learning about the special needs of mobile families would improve the support that teachers would be able to provide them.

The planning of a staff development programme in collaboration with teachers, rather than enforcing something on them from above as well as involving them in its implementation, would go a long way to empowering them and thus strengthen the professional management form that exists at Rygaards.

6.4.3 Recommendations for extending parent participation in curriculum provision

Among the findings of this study are indications that parents have major concerns about their children's ability to fit back into another particular education system once they leave Rygaards. Having said this, the majority of them are also aware of the benefits that an international learning environment offers, such as, exposure to other cultures, practices and languages.

How do parents concerns reflect their world citizenship and what resource base do they represent in terms of curriculum provision? It could be argued that the concerns that parents voice are a reflection of conflict between their identity and the global reality of their lives. In other words, while people are able to move from one country to another within a matter of hours, the emotional and intellectual impact of global re-location has a longer and deeper impact on their ability to adapt to a new social and learning environment. Their attachment to a particular place in the world and their inevitable desire to pass on their culture of to their children is evident in parental responses received from the questionnaires prepared for this study. This indicates that while RRC parents are relatively secure about their own national identity, and make every effort to pass on their language and culture to their child, they are in a dilemma about their children's sense of 'belonging' to any specific part of the world.

However, if we look at these concerns from a wider and more positive perspective, the worries of globally mobile parents combined with the rich resource base that they represent, could be harnessed for the benefit of the parents themselves as well as the school, its pupils and staff. Sharing their cultural capital would give parents the opportunity to pass on their own particular culture, not only to their own child, but to children from other cultures, thereby contributing to the development of an understanding of what it means to be a citizen of the world, which is in fact what globally nomadic children of today are. This suggestion provides an exciting opportunity for Rygaards to assess not only the content of the curriculum that it presents, but to identify new and enriched ways of presenting it.

During this study, parents in RRC were invited to lead activities that celebrated their cultural festivals with the class's children and their parents. At Rygaards School's level, the Parents' Association already organises an annual UN day and an exciting 'Christmas around the world' day in which the

rich cultural diversity of the school is celebrated. All these examples are evidence of the rich cultural capital that the parents at Rygaards represent as well as the level of their volunteerism. Furthermore, the participation of parents in these activities has a number of positive effects. Their participation not only gives parents the opportunity to give expression to their own identity, but it also enables them to pass on their own core values and cultural heritage to their child within the formal learning environment of Rygaards. When it comes to the pupils in RRC and Rygaards as a whole, the children of these participating parents are always proud of the ‘showing and telling’ of what constitutes a part of their identity. Furthermore, such activities open other cultural windows for all the children in Rygaards, some of which may provide secure foundations for future re-locations, others of which may result in future study choices and work interests.

While parents at Rygaards are actually at present making an informal contribution to the presentation of a multi-cultural curriculum, the questions that inevitably arises is how this cultural capital can be better utilised in RRC and Rygaards School? What are the consequences of a comprehensive approach to parent involvement in the classroom for Rygaards teaching staff?

The success of cultural activities at Rygaards and the high degree of parent involvement, encourages providing solutions to some of the observations of the Independent Schools Inspectorate. Since teachers at Rygaards are free to interpret the guidelines of the British curriculum, closer co-operation with parents could provide enrichment not only in terms of content but also in terms of provision for more able children, on one hand and extra support for children with special needs on the other. It could also mean that parents with the time and interest, could be more involved in supporting teachers in planning and presenting the curriculum, thus improving their ability to support learning at home.

This kind of parent involvement presents numerous organisational challenges and most teachers would argue that it increases their workload to have parents in the classroom. However, initial parent participation could be intermittent and focused on a particular lesson, theme week or cultural event, before a long-term project of daily parent involvement in classrooms is introduced. For example, Rygaards has an annual tradition of celebrating ‘book week’. This practice provides the opportunity for parents to share their cultural heritage in numerous informal and exciting ways. Furthermore, engaging

parents in the planning of 'book week' would present teachers with the opportunity to draw on the parents' cultural heritage and to introduce them to simple teaching methodology and classroom practices. All of this would mean that parents would be better equipped to participate later in classroom activities and therefore to actually assist the classroom teacher. A short term project such as this could be used in an initial trial run of involving parents more closely in the classroom and thereby meeting their concerns by involving them in curriculum planning and presentation and at the same time extending the challenges for more able pupils and harnessing the necessary adult assistance for children with special needs.

Having suggested strategies for strengthening the present level of parental support of learning, the next step is to make some recommendations about the development of a comprehensive PI Programme at Rygaards.

6.5. Recommendations for developing a comprehensive Parent Involvement Programme at Rygaards School

In order to develop a comprehensive and long-lasting PI Programme at Rygaards, due consideration must be given to the envisaged phases of the project. Consequently, a number of recommendations related to some of the envisaged phases of the project, will be discussed.

6.5.1 The principle of stakeholder participation

The outcome of the majority of development programmes indicates that participation by stakeholders, throughout every phase of a project, is some guarantee of a relatively high rate of success. This assumption applies to the recommendations of this study. Consequently, while it is not within my scope, as one individual teacher, to outline a suitable PI Programme for Rygaards School, the findings of this study have provided guidelines for making recommendations relating to the initial process of thinking about and discussing the need for a comprehensive and long-lasting PI Programme.

6.5.1.1 Rygaards leadership must take PI further

The recent postings of a new headmaster and international department head, provide a window of opportunity for new thinking on the issue of school support for globally mobile parents. Furthermore, the headmaster has over fifteen years experience at Rygaards and the head of department is a newcomer to Rygaards. This means that they have an opportunity to discuss the present state of parent involvement in the school as well as Rygaards support of internationally mobile parents applying their different perspectives,

It is evident that both the headmaster and departmental head are keen to improve the services provided by Rygaards, as can be seen in their involvement in the building of a whole new school wing for the international department, the development of an intranet system for both staff and parents, the introduction of the Virtues Programme throughout the school and the introduction of the initial phase of a mentoring system for new teachers to Rygaards. With this new leadership at Rygaards, there is little reason to suspect that recommendations for the development of a comprehensive PI Programme will fall on deaf ears. Their professional position in the structure of Rygaards School, makes it possible for the headmaster, with the support of the departmental head, to convince the School Board to make resources available for such a project while encouraging the participation of Rygaards staff and parents in its planning and implementation.

6.5.1.2 Teachers are integral to the success of closer parent-school co-operation

Teachers are well placed to be influential in the lives of families and the life of the school. They are aware of parents' concerns and demands as well as their pupils' needs, strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly however, teachers are fully aware of changes in the demands made of them over the years, and they agree that they need school support to fulfil them. Without the human resource that teachers represent, Rygaards would cease to exist. Consequently, the professional experience of Rygaards teaching staff, their own re-location challenges and the practical experience they have in dealing with globally mobile families, makes them an invaluable resource base. Accordingly they will play an invaluable part in any discussion about greater parent involvements.

When it comes to what will initially be perceived as the threatened 'invasion' of their classrooms, there

is no doubt in the researcher's mind, that many pros and cons will be raised by teachers concerning parents standing on their professional toes and the added workload that an initially closer parent co-operation will result in. Indeed the researcher suspects that teachers will be the most difficult of stakeholders to convince about the benefits of greater parent participation at class level. Their conflicting experiences, on the one hand, of contemporary attitudes towards the teaching profession, by highflying parents with enviable academic credits and the increasingly higher academic and child-care expectations that these same parents have of teachers, on the other.

6.5.1.3 Parents are already involved but their cultural capital must be harnessed

Evidence of parent support of learning abounds at Rygaards. Nonetheless the traditional boundaries that have developed between the social institutions of home and school, since schools began to take over many of the educative tasks previously those of parents, seem to be firmly entrenched at Rygaards. What is urgently required is a climate of flexibility and openness.

Parents themselves have taken the most initiative to accommodate the needs of newly re-located families at Rygaards. It can be no surprise that this has happened since who better than these very parents to know what support globally mobile parents need. Having said this however, it is important to see these initiatives within the context of the pastoral goals of Rygaards and its Virtues Programme, where care and concern for others constitutes the school's ethos.

Furthermore, not only have parents at Rygaards shown concern for one another, they have also promoted activities that celebrate the international and culturally diverse make-up of the school. In this regard, they organise events for families, raise funds for school projects, and participate in the celebration of numerous cultural festivals from all over the world. Their volunteerism is further evidenced in their willingness to join in on class outings, to provide extra help in listening to reading and library visits. Outside of the classroom this volunteerism extends to their willingness to organise after-school activities and when it comes to decision-making, parents volunteer their time to act as class representatives, to sit on the Parent Association as well Rygaards School Board

In spite of this the parents at Rygaards have not yet been given the opportunity pool resources within Rygaards classrooms. Most parents probably have no desire to do so, but there are parents who do and who would volunteer their skills and time and contribute cultural capital to enrich learning and teaching that goes on in their child's classroom. Furthermore, for those parents, who make demands of teachers, and who teachers would rather not have entering their professional domain, greater involvement in the classroom would open windows on the reality of teachers' tasks and make parents more aware of the diverse demands that teachers face.

It is essentially the issue of breaking down barriers that presently exist between these various stakeholders, who have much to gain from greater involvement, which presents the initial challenge towards developing a PI Programme, not only at Rygaards, but in schools in general. It is here that the School's governing Board will need to show leadership by making resources available. An outside consultant could play a major role in co-ordinating stakeholder groups and enhancing co-operation. The barriers that presently exist between interested persons make the formalised development of a PI Programme at Rygaards seem like an overwhelming task.

The issue of family transience is an ever present predicament, and non-supporters of the project could argue that the parents engaged in the discussions may have left Rygaards before the project could be implemented. This is a valid criticism, and it is at this point that planning becomes crucial to the successful implementation of a school wide project.

6.5.2 Planning

Like all projects, the proposed plan of developing a comprehensive PI Programme, is an on-going process. Careful planning by all stakeholders, in terms of setting achievable goals and allocating tasks will ensure that small steps rest on a firm foundation. All those involved will be kept abreast of the process and invited to participate in it in ways that encompass the diversity of their level of interest, willingness and human resource capability.

6.5.2.1 The schools' leadership has to take the initiative

As already mentioned, the school's headmaster and departmental head find themselves between the powers that allocate resources and the stakeholder groups that can make the project happen. Since these two key players participate in meetings with the Board, Teachers' Association and Parents' Association, they are well positioned to introduce the idea of a more comprehensive PI Programme at Rygaards and to initiate action within these different *fora*. Taking cognisance of the transience of families, the leadership needs to prepare a rough time-plan for the initial phase. The financial costs of employing an independent consultant will in itself, set a limit on the time available for working through issues within stakeholder groups as well as between them. Nonetheless, while care must be taken to ensure that financial considerations do not ignore the social reality involved in breaking down barriers, the consultant need not be present at every meeting. Furthermore, given the enormity of the proposed project, the transience of parents and the limits on teachers' time, the initial leadership input should involve the setting of one or two achievable goals for the first year of the project that can set the whole process in motion and that will be visible to those parents and teachers who have participated in the initial phase and who may be leaving Rygaards, as well as all new arrivals at the school.

While it is impossible for me to make concrete suggestions on what should be discussed and the format of such discussions, it is necessary that the independent consultant should understand the phenomenon of family mobility within the context of globalisation and all its' implications. The consultant should be sensitive to cultural and language barriers as they exist at Rygaards, as well as the professional experiences of teachers at Rygaards in relation to existing co-operation with parents and leadership at Rygaards. He/she should be aware of the challenges of presenting a British curriculum within the context of Danish educational and labour legislation.

6.5.2.2 Teachers must play an active part in the setting of goals for the project

In order to implement a project, stakeholders must have been involved in its' planning phase. Teachers must therefore be involved in the setting of goals in the important planning phase.. This will give them the opportunity to accept and see these goals as realistic and achievable in terms of the

commitments that they already have. As the project impacts on their professional working space it is critical that teachers be involved in setting the pace of the project. This needs to be planned in such a way that the tempo of development gives them time to adjust to the professional demands arise from the project.

6.5.2.3 Parents' participation may be intermittent due to other commitments

In the experience of this researcher, parents have difficulties with other parents, whom they consider to be unsuitable, participating actively in the classroom. In the planning phase, it is important that all parents who wish to participate more actively be given the opportunity to find a place for themselves in the project and that the issue of their participation is worked through with those parents who do not wish to be involved, or who are unable to become more actively involved in the life of their child's classroom. Furthermore, during the planning phase, cognisance must be given to the fact that parents are not paid employees and are therefore likely to prioritise other commitments at certain times of their stay at Rygaards. This may result in intermittent participation on their part.

6.5.3 Implementation and monitoring

The implementation of the project will rely on the continued support and enthusiasm of Rygaards leadership. Teachers as well as parents must be encouraged to engage in continuous monitoring of the progress of activities carried out, in order to ascertain the degree to which the agreed goals are being achieved, the problems that have arisen and the successes that have been achieved. Leadership should assume the role of mediator in the event that conflicts arise either between members of a stakeholder group or between groups. The monitoring results should provide material for the discussion and planning phases of the second year of the project. The experiences of active parents and teachers, who are leaving Rygaards, should be gathered to strengthen a process that is characterised by transient participants.

6.5.4 Induction

Lessons learnt from this study, indicate that Rygaards is characterised by a high level of transience, and that the passing of existing information from old participants to new ones is a vital aspect that must be programmed into the planning process. In other words, the induction programme for new teachers and parent, must continually emphasise the School's desire to develop and improve its PI Programme and the role, by inviting newcomers to Rygaards to play a role in it.

6.6 Limitations of the study

It is impossible for a single case study to investigate the phenomenon of parent support of learning in its entirety. This case study is no exception to the rule and consequently it suffers from a series of limitations that prevent it from providing a completely reliable and valid description and understanding of its study site.

Firstly, while this study is limited to RRC, and does not claim to have completely uncovered the research problem, that is, the support that globally mobile parents are able to provide for early learners in the international environment of RRC, it is hoped that there may be some aspects contained herein which could be useful to both practitioners and researchers in this field.

Secondly, it is impossible for any individual to see things with absolute objectivity, since we are all influenced by the context in which we were raised and in which we stand while conducting a qualitative study such as this one. Consequently, in reflecting on her own role in the study, the researcher is aware that she simultaneously played a number of different roles within the context of the research site, namely that of a globally mobile teacher, RRC'S leader and participant-observer researcher. Therefore, while these various 'positions' provided her with different perspectives from which to view the research problem, the fact remains that the issue of subjectivity has been an issue of to concern, and one which limits the findings of the study.

Thirdly, not only is the study limited by the role of the researcher, but considering the complex nature

of the research site in terms of family mobility and cultural diversity, it can be assumed that language, as well as social and cultural barriers on the researcher's part as well as that of the site's other participants, have resulted in oversights and misinterpretations of intended meanings.

Fourthly, it is clear, the issue of multi-culturalism and language plurality in RRC possibly created numerous communication difficulties between parents and the researcher. However, by using different methods of data collection and checks with members of the same family who could understand and speak English, attempts to limit misunderstandings and confirm observations were made.

Finally, not all the collected data was used in the study's findings. This means that the problem has not been fully uncovered and so further investigation is necessary. For instance, while data on a Danish newspaper was collected and brief reference made to programmes directed at parents by BBC's Prime, a qualitative in-depth interview with parents, to establish how they use this or similar international media to resolve the parenting problems that they face and which influence their support of early learning, was not conducted.

In short, therefore, this study and its findings are limited and that further research is required to shed more light on the research problem.

6.7 Recommendations for further research

Because this study suffers limitations, it is possible to make a couple of recommendations for further research that might shed more light on the research problem of this study

- since families suffer the loss of extended family contact and their social contacts are severely reduced as a result of their global mobility, a gap emerges in the support networks that they can rely on to fulfil their parenting task.; a topic for further investigation would be how and the degree to which, these parents use commercial media to solve their parenting problems

- it is evident that care-givers have special needs; having identified this aspect of family re-location, as having a significant impact on the entire family, further study needs to be carried out on this aspect of global mobility
- the initiatives that teachers take to reach out to parents are numerous; an investigation into this phenomenon within the context of other multi-cultural international schools would provide further ideas for the kind of support that teachers need from their schools and leadership teams in order to assist parents to support formal learning
- an examination of the strategies adopted by globally mobile children to adapt to their new learning environment would provide a deeper understanding of the problems they face and how parents, teachers and schools could best support their endeavours to face them.

6.8 Conclusion

The study site of RRC is a complex one and representative of the reality that the majority of globally mobile families at Rygaards School experience. However, despite the challenges that re-location present, parents are supporting learning at Rygaards and the quality of the school has been affected positively by their participation.

However, the issue that is at stake is the degree to which Rygaards makes use of the human, social and intellectual capital that this international parent community represents. The opportunities that working parents have to engage in dialogue with their children have become scarce and the possibilities for children to learn in familiar, relevant and contextual ways have diminished and that children are best supported when school, home and community collaborate. For that reason it is essential that Rygaards encourages increased parental interest and participation in learning at classroom level. By identifying the skills that parents possess, and that could enrich its international learning environment and create opportunities for ‘learning and teaching’ between and by parents, pupils and teachers, the School can achieve mutually enhancing involvement.

In conclusion, while transience is a reality that characterises the school, Rygaards can still do much that matters in collaboration with its students and their families. Greater classroom penetration by parents within a single year or single lesson, will make a difference because it will fill gaps while at the same time provide opportunities for building social networks, creating a sense of belonging and control over an increasingly changing world, open doors on new and exciting cultures, celebrate the rich diversity that Rygaards is blessed with and make learning a relevant, contextual and community oriented experience – in which everyone at Rygaards has a part to play. In other words, every act of parent support will increase their sense of belonging to Rygaards community, broaden their definition of what it means to be a world citizen and build bridges in the new global world in which their children live.

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Jan 2002	Parents' expectations for their children
Sept 2003	Parents' comments on the settling in period
August 2005	Family mobility and parents' as first educators
Sept 2005	Family mobility and its impact on parent support of learning

Catalogue of questionnaires from 2000 –2005

Table 2

Situation	Focus of observation
Morning delivery of children	Parents encouragement of the development of child's independence
Afternoon collection of children	Language interaction between parent and child
Home visits	Provision of learning materials, informal parent-child interaction
Coffee mornings	Parent participation in a classroom activity
Welcome barbeque	Interaction between new families
Xmas party	Participation by fathers, interaction between families
Festival celebrations	Parent interest in class participation, Parent ability to engage 4 year olds
Summer bazaar	Co-operation between parents

Situations involving parents and their children that lent themselves to observations

Table 3

Situation	Focus of conversation
Morning delivery of child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State of child's health, mood and willingness to come to school Child's visit to doctor or dentist Collection of child by au pair or a stranger Special dietary requirements of children Instructions regarding medication requirements of child Non-attendance of after-school care Play arrangements and collection by other parents
Afternoon collection of child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents' comments about displayed work Child's behaviour and well being Child's happiness and morning separation anxiety Birthday party arrangements Arrangements for festival celebrations School wide activities
Parent consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child's development and rate of progress Behaviour difficulties at home and school Problems related to re-location arrival and departure Parents parenting concerns Misunderstandings between staff and parents Relationship problems within the family Child's physical health Child's developmental and learning difficulties Ideas for parents' support at home
Class meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences in parental expectations for their child and of RRC staff Discipline Practical issues relating to clothing and food requirements The introduction of reading books and the phonics programme Information from the school
Coffee morning's Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caregivers' experiences Child development Difficulties with children's eating and sleeping patterns Parents as co-educators The challenges of parenting Absent spouses
Social family gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child's progress Status of family's settling in Parent's work situations Family travel plans Planned visits from extended family members Invitations extended to teacher to visit the home for a meal

Situations involving parents and their children, which lent themselves to conversations

Table 4.

In our culture mothers are responsible for the education of young children.				
Agree strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	1	5	5	7
Now that our child is attending an English medium school we should speak less of our mother tongue at home				
Agree strongly	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	1	2	4	13

RRC parent responses to August 2005 questionnaire

Table 5

Do you speak your mother tongue to your child?		
Yes	No	
20	3	
Does your child understand your mother tongue?		
Yes	No	
21	2	
Does your child representatively in your mother tongue?		
Yes	No	
17	6	
If you have more than 1 child, do they communicate with one another in your mother tongue?		
Yes	No	Only child
9	13	1

23 out of 40 RRC parent responded to the September 2005 questionnaire

Table 6a.

1. The social skills of sharing and showing concern for others
2. The skill of reading
3. Number concept
4. Fluency in English
5. Appreciation of cultural traditions
6. The skill of writing
7. Music appreciation
8. The development of a spiritual dimension of life
9. The skill of kicking and catching a ball
10. The ability to express oneself in art

Learning skills rated in order of importance by parents

Table 6b.

Skill	No. of respondents	Rating
The social skills of sharing and showing concern	13	1
Fluency in English and ball control	6	2
Appreciation of cultural traditions	8	3
The intellectual skill of reading	5	4
Concept of number	6	5
Music and the skill of writing	8	6
Ability to express oneself in art	7	7

Learning skills rated in order of importance by parents

Table 6b

Learning skill	Degree of priority ranking	
	Most Important 1-5	Less important 6-10
Sharing and showing concern for others	19 respondents	1 respondent
The intellectual skill of reading	16	4
Number concept	15	5
Appreciation of cultural traditions	11	9
The skill of writing	10	10
Ball control	9	11
Spiritual development	8	12
Expressing oneself in art	4	16

Learning skills rated in importance by parents

Table 7.

List of activities that RRC Parents provided as examples of activities they perform at home to support their child's formal learning at school

Establishing strong attachments with each family member
Teaching him how to be a member of a family of 6
Being a role model by showing respect
Helping him to make his needs known in a polite way
Teaching him the importance of mixing with other kids and being friendly to others
Teaching my child how people interact
Teaching her to share things with others
Teaching him community with his new born brother
Learning to take turns
Teaching the importance of respecting others and to know his limits
Teaching her good manners
Teaching her how to share
Praising him

Table 8

Articles published in Danish weekend newspapers from 30.2.2005 –20.11.2005

Article title	Publication	Topic resume
Skam få dig Dobbeltmødre	<i>Politiken: Søndag 30.2.2005</i> <i>Politiken: Søndag 6.3.2005</i>	The use of shaming as a child-rearing strategy The debate on state funding of artificial insemination of lesbians
Forældre går med i skolen	<i>Politiken: Søndag 6.3.2005</i>	Municipal attempts to involve parents with problem children, in the classroom
Forældre er med på skolebænken	<i>Politiken: Søndag 6.3.2005</i>	Subject courses for parents of school going age
Cartoon	<i>Politiken 29.4.2005</i>	Global nomad students
Forældre på kursus for at sige nej	<i>Politiken 20.5.2005</i>	Course for parents on how to say no
Rigtige forældre	<i>Politiken Søndag 12.6.2005</i>	Arguments supporting eligibility of homosexuals and lesbian parents
Et liv med sedler og møder	<i>Politiken Lørdag 13.8.2005</i>	Present day forms of parent-contact utilised by schools
Alene Hjemme hver dag	<i>Politiken Søndag 14.8.2005</i>	The trend in "family" patterns in Denmark
Det tabte paradis	<i>Politiken Søndag 18.9.2005</i>	The restricted concept of family
Opinion i tal	<i>Politiken Lørdag 3.9.2005</i>	The state's responsibility in terms of children and Youth
Pasning ude af trit med arbejdstid	<i>URBAN 7.9.2005</i>	Child-care provision out of sync with the demands of the labour market
Lektier hjælp til forældre	<i>Politiken Søndag 11.9.2005</i>	Subject courses for parents
Skumfiduser og konsekvensryttere	<i>Politiken Søndag 11.9.2005</i>	A parent's criticism of state and school support
Hjælp til forældre	<i>Politiken Lørdag 17.9.2005</i>	The importance of home-school co-operation
Mors of fars terrorist	<i>Politiken Lørdag 24.9.2005</i>	A grandfather comments on child-rearing practices
Ghettoskole	<i>Politiken Lørdag 20.11.2005</i>	The ghettorisation of schools

