

**Playing the game: examining parental engagement in schooling in post-millennial Queensland**

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**Abstract**

Parent engagement in schooling has long been held as a vital component of the successful navigation of the schooling process and, consequently, governments often invite such engagement via policy implementation. However, at times, contestation arises about parent engagement, with some parents seemingly “crossing the line” when attempting to be involved in their children’s schooling. This paper investigates the possibility of parent engagement in schooling in Queensland, Australia, conceptualizing it as a game of social and systemic practice. The author examines this notion using a recent example of contestation between parents at a regional government school and the education authority. Policy directives about parent engagement are explored, with the rhetoric of such policy applied to the example in question. The work of Bourdieu and Foucault is used to argue that the invitation to parents to engage is framed and thus often misrecognised, resulting in unintended conflictual relationships between parents and governing authorities.

**Introduction**

Recently in the Australian tabloid the Courier Mail in Brisbane, Queensland, an article appeared regarding a campaign by parents at a regional school to alert the education authority, Education Queensland, of their dissatisfaction regarding teacher aide time in newly established prep classes in this state (26<sup>th</sup> March, 2007). The Parents and Citizens (P&C) Association from this particular school had sent a letter to other Parents and Citizens groups in Queensland, seeking support to lobby Education Queensland to consider more teacher aide time in these play based classes. In the

words of Madonna Sharp, the secretary of the Pinnacle State School P&C, this group of parents was ‘doing its job well by supporting their school and advocating for the education of their children’ (2007, p.9). Such a sentiment was not felt by the education authority, Education Queensland however, who replied with a letter to principals across the state, which stated that this campaign should be ‘managed’ by them or ‘before you know it at the meeting there will be a resolution to send a letter to...’ (2007, p.9). In other words, the education authority was not happy to be subject to a mounting campaign on a politically sensitive issue.

This paper highlights such a point by going further to argue that parent engagement in schooling in the State of Queensland is very often managed ‘at a distance’ (Rose, 1999, p. 49) by this education authority. However, the author does not mean to argue such a position in ways that suggest conspiratorial intervention. Rather, there is an argument that parents who are part of schooling in Queensland are wholeheartedly invited by government and their authorities to “actively” engage in the process of schooling in this state. However, this process of engagement by parents is understood by governing authorities in this state in terms of propriety and most definitely does not include engagement in curriculum decision-making. Therefore, conflicts can arise between such authorities and parent groups who believe they are simply ‘doing their job’ (2007, p. 9) when they seek intervention in such areas. Thus, this paper uses the work of Nikolas Rose (1999, 2000), Thomas Popkewitz (2003, 2004), Stephen Ball (1990a, b, 1994, 2000, 2003a, b, 2004), Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 2001) and Michel Foucault (1974, 1978a, b, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984a,b, c, d, 1985, 1991) in order to understand the process of parent engagement in schooling in post millennial Queensland as a “game” of social and systemic practice on the schooling field.

### **Understanding the context**

In Queensland, there is and has been a plethora of policy documentation relating to parent engagement in schooling (Department of Education, 1987, 1990, 1997a, b; Education Queensland, 1999a, b, c, d). There is substantial information in these aforementioned documents to suggest that governments and bureaucracies are inviting parents to engage in their children’s schooling. In fact, there have been quite

significant references to parent engagement in schooling in this state for many decades.

The most significant references to such involvement in Queensland began with the advent of two particular policy documents as part of a state government push in the late 1980s. Education Have Your Say produced the Department of Education document Focus on Schools (FOS) (Department of Education, 1990a), which referred significantly to the rights of parents and children with respect to state schooling. This document includes the following rhetoric:

State schooling has to accommodate three legitimate rights:

- The right of a democratic society to ensure its continuation by instilling in its citizens a common set of values, skills and knowledge;
- The right of parents to question the aims of schooling and the influences to which their children will be exposed;
- The right of children to have access to a common set of values, skills and knowledge, because education, like health, security and happiness, is of fundamental value to individual citizens in its own right. (Department of Education, 1990a, p. 41)

These statements suggest a significant policy focus around the notion of the rights of parents to participate in schooling and decision-making about the aims of schooling and to the types of schooling to which their children would be exposed. However, what is particular about this document is also that there appear to be limits about how far these rights might extend. For example, on page 41 of the document, there is a statement that refers to the fact that, while schools should be responsive to local needs, they have a responsibility to the wider community as well (1990a, p. 41). The report goes on to state that the demands of particular individuals and groups do not always correspond with the ‘dominant view of society’ (p.41) and so there will always

be conflict and compromise. Thus, according to this government department, the ‘dominant view of society’ takes precedence over local needs.

This notion of the ‘dominant view of society’ is a significant one and one that really frames how policy relating to parent engagement might be interpreted. Such rhetoric also highlights Ball’s references to the contradictions that are inherent in such policy reform (Ball, 1990a, 1994; Bowe et al, 1992; Muldeerig, 2003). The consideration of as having ‘rights’ in relation to the type of schooling their children are exposed to, infers a significantly collaborative and transparent relationship. However, phrases that suggest that decisions are made in relation to ‘the dominant view of society’ are very likely to qualify and frame how such involvement in schooling might be understood. Further evidence of such a point exists in the following:

Moves towards decentralization and changes in professional relationships are now bringing opportunities for those within the school community to determine what schools do and contribute to students’ learning. Education is becoming a *partnership* between the school and the community, and strong ties are being established between the two, with community members participating in most facets of school-based decision-making. (underlining added)  
(Department of Education, 1990a, p. 41)

The key term in the above quote is the term most. For, although an invitation to parents to engage and to partner did exist in this document, it was a framed invitation. It was an invitation that is framed by propriety, where parents were invited to engage but under particular conditions (Macfarlane, 2006). Further examination of Queensland government policy in relation to parent engagement in schooling in the 1990s indicates a similar position. In 1997, the Queensland Government adopted a significant policy document entitled Leading Schools: Partnerships for Excellence, as policy for its state schools. This policy introduced the notion of schools councils as:

...an important vehicle whereby the wider school community can be effectively involved in determining the broad strategic direction of the

school, within systemic guidelines. (Department of Education, 1997a:3)  
(underlining added).

However, policy rhetoric in this document also suggested:

School based management, which has as a core objective the improvement of learning for all students, provides opportunities for the school community to share in educational decision-making...School based management involves a considerable increase in local decision-making about schools and schooling within the broad policy frameworks developed by Education Queensland. (Department of Education, 1997a:5)

What these policy statements indicate is that the rhetoric of policy, at this point in time, is suggesting that school based decision-making is desired and that this school based decision-making should include the school community. The inference then is that parents, as members of the school community, should have a role in this decision-making. However, the role of parents in relation to their participation in schooling is always qualified. Moreover, it is not only government seeking to qualify parent participation. Other individuals who have the “right to speak” (Ball, 1990b) about proper participation of parents in the process of schooling also qualify such participation. For example, Ian Mackie, a past president of the Queensland Teachers Union, echoes this qualification in the following quote. Mackie states that:

Parent participation in school committees and decision-making structures...generally works best when principals are able to manage and control that participation and when there is a clear distinction between those who contribute advice and those who are ultimately responsible for making decisions. Parents have a right to be involved in their children’s schooling – but in an advisory capacity – and I believe there should be safeguards in these advisory models to protect against a siege of unrepresented views...The reality is that the bulk of parents are quite happy to let the school get along with its business, but there are a zealous and committed few who wish to impose their

view on some schools. (Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association (QCPCA) 'Parent Talk', 1996, p.21) (underlining added)

Mackie's notions situate parent engagement in very particular ways. In Mackie's terms, parents can be involved but in advisory capacities. They must be managed and controlled and not exist in the category of decision-maker or leader (Macfarlane, 2006).

Statements about parent engagement in schooling are explicit in some ways but it is also not difficult to see how some parents might become confused. Parents appear to be invited to engage but it is the categories of engagement that are under question. Currently in Queensland, there have been few developments in policy about engagement since the 1997 Schooling 2001 document, the precursor of which was Leading Schools: Partnerships for Excellence (LS). Following the election of the Labor State Government in 1998, policy relating to LS was reorganised. The LS document was replaced by the policy document Future Directions for School-Based Management in State Schools (1999a). There were many similarities between this document and the LS document but subsequent policy documents, Implementation of School-based Management in Queensland State Schools, (1999b) and School-based Management in Queensland State Schools, (1999c) altered this policy and introduced three levels of devolutionary practice that qualified parent engagement (Meadmore, 2000). While in other states in Australia more uniform approaches had been put in place, in Queensland, the three different levels suggested by the new policies assisted in breaking down the effectiveness of school councils and other more amenable approaches to parent participation. The only organization that is mandatory in the three models is the P&C Association, where involvement is signified via traditional participation (Meadmore, 2000).

These developments raise some interesting issues because, at present in Queensland in 2007, there are only two established means of engagement in schooling, beyond the

role of the traditional helper<sup>1</sup> (Macfarlane, 2006). These means of engagement are via the P&C Associations or, in some cases, via School Councils. As part of these organizations, parents are presented with an opportunity for engagement in management decisions and in the day-to-day running of the school. However, as previously stated by Ian Mackie, these roles are advisory only – they do not carry any specific decision-making responsibilities, which suggests little change since 1996. Such a notion is highlighted in current government policy in the current Education (General Provisions Act) 2003. This act states that parents who are members of the school council may not:

- Interfere with the management by the School’s principal of the day to day operations of the school and its curriculum; or
- Make operational decisions about teaching or learning resources at the school; or
- Make decisions about the individual teaching style used at the school; or
- Make a decision that is contrary to law or to a written policy of the Department (p. 72)

Thus, it appears that while parents are invited to engage and to partner, via certain “traditional roles” (Macfarlane, 2006), they actually appear to be unable do so via inclusion in any leadership capacity or in decision making about curriculum, as the parents of Pinnacle State School attempted to do.

The aforementioned information suggests that while parents are invited to engage they can only do so “properly” (Macfarlane, 2006). It appears to be “proper” for parents be active in school life, engaged in school decisions and partnering with school policy. However, in doing so, they must also remain inexpert and unleaderly (advisory) (Macfarlane, 2006). In the case of Pinnacle State School in Mackay in Queensland mentioned at the beginning of this article, such parents stepped outside of these categories. The Pinnacle parents attempted to be active, engaged, partnering, expert and leaderly (decision makers about policy) because they suggested that

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional helper role is defines here as helping in traditional activities, for example via tuckshop/canteens/ uniform shops, assistance in the classroom in reading or craft activities and assisting in fundraising events.

curriculum resources were inadequate and that policy in this respect was incorrect. Therefore, the “cry” for their management as parents who participate “properly” was heard in 2007 as it had been at various historical times previously. It appears then that the need from bureaucracy and therefore, from government, is that parents can engage but in doing so they must be “properly” pedagogicalized (Macfarlane, 2006).

### **“Properly” pedagogicalised**

Notions of propriety about social and systemic practices in Queensland such as engagement in schooling are underpinned by understandings of ethical citizenry and responsabilization. To borrow from Nikolas Rose (2000, p.1395), the term responsabilization ‘asserts our belief in a common purpose’. This term has become the means by which governments promote particular values, ethics and behaviours to the population espousing these as desirable qualities. Based on the assumption that people need a ‘framework of belief’ (Rose, 2000, p.1396), this ‘technique of government’ (p.1397) promotes mutual responsibility and reciprocal obligation as the cornerstones of civil societies. Consequently, the civic-minded citizen self regulates and becomes “responsibilized”, that is, comes to understand this process as the “proper” way to function (Rose, 2000). Moreover, the focus on a belief in a common purpose works to create “responsibilized communities” consisting of free and autonomised individuals who derive guidelines and techniques from these communities to enable them to ‘enact their freedom’ (p.1399). It is through this process that individuals are subjected to technologies of government (Rose, 1999), thereby becoming agents in particular and “desirable” ways.

Thomas Popkewitz builds on Rose’s notion of “responsibilization” in his recent work Governing the child and the pedagogicalization of the parent: A historical excursus into the present (2003), arguing that parents’ participation in schooling is fundamental to American schooling as a system of governmentality. He asserts that, in the US, the notion of a community is central to the notion of progress of both schooling and nation (p.10). As Popkewitz (2003, p.50) understands it:

The metaphor of community is evoked in the US reforms of site-based management, home-school collaboration and curriculum discussions of the classroom as a “community of learning”.

He goes on to argue the importance of the notion of community in bringing together ‘multiple salvation themes of progress’, coming as it does with a ‘universal value of goodness’ (p.50). This allows the possibility of re-locating ‘community’ within a field of practices that join the ‘life-long learner’ with what he terms ‘the pedagogicalization of the parent’ (p.50). The driving idea here is the usefulness of developing “partnerships” between the school and the home, both of which are characterised by their character as friends not enemies of diversity. However, as Popkewitz goes on to explain, while new emphasis is placed on diversity and equity, there is at the same time an imperative to ‘produce new sets of distinctions of inter-group differences’ (p. 50) whose work is to exclude particular categories of families by placing them outside what is normal for school success.

Clearly then, the terms responsibilization and pedagogicalization are linked in quite precise ways. Pedagogicalization is strongly related to the formation of like-minded partnerships, which work to create harmony between the partners and determine common educational and social goals. It is about enrolling or enlisting individuals to align themselves with the stated aims and strategies of school or the government to ensure that the “proper” participatory behaviours are instilled in children, parents and in the school community. In short, “responsible” parents are enthusiastic and committed parents who participate readily in the life and work of the school. However, schooling authorities govern this participation by steering individuals at a distance (Rose, 1999) towards appropriate school community participation.

### **Playing the game**

As a means of facilitating further understanding of the process of parent engagement in schooling in post-millennial Queensland, such engagement can be represented via the analogy of a game. The use of this analogy represents an appropriate approach to this issue of engagement, as the notion of a game is frequently used in examining social and systemic practice, particularly in poststructuralist and postmodern work.

For example, Foucault is concerned with ‘games of truth and error’ (1985, p.6) focussing on how truth is produced through discursive practices and how the obsession with validity is produced as a consequence of this game of truth (1984b). Moreover, Lyotard (1984) and Rorty (1989) have used the analogy of the game in relation to how “language” games are produced. Additionally, the sociologist Bourdieu (1984) uses the metaphor of the game in his work, in order to enhance understanding of social practice.

To borrow from these theorists and proceed in this way is to understand the schooling process as a field that is produced in terms of what counts as truth about good schooling practice and, therefore, proper engagement in schooling. Parents constitute a group of social actors who perform as players in the game of engagement that takes place on this field (Bourdieu, 1984). This particular game is only one of many games that may be played on the schooling field. Moreover, the engagement game that is played on this field is one that is governed by the discursive rules of schooling, which constitute engagement in terms of proper pedagogicalization (Popkewitz, 2003, 2004). As previously stated, for properly pedagogicalized parents to be considered as legitimate players on the field of schooling, they must be actively engaged in legitimate ways. Therefore, they must participate in the engagement game in particular ways, at particular times.

In order to provide a framework for understanding the game of engagement in schooling, it is imperative to explore particular theoretical perspectives, which facilitate an understanding of schooling in terms of the field on which the game is to be played. Both the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu (1984, 2001) and Foucault (1974, 1978a, b, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984a, b, c, d, 1985, 1991) can be useful here as a means of understanding schooling as a field and engagement as a game. Additionally, this analogy will assist in developing an understanding of how discourses of schooling, as systems of power relations, work as technologies of government to categorise individuals, producing implications that can result in deviant categorization and unsatisfactory consequences for parents.

## **Understanding the game**

To proceed in this way then, it is necessary to examine ways in which social and systemic practice relating to engagement in schooling are constituted and understood. Bourdieu's (1984, 2001) work can be used here as a means of understanding how particular dispositions of individuals are produced and govern the way in which these individuals engage in social and systemic practices like schooling. Additionally, this understanding will be used to inform how these dispositions work to produce engagement by parents in the schooling process in Australia. Thus, aspects of the practice of schooling in Australia will be examined in terms of developing an understanding of how schooling is discursively produced in contemporary contexts and of how this discursive production contributes to the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001) of individuals, leading them to adopt particular dispositions and understandings as "truth" (Foucault, 1978b, 1980, 1984b).

Negotiating the field of schooling can be understood as engaging in social and systemic practice (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Schools are social institutions where particular rites of passage are enacted as part of acceptable social practice in particular communities. Acceptable or proper forms of engagement by actors in such institutions or fields, involves adherence to particular "rules" that signify how successful participation or practice is produced (Foucault, 1978b, 1979, 1981; Bourdieu, 1984). These "rules" can be produced by discursively organised categories of understanding and unconsciously internalised dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984), which work to govern the behaviour and engagement of individuals in terms of "successful" membership of particular communities (Foucault, 1978b, 1981, 1984b, c, d, 1991; Rose, 1990, 1999, 2000).

Bourdieu (1984) contributes to understanding such processes of engagement in terms of the way in which he conceptualises social practice. Bourdieu (1984) situates human beings as active agents who respond to the environment in terms of what it means to them. He attests that human beings engage in particular forms of practice by means of a set of practical dispositions that become an unconscious part of their repertoire. These dispositions are structured from past experiences, which act to shape

perception, thought and action and that form strategies regarding how individuals act on their present circumstances (Habitus, Capital and Field Website (2004), retrieved on 10/05/04). Bourdieu calls these habitual strategies and dispositions *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In Bourdieu's terms, an individual's habitus consists of 'dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how and competence, all of which function below the threshold of consciousness' (Habitus, Capital and Field Website (2004), retrieved on 10/05/04). Consequently, individuals develop particular beliefs and understandings that anchor and produce thinking and practice in particular ways. Thus, players in the game "unconsciously" adhere to the "rules", which are produced by how the game and field are discursively organised.

In relation to schooling then, the game of engagement is played according to discursively produced categories of performance that situate parents in particular ways. Parents are "unfree" to play their own game or to not participate in the game. Instead, parents engage in terms of their dispositions and schemas. These dispositions and schemas are produced as part of their subjectivity and in response to the game (i.e. engagement in schooling) and are always already framed by the rules of language use (Foucault, 1981, 1984b, c, 1991). Thus, parents are governed by regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980), which are produced by discourses constituting the way in which they may engage properly in the game of schooling.

Parents participate as 'players in the game' (Bourdieu, 1984) as they actively engage with competence but always within the constraints of the game (Habitus, Capital and Field Website (2004), retrieved on 10/05/04). This is not to suggest that the "rules" of the game are fixed and immovable. Rather, discourses are reworked and shift as a result of jolts, surprises and discontinuities that are produced at particular times (Foucault, 1983, 1984a). Therefore, the "game of engagement" on the field of schooling is constantly changing and subjectivities are reproduced and reinvented as a consequence.

One way to understand parent engagement then is to see it as a space of action and contestation rather than a line of development. Figure 1 on the following page depicts the schooling field. The depiction shows a simple bounded space similar to a sporting field with which the reader would be familiar. Proper engagement exists on the field

represented in light grey and successful engagement exits in the sections depicted in dark grey. The white sections represent places where parents could metaphorically “be sent to” if they do not engage in appropriate ways. This means that if parents “engage-in-resistance” (Macfarlane, 2006) as the Pinnacle parents did, then they risk metaphorical exclusion from the game, perhaps temporarily, until they are able to re-engage in appropriate ways. Such a notion suggests that disengagement is not an option because as long as children are in school, parents must remain in the game (Macfarlane, 2006)<sup>2</sup>.

[insert figure 1 about here)

Discursive shifts and discontinuities work to produce policy reform that governs the constitution of this represented field (Ball, 1990a, 1994, 2003b, 2004). These shifts and discontinuities act to both produce and reproduce the ways in which individuals engage with schooling. They also work to produce and reproduce understandings of propriety, either affirming or changing an individual’s habitus. Thus, the habitus of individuals participating in the game of engagement comprises any new or shifting information and works to perpetuate the means by which the game is played. Individuals will continue to engage according to the rules, and to maintain proper categorizations. As the field changes, the game responds, by the formation of new rules that govern the players who participate.

Parents then, self-regulate (Foucault, 1978a, 1979) to engage in the process of schooling in terms of particular levels of performance (Ball, 2000, 2003a, b, 2004) that categorise them as proper or improper members of the school community (Rose, 2000). Such self-regulation ensures the continuation of the game of engagement, thereby necessitating the perpetuation of this process as part of what constitutes schooling. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) argue that social collectives, such as schools, reproduce themselves. These collectives:

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<sup>2</sup> This diagram is necessarily limited in what it is able to capture about the game of parent engagement but nevertheless it provides a special metaphor for understanding the moves that occur in the rules of the game and the limits of the field on which the game is played

...have built in propensities to perpetuate their being, something akin to memory or a loyalty that is nothing other than the “sum” of routines and conducts of agents who relying on their know-how,... their habitus, engender (within the limits of the constraints inscribed in the relations of force constitutive of the field of which they partake and of the struggles which oppose them) lines of action adapted to the situation such as their habitus inclines them to perceive it, thus tailor made (without being designed as such) to reproduce the structure of which their habitus is the product. (pp. 139-140)

Thus, the habitual behaviour and responses of human beings act to ensure that particular collectives (i.e. bureaucracies, schools, hospitals) perpetuate themselves (Foucault, 1979). Such habitual behaviour and dispositions continually shift due to the intersection of particular discourses and the discontinuities that can be produced as a result (Foucault, 1984b, c, 1991). These shifts and intersections produce new regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) that act to produce particular conceptualizations of propriety, which work to govern individuals in terms of how they perform as “players” in the engagement game.

Such a focus is further substantiated by comments such as those by Geoff Masters, the CEO for the Australian Council of Educational Research in 2004, who takes a particular position in determining how schools can be “highly effective”. Masters (2004) writes stating that highly effective schools are characterised by:

...outstanding school cultures. In these schools students have a sense of belonging and pride. The school provides a physical and social setting that is safe, well organised and caring. Values of respect, tolerance, and inclusion are promoted throughout the school, and cultural and religious diversity are welcomed and celebrated. (p. 25)

Geoff Masters is an individual who, because of his position, is produced to understand highly effective schools in a particular way (Foucault, 1979, 1984b, 1984c, 1984d). Statements such as these, by influential individuals (i.e. those who exist in particular

categories or who are accorded particular status) (Foucault, 1980), can contribute to the production of particular truths about what constitutes a proper or highly effective school. Masters is part of an educational site that validates who has the “right to speak” (Ball, 1990b) about such matters. In Foucault’s terms, Masters’ ability to plug into particular truths that lead to the development of new regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) exists as a result of the power relations that are produced by particular discursive formations. Foucault (1974) states:

But we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them. (p. 46)

Masters has permission to speak “truth” in relation to schooling that allows the ‘social appropriation’ (Ball, 1990b, p.3) of the discourse. Such statements, spoken as “truth”, are mobilised by rhetoric that plugs into particular prominent discourses at various times throughout history (Ward, 1996). In the same way, such statements can mobilise other statements and cause them to be taken up as truths at particular times as part of, or in place of, what already exists, causing shifts and discontinuities to occur in current discourses and new truths to become established (Foucault, 1980, 1984b, c, 1991). Terms that were previously used to define quality and propriety can be replaced by other terms. In this case, “highly effective” is used to signal quality.

Such notions suggest that privileged rhetoric plugs into discourses that work powerfully to produce particular ways of participating and behaving as proper. Ball (1994) highlights this point with respect to the authority of particular voices in deciding truth, particularly in terms of policy making. Ball (1994) argues that discourse redistributes voice so that it does not matter what some people might say or think – only certain voices are meaningful and authoritative.

Furthermore, Ball (1994) states that, in Foucault’s terms, policy ensembles that include the values and ethics of the market, management, appraisal and performativity can work as regimes of truth ‘through which people govern themselves and others’

(Foucault, 1980, p.22). Certain rhetoric and policy can highlight certain ways of engaging and situate these ways of engaging as reasonable to the population or the community. Moreover, Ball (1994) states that, texts, readers of texts and the contexts of response, all have “histories” and, therefore, policy reform is constituted in relation to these histories. Thus, policy is not necessarily based on constraint or meant to inhibit agency (enablement) but can highlight the changing relationships and intersections between the two. What is apparent from such a tracking of discourse then, is that:

the effect of policy is primarily discursive, it changes the possibilities we have for thinking “otherwise”; thus it limits our responses to change and leads us to misunderstand what policy is by misunderstanding what it does. (Ball, 1994:23)

It is possible for parents’ participation in the engagement game then to become more restricted while simultaneously appearing open, as particular policy reforms or rhetoric are implemented. It is also possible for parents’ understanding of how to play the engagement game to be altered and adjusted as a result of particular policy reform. Rhetoric that is used in particular ways at certain times can produce new understandings of what might be considered proper or “highly effective” practice in schooling. This “highly effective” practice then, forms part of the field of schooling and works to produce the “rules of the game” of engagement. Thus, comments related to ways of engaging and limits to such engagement as a necessary component of schooling, work to constitute the field on which the game is played in a particular way. Moreover, ways of engaging that are highlighted as proper, are adopted as “true” practice that individuals should aspire to (Foucault, 1978b, 1979, 1984b, c, d, 1991). Such ways of engaging or behaving become part of the habitus of any individuals participating in the game (Bourdieu, 1984, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In terms of parents’ engagement in schooling then, parents adopt these “truths” about proper engagement and, therefore, believe them to be integral to a “highly effective” process. To engage properly, is to adhere to the values and ethics necessary for responsabilized membership to the school community (Rose, 1999, 2000) or to adhere to the “rules” necessary to be included as a successful participant in the game. In Ball’s (2003b) terms:

[r]eform does not just change what we do. It also seeks to change who we are, who it is possible for us to become...Within each of the policy technologies of reform there are embedded and provided new identities, new forms of interaction and new values. (p. 7)

Thus, parents will allow their engagement to be limited by the rules of the game and will join in the demonization of individuals who do not adhere to the rules. This means that parents will “freely” participate in their own self-regulation because this appears to be reasonable behaviour. However, the assumptions, contradictions and ambiguities of policy sometimes cause parents to mis-recognise their role in the engagement game. Such misrecognition leads to incidents like those at Pinnacle State School, which call for governing bodies that are steering at a distance to “manage” engagement behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

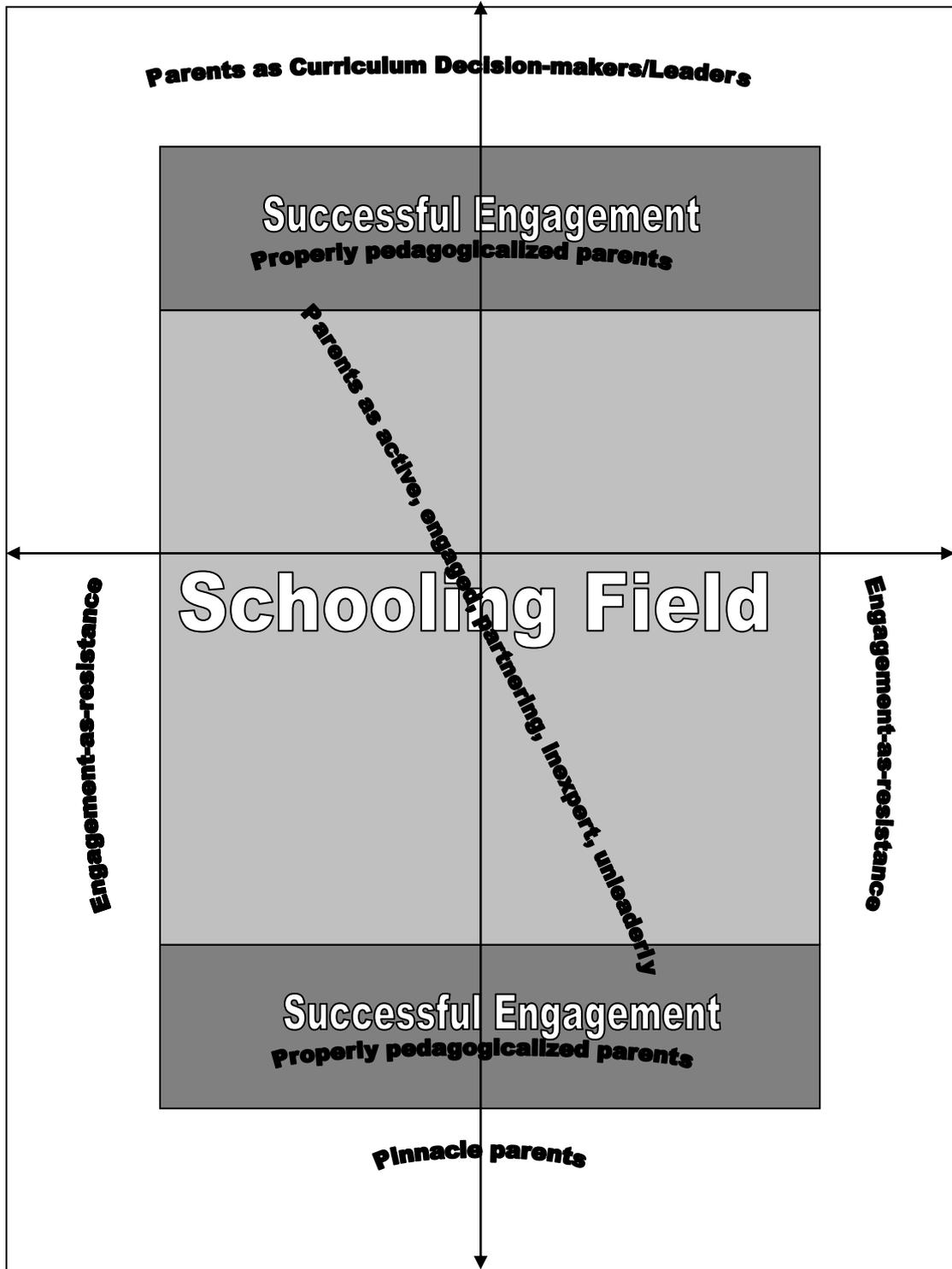
In this paper, it has been argued that policy reform and associated rhetoric, work to constitute schooling as a field, where individuals engage in social and systemic practice. Parent engagement in schooling then, can be conceptualised as a game, in which individuals participate as players according to particular rules, behaviours and requirements. Such rules, behaviours and requirements are produced by discourse, which constitutes how the game is played and altered at certain times and in particular places. Bourdieu’s work has been used in conjunction with Foucault’s theories, to illustrate how habitual strategies and dispositions, which are part of the habitus of individuals, contribute to how the game is played and how it changes over time. Thus, how individuals engage in social and systemic practice is best understood by using the analogy of the game, as a means of illustrating how the rules of language use work to govern individuals in terms of propriety and performance on the schooling field.

For the parents at Pinnacle state school in Mackay then, their recognition of how they were ‘doing their job’ (2007, p.9) was in fact misrecognition (Hunter, 1993). While parents on P&C organizations obviously have a role to play and indeed are invited to engage in Queensland Australia, they must be sure that they do so as active, engaged,

partnering, inexpert and unleaderly, that is, as ‘properly pedagogicalized’ (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 183) or they will “need to be managed”. In Foucault’s terms, such parents will be disciplined in a variety of ways and therefore risk unruly categorizations (Fraser, 1989) that may well delimit future opportunities for their engagement in the schooling of their children.

Figure 1

**THE SCHOOLING FIELD**  
**(Arrows denote schooling field)**



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