UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Southampton Education School

Principals' Communication Style and Parents' Involvement in School

by

Eng Lee, Wee

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2011

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES
SOUTHAMPTON EDUCATION SCHOOL

Doctor of Philosophy

Principals' Communication Style and Parents' Involvement in School

by Eng Lee, Wee

Communication skills have been recognised as critical to school leadership. The evolution of social culture, the complexity of human relations and the change in today's schooling systems require school leaders to be highly competent in their communication skills. The aim of the study was to explore the links between principals' communication styles and parents' involvement in Malaysian secondary schools. A comparative qualitative case study was employed. The conversations of three principals and six parents from three different schools were observed and video-recorded. The participants were also interviewed and field notes were taken throughout the fieldwork. Data were analysed using multimodal discourse analysis based on the conceptual definitions and empirical indicators of communicative style adapted from Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983). Analysis of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal observations and interview data indicates that all three principals present very similar styles, namely friendly, open, relaxed, attentive and animated. The principals' communication styles are task-oriented and generally shaped by their roles and responsibilities as school leaders. However, the styles present by parents are more varied. They presented at least seven styles, namely friendly, open, relaxed, attentive, animated, dominant and contentious in 35−45 minute conversations with the principal. The parents adopted daily communication styles that are generally shaped by the complex processes of socialisation and tend to show more complex styles of speaking in order to achieve their personal communication goals. The findings show that informal communication is the most effective way to encourage parents to become involved in school. Examination of

interview data with the principals and parents also concludes that being friendly, committed, respectful, transparent, appreciative and honest is the most influential way of building a meaningful school−home partnership.

DECLARATION OF AUTHOR

I, Eng Lee, Wee declare that the thesis entitled

Principals' Communication Style and Parents' Involvement in School

is the result of my own work, except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged as sources of help.

Signed: _____

Date   :_____

This doctoral study is dedicated to

my lovely wife, Lai Heng

my sons, Tze Wei and Jienn Shen

Thank you for convincing me I could do this

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Principals' Leadership Communication Style and Parents' Involvement in School

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

1.1 Background

Communication has long been credited with being fundamental to organisational success. Scholars such as Barrett (2006), Riches (1994), DuBrin (2010), Lussier and Achua (2010), Moos and Huber (2007), Northouse (2010), Reeve (2008) and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) acknowledge that communication is a critical element for overall organisational operations and success. Barrett (2006), DuBrin (2010), Lussier and Achua (2010), Northouse (2010), Moos and Huber (2007) and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) strongly believe that leadership exists through communication. Riches (1994, p. 254) goes so far as to say that 'Management could not take place without communication, and organisations could not exist without it'. This statement asserts that communication is central and pervasive in all organisational life. The role of organisational communication is not only to facilitate information flow but to function as the heart and soul of the organisation in order to make it alive, survive and grow (Arredondo, 2000; Lussier & Achua, 2010; Spinks & Wells, 1995; Witherspoon, 1996).

Believed to be both a keystone and a lubricant to turn the wheels in any leadership role (Arlestig, 2007; Dexter, Berube & Young, 2006; Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004; Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 1999; Northouse, 2010), regardless of any leadership theory or model adopted by leaders, communication plays an important role in the success or failure of the leader's effort.

Communication skills have been recognised as critical to school leadership (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Crow, Matthews & McCleary, 1996; Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005). The evolution of social culture, the complexity of human relations

and changes in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and Malaysia schooling systems, from a closed system with a vertical hierarchy system to a more open and collaborative structure, requires school leaders to be more competent in their communication skills (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004; Klinker, 2006; Muijs, 2011). Therefore, clear and consistent communication is necessary for a principal to shape and sustain good relationships with teachers, support staff, students, parents, family, stakeholders and community (Crow, Matthews & McCleary 1996; Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009).

The literature on organisational communication clearly acknowledges that the basic function of communication in any organisation is to affect knowledge or behaviour by influencing, directing, regulating, motivating, inspiring, socialising and persuading (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004; Lussier & Achua, 2010; Moos & Huber, 2007). Thus, school leadership communication in today's practice is not only to facilitate the transmission or sharing of ideas, but to increase support and respect internally as well as in the external community (Foskett & Lumby, 2003; Reeve, 2008; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009).

The field of organisational communication is highly diverse, complex and fragmented. Schools have become larger. The student population and the parents being serviced are also increasingly heterogeneous, resulting in schools' administration and educational programmes becoming more complex (Bell & Bush, 2002; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Klinker, 2006). Therefore, school leaders have to be more effective and efficient in their social interaction, as their ability is not only being measured by their facility to detect problems but how they might also plan an effective communication strategy to overcome problems (Cherin, 1999; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006; Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 1999; Reeve, 2008).

Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka (2000), DuBrin (2010), Fleming (2000) and Northouse (2010) write that leaders have to be able to communicate well with a wide range of staff, and those who understand the importance of communication have always to be flexible in their chosen styles and language to accomplish the intended goals. School leaders may have to realise that the way they speak is another essential factor in influencing others in the school. Therefore, the study of communication style is considered an essential aspect to sustain organisational improvement (Wood, 2007).

Previous studies have proven that a leader's communication style impacts on the effectiveness of the leadership (Arredondo, 2000; Dexter, Berube & Young, 2006; Norton & Brenders, 1996). Educational leadership studies conducted by Lipham and Franke (1996), Payne (1996), and Walker and Cavanagh (1994) showed that it also affects staff commitment and job satisfaction. Therefore, the principals' communication style may be accepted as a predictor of teachers' and staff's commitment, perception and involvement with the school. For this reason, school principals might have to demonstrate an adequate communication style in order to develop better interpersonal relationships and respect from school members, parents and the local community.

Many studies have investigated school−home relations, but fewer have tended to explore principals' communications in relation to parental involvement in school. The literature has shown that most of the research examining school−home relations often establishes communication as the intervening variable between school leadership style, parental involvement and students' academic achievements. Studies conducted by Addi-Raccah and Ainhoren (2009), Crozier and Davies (2007), Griffith (2000), Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006), Hill and Craft (2003), Nir and Ami (2005), Poulou and Matsagorouras (2007) and Ranson, Martin and Vincent (2004) are examples of those that establish communication as an intervening variable. The studies have covered a range of research areas, but there might be perceived limitations as far as in-

depth investigation is concerned. The focus on issues is often on the school organisation rather than specific roles such as principal, senior assistant or teacher.

This research is concerned to ensure that the findings are useful and benefit school principals, especially those who are directly involved as participants. The main focus of the study is to explore secondary school principals' leadership communication styles in relation to parents' involvement in school learning activities. The study attempts to add to our understanding of why parents are reluctant to participate in school learning activities, even if they realise that their involvement may have a positive impact on their children's learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Improving education has become a national priority in most countries of the world (Bell & Bush, 2002). Declining student achievement levels, changes in student needs and an increasingly multicultural population in the late 1990s in the United States, for example, required policymakers and educators to focus on children's family life (Kelly-Laine, 1998). Evidence in the literature on parental involvement indicates that what occurs at school and at home is important in determining outcomes for children. It is believed that parents can significantly influence their children's homework, achievements, attendance and self-belief, regardless of income and educational status (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, Van Voorhis, Martin, Thomas, Greenfeld, Hutchins & Williams, 2009; Pomerantz, Grolnick & Price, 2005; Villas-Boas, 1998).

In Malaysia, parents' involvement in children's schooling has been credited with being vital for effective schools for the last few decades. The implementation of a Parent−Teacher Association (PTA) in all government public schools since 1971 may be seen as one of the government's actions to reduce the communication gap between schools and parents.

As Malaysia approaches her Vision 2020 to become a fully industrialised and developed nation by the year 2020, education has become the priority for shaping future generations. The implementation of the Master Plan for Education Development 2006−2010 (MPED 2006−2010) within recent Malaysian educational reform is another effort to enhance the involvement of parents rapidly as partners in the Malaysian education system. In school management, for example, the plan places great emphasis on school leadership to improve school−home relations (Ministry of Education, 2006b). Schools are recommended to develop more collaborative programmes to increase parental involvement in school. Schools are recommended to spend more time with parents. The school administrators and teachers are recommended to involve parents in weekly school assemblies, school meetings, school−home reading programmes, school open days, school sports days and school prize giving days. At the same time, schools are also recommended to encourage their students, teachers and administrators to carry out more community work in order to develop a better rapport with parents, families and the local community (Ministry of Education, 2006b). This effort is line with Epstein's (1995; 2001) suggestions for encouraging schools to invest more time in designing support policies to improve school−home relations.

Previous studies, however, have proven that encouraging parents to become involved with school is not always an easy task. Most parents are often reluctant to engage in school learning activities, even if they are aware that their participation generally has a positive impact on children's learning and social behaviour (Farrell, 1999; Chavkin, 1993). Whilst few studies have been conducted on this topic in Malaysia, studies conducted by Abd. Razak and Mohd. Nor (2007), Md. Lazim (2004), Mohd. Dom (2006) and Sulaiman, Abdullah and Yusop (2004) conclude that most schools face severe difficulties in terms of parental participation. Parents are reluctant to participate in most school learning activities, including those organised by the PTA. A survey conducted by Md. Lazim (2004), for example, reveals a lack of willingness to participate in school learning activities because parents are busy with their daily occupations. Their

perceptions of school leadership were also an influential factor. This study, however, does not discuss further how parents perceive school leaders; further exploration of school leadership would be needed to find the answers. Thus, the study attempts to explore why parents are reluctant to become involved with the assumption that the way principals communicate might be a factor that affects their relationships. Determining the reasons why parents are reluctant to become involved might help school administrators to improve practices that are generally assumed to be unsatisfactory in most Malaysian schools (Abd. Razak & Mohd. Nor, 2007; Md. Lazim, 2004; Mohd. Dom, 2006; Sulaiman, Abdullah & Yusop, 2004).

Trends in parental involvement in Malaysia differ from school to school, depending on factors such as parents' ethnicity, socioeconomic status, school community and location. However, in some cases the level of parental involvement in school also varies with the children's age (Abd. Razak & Mohd. Nor, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2006a). Prior studies on school−home relations indicate that parental involvement in Malaysian primary schools is better than in secondary schools (Md. Lazim, 2004; Wee, 1999). This is believed to be closely linked with parents' responsibilities for assistnig children in their early years (McMillan, 2005; Mohd. Dom, 2006; Poulou & Matsagouras, 2007). Mohd. Dom (2006) points out the emphasis on children's psychological development is a key motivator for most parents to engage in Malaysian primary school activities.

Md. Lazim (2004) and Mohd. Dom (2006) reported a change when children reach secondary school. Most parents believe that their children are mature when they reach secondary school, implying less need for help. Learning experiences gained from primary school are expected to enable them to study on their own. Therefore, the children are given more freedom to manage independently when they reach secondary level (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Epstein (2001) indicates that parental involvement decreases dramatically as children move up. This is supported by two different studies conducted by Deslandes (2000; 2003) comparing parental involvement with higher and lower grade secondary students

in Canada that found that the higher grade students received less parental support and had more autonomy than students from lower grades. Data from 17,424 higher grade students showed that parents maintain less communication with them and their teachers and attend school events and meetings less frequently. Deslandes' (2000; 2003) studies show that there is a relationship of positive significance between the level of study and parental involvement. Parents may tend to give adolescents more autonomy over their studies.

In some cases, parents presume that only qualified personnel such as teachers are eligible to deal with the academic domain, and that their continuing involvement may negatively affect children's progress. Most parents still lack knowledge on the school−home partnership. A study by Crozier and Davies (2007) found that lack of understanding of the significance of parents evening programmes is the reason why parents of Bangladeshi origin fail to become involved in many schools in the north-east of England. Similarly, a study by Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) to examine parents' perception of parental involvement in Greek schools revealed similar perceptions. The parents perceived teachers as 'experts' in the academic domain, while parents saw themselves as 'guardians' of children's social and emotional growth. Therefore, many parents believe that direct involvement might interfere with their children's academic learning.

Simon (2004) asserts that many busy parents, especially those who are economically disadvantaged or have limited language proficiency, might tend to hand over most of their responsibility for assisting their children to the school. In these circumstances, schools could perhaps take the initiative to engage volunteers to help in the communication between school and minority groups such as Bangladeshi families.

Many researchers such as Crozier and Davies (2007) McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown and Lynn (2003), Poulou and Matsagouras (2007), Simon (2004) and Soomin and Wang (2006) acknowledge that lack of knowledge and skills

about successful partnerships between parents and teachers results in most schools failing in their collaborative programmes. Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) assert:

> From one hand, parents need guidance from teachers about their children's development and from the other, teachers ask for parents' involvement in school, but they are not equipped with skills or knowledge to promote such an involvement.

(Poulou & Matsagouras, 2003, p. 84)

Therefore, school leaders and teachers are recommended to equip themselves with skills, knowledge and strategies in order to develop effective communication with parents, as school−home partnerships are not just a short-term goal but a journey to enhance long-term educational success.

The main problem facing most Malaysian secondary schools is the number of parents actively involved in school−home collaborative programmes. Programmes have been set up by most of the Malaysian state educational departments to strengthen the relationships between teachers, children and parents, but fail due to lack of parent participation. Studies by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, indicate that most parents are interested in suggesting ideas, but take less initiative in organising learning activities (Ministry of Education, 2006a). A study conducted by Abd. Razak and Mohd. Nor (2007) also found that PTA committee members played a very limited role. They are mostly involved in mini projects such as organising social work and fundraising.

Parental involvement is a concern in most schools (Blendinger & Snipes, 1993; Epstein et al., 2009; McMillan, 2005; Pang, 2004; Pang & Watkins, 2000; Wee, 1999). Schools might perhaps take the initiative to involve parents, but the issue is complex due to diversity in terms of sociocultural background. Researchers such as McKay, Atkins, Hawkins Brown and Lynn (2003), Poulos and Matsagourous (2007), and Soomin and Wang (2006) argue that, although a school−family partnership is universally accepted as best practice, effective

parent−teacher partnership is not always easy to promote, as schools have to ensure that they develop relationships in a way that acknowledges the needs and perspectives of all parties, including children, parents, teachers and school authorities. Therefore, schools need to set up communication channels in a way that allows them to build mutual trust. They may need to schedule flexible meeting times for working parents and to highlight academic and behavioural successes on a regular basis to gain positive and influential levels of support from diverse parents (Bensman, 2000; Halsey, 2005).

Communication allows teachers and parents to exchange information about their children's progress in school or at home. It also provides teachers and parents with a deeper understanding of mutual expectations, for both parties' attempts to assist the children. Therefore, schools may need to provide more communication channels and opportunities for parents to support and participate in their children's education programmes (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988). Many studies have also reported that parental involvement in school not only helps school performance but parents' attitudes about school (Coleman, Collinge & Seifert, 1993).

This study focuses particularly on communication with parents by the principal, as the most influential person to encourage parental involvement, directly or indirectly. Direct influence might be in face-to-face communication, by telephone or email. Some suggest that personal contact with parents might be the best way to meet the needs of parents, but to reach every single parent is rather hard to achieve. The principal may also empower teachers, staff and students to encourage parental involvement. Indirect influence might be useful for reaching a large number of parents, and may also generate a good atmosphere in which to develop relationships with parents.

Hoover-Demsey and Walker (2002) assert that good school−home relations may increase parents' satisfaction and support, but this might only be achieved through positive interaction and communication between school and

9

parents (Crow, Matthews & McCleary, 1996; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Epstein, 1995, 2001; Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005; Reeve, 2008; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). The current study attempts to determine how principals speak to parents and how parents perceive the way in which principals speak to them.

Whilst parents may be reluctant to become involved with school, school may also be reluctant to welcome parents as partners. An effort is required to engage parents in activities. Critical questions have to be answered in the light of many studies in the literature revealing that schools do not welcome parents. Foskett & Lumby (2003) summarise:

> While experience is growing in many countries, the professional distance between school and parents is still a barrier that is slow to disappear, and ideas of partnership are strongly developed only rarely. Parents are still very much outsiders to the management of the schools across much of the world.
>
> (Foskett & Lumby, 2003, p. 113)

Studies have proven that parents are actually interested in becoming involved in school learning activities. Robbins and Alvy (1995), and Slaughter and Kuehne (1998) conclude that school leaders and teachers do not in fact welcome parents to school. They claim that principals and teachers are reactive with parents, as they view the relationship as a back-burner priority, traditional and passive. Slaughter and Kuehne (1998) demonstrate that most parents come into school only with complaints about school administration. They find that schools often organise events for their own convenience and pay little attention to parents, who become disappointed and withdraw their support.

Crozier and Davies (2007) studied Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents in the north-east of England and concluded that schools are not truthful in dealing with parents and inhibit accessibility. Schools are not sufficiently welcoming to minorities and label them 'hard to reach' parents. However, the findings indicate

that some parents are quite knowledgeable about their children's school education system and what their children do in school. Many parents show trust in their schools and are satisfied with the way in which the schools organise their children's education, and tend not to contact the schools. Most of them, however, do not deny a lack of confidence with English among the main factors that discourage them from attending school parent−teacher consultation meetings. The study clearly shows that professional as well as cultural barriers between schools and parents remain a critical issue if schools are to achieve higher parental participation and respect.

Schools are increasingly becoming diverse. The modern world is highly mobile, and differences abound, globally, nationally and locally. Differences might be found even across a city. Therefore, interpersonal skills and effective communication become essential in developing mutual respect and better relationships (Foskett & Lumby, 2003). However, efforts to create true partnerships are debatable. One-way communication with parents is a convenient form of manipulation that leads parents to withdraw from participation. Fleming (2000), Robbins and Alvy (1995), and Slaughter and Kuehne (1998) strongly argue that schools make a serious mistake if they disregard parents, because they need their support if they are to improve. Proactive communication is needed on all school issues.

Principals play a major role in making a difference in terms of parents' expectations and perceived role *vis à vis* the education system. Policies and practices that promote openness and two-way communication between parents, teachers and principals are necessary for building the trust and shared orientations that can elevate parents' interest in children's learning at school and at home, leading to better scholastic achievements (Trumbull, Diaz-Meza, Hasan & Rothstein-Fisch, 2001).The literature suggests that improving school−home communication is essential in order to achieve higher parental involvement in children's learning.

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between principals' communication style and parents' involvement in school. This study will seek to identify patterns of principal and parent communication styles and their influence on parental participation in school activities. In addition, this study will also seek to investigate whether the level of parental involvement appears related to demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. It is hoped that this study will provide a positive insight into why parents are reluctant to become involved in school learning programmes.

1.4 The Significance of the Study

Having worked for nine years at secondary school level and for the last three years at the Ministry of Education in Malaysia, the researcher has come across schools with various levels of parental participation. The significance of school principals' facilitation of school activities cannot be denied. The principal is the key person leading the staff and shaping the school environment. School principals with different leadership styles and interpersonal skills might affect the degree of parental participation in school learning activities. The researcher has observed that, while some principals struggle to persuade parents to become involved in school learning activities, some principals do not care. This circumstance can be clearly seen in a few schools, even if the parents are from the same ethnic group and socioeconomic level. In fact, some schools with low levels of parental participation at first managed to increase it when the school head changed. This was the start of my wishing to find out the reason. Studies conducted by local researchers such as Md. Lazim (2004) and Mohd. Dom (2006) also indicate that leadership style is a main factor in parents' reluctance to become involved with the school. Therefore, this study is designed to contribute to understanding how principals' communication style has a significant effect on school parents' relationships.

The low level of parental involvement in Malaysian public secondary school is a serious concern (Ministry of Education, 2006b). So, the knowledge gained in this study may contribute to the enrichment of communication by leaders and the school leadership literature. The findings of the study might provide principals with more information about the importance of their communication style in developing partnerships with parents. Principals, particularly those involved as participants in this study, might recognise the strengths and weaknesses in their communication skills as they try to encourage parents to become involved with school. The findings of this study might also be useful for participants planning their future communication strategies, or to inform teacher training programmes. The literature indicates that few interpretative studies have been conducted to investigate principals' communication style, especially related to parental involvement in school. Therefore, this study might provide a worthwhile contribution on understanding school leadership communication style.

1.5 Research Questions

Given the study problem, a series of research questions was developed to guide the work. This was divided into two sections. The research questions in the first section sought information about principals' communication styles and their views on parents' communication styles. The second section sought information about parents' communication styles and their views on principals' communication styles. It is hoped that looking from each perspective might give a clearer picture about principals' communication style in relation to parental involvement in school. The full series of research questions is as follows:

How do principals perceive their communication with parents?
  i.   What communication style(s) do principals use with parents?
  ii.   Does principals' prior knowledge about parents' background affect principals' communication style with parents?

iii. What role do principals perceive that their communication style plays in influencing parents' involvement in school?

iv. Does parents' ethnicity impact on principals' communication styles?

How do parents perceive their communication with principal?

i. What communication style(s) do parents use with the principal?

ii. What role do parents perceive that their communication style plays in influencing principals and their involvement in school?

iii. Does parents' prior knowledge about the principal affect their communication styles with the principal?

iv. Does the principals' ethnicity impact on parents' communication styles?

1.6 Definitions of Terms

Central to this study are the following main concepts. Definitions are given to provide an operational terminology of key terms.

1.6.1 Principals

A principal may be defined as the administrative head. However, for this study the word 'principal' refers to a public secondary school principal given the authority by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, to manage and to lead a school's administration.

1.6.2 Parents

'Parent' could be given as a blanket term to cover biological parents, grandparents or other guardians of children. However, in this study it is limited to biological parents who have a legal responsibility for the child.

1.6.3 Schools

Schools in general may be seen as an institution designed to encourage children to learn and attain knowledge under the supervision of teachers. However, the definition in this study will be limited to public national-type Malaysian secondary

schools. A Public National Type Malaysian Secondary School is also known as *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*; that is, fully government-aided secondary school where the medium of instruction is both *bahasa Malaysia*, the Malaysian national language, and English as a second language.

1.6.4 Parental Involvement

Different perspectives on the terms 'parents' or 'parental involvement' are often found in the literature. This is because they are broad and multifaceted with an inconsistent definition to specify various ways of parents engaging in children's learning process. Grolnik and Slowiazek (1994) define parental involvement as the dedication of resources by parents in given domains. However, this study will focus on a widely accepted typology of six types of parental involvement in a framework developed by Epstein (1995; 2001). In this study, 'parents' or 'parental' involvement are synonymous with the terms 'participation', 'partnership' and 'collaboration' that refer to parents' direct contact with the school or assisting their children in learning at home. This includes helping children with their homework and reading programmes. Parents attend school for events, PTA meetings, meetings with teacher and volunteering in school learning activities.

1.6.5 Leadership Communication

Leadership communication is an important component in generating effective management. Barrett (2006) defined it as controlled and purposeful transfer of meaning to individuals, groups, organisations, or communities (p. 5). Leadership roles require communication skills to create and deliver messages that guide, direct, motivate or inspire others to action, as intended. In this study, leadership communication is defined as specific modes that principals use to interact verbally or non-verbally with parents.

1.7 Methods

Prior study on communicator styles indicates that research has generally adopted an objectivist rather than a subjectivist perspective. This might be useful for

classifying features and for generalisation, but has ignored contextual details. Therefore, this study is designed as a qualitative case study to allow better understanding of human interaction in order to explain the complexity of the communicator style.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on three principals and six parents from three secondary schools with communities of different ethnic origin in two districts in Malaysia. Thus, it is possible that principals and parents from other districts of the same type of secondary school may provide different data. Furthermore, the parent respondents were selected from PTA committee members so the respondents chosen may well not be representative of the whole parent population in Malaysian secondary schools.

1.9 Structure of the Study

Having provided an overview of the study such as research background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, definitions of operational terminologies, research limitations and summary of the methods in this chapter, it is now necessary to provide a brief outline of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2 is a literature review. It focuses on key issues related to human communication, including complex issues of definitions and the process of communication. In addition, this chapter emphasises the importance of communication and highlights the concept of effective communication. In order to provide a background for the study, the chapter also emphasises crucial issues related to school−home communication and parental involvement in schools.

Chapter 3 provides details about the methodology of the study, including the fundamental tenets and philosophy of the enquiry paradigm underlying the conceptual frameworks of the study. The chapter begins with discussion of the research philosophy, followed by an explanation of the research design,

sampling, data collection and data analysis. Finally, the chapter highlights several issues crucial to research ethics and research validation. The results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Discussion is presented in Chapter 6 and conclusions in Chapter 7.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and synthesises relevant and significant literature in relation to the research problem of this study. It begins with an exploration of some important concepts linked to the term 'communication'. It further discusses the concept of style and leadership in the context of communication. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of communication and ethnicity. This chapter also highlights several issues concerning school−home communication and concludes with a presentation of the research conceptual framework.

2.2 Definition of Communication

The word 'communication' is historically associated with the term 'common'. Its stem is from the Latin verb *communicare*, which means 'to impact', 'to share' or 'to make common' (Rosengren, 1999). 'To share' or 'to make common' means that the communicators use the same symbols during interaction if they want communication to succeed, because the communication process is not just about transferring meanings, but transmitting signs, codes or symbols.

The terms 'signs', 'codes' and 'symbols' are commonly used in explaining communication, but that does not necessarily result in consistent definitions. Explanations of 'communication' can be vague or confusing because of nuances in the three different terms. In some cases, scholars view them as having the same meaning. However, other scholars such as Morris (1955) and Peirce (1966) take 'sign' to indicate a relationship with an object, while the meaning provides the link between the object and the sign. A sign does not possess meaning, because it is just a natural component that has a direct connection with what it represents. Peirce (1966) indicates that signs represent objects that can be interpreted. For example, a blue sky and sunny day is a sign of good weather. In

the school−home context, lack of parental involvement might be a sign that communication from teachers and principal has been poor, the parents are uninterested or too busy with daily occupation. The example shows that that the sign takes on the role of designating the affiliation between the world of signs and the world of reality (Morris, 1955).

Symbols have no connection with things. Langer (1957, p. 63) claims that symbols are more complex instruments of thought; not a proxy of their object, but vehicles of conception (p. 11). Ogden and Richards (1946), in their Semantic Triangle, identified words, objects or actions as feelings and thoughts, symbolic because they stand or represent a unit of meaning and can be explained by the thoughts in a person's mind. Words are symbols of something because they have been given meaning. For example, the word 'parent' may represent a father and mother of a person who takes care of a child.

A code is a set of correspondence rules used by a person or a group. Donald (1992) pointed out that it is a system of objects, responses and sign possibilities. He divides codes into syntactic and pragmatic codes. Syntactic codes are associated with the use of language and are a general set of features enabling people to communicate in different situations. People understand the syntactic code because they recognise the rules of grammar and denotations of terms in language. A syntactic code has a strong relation with formality as opposed to pragmatic code, which refers to a person or a group who share specialised knowledge. Pragmatic codes tend to be used in daily interactions within a situation (Donald, 1992). They may only be understood by certain individuals who are involved directly with the field or group. For example, the term 'school−home partnership' is only well-known among educators and parents and it means parents assisting children's learning at home or participation in school learning activities.

Therefore, a process of learning new symbols takes place when people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures attempt to comprehend

each other by signs. The introduction of unfamiliar terms and the attempt to comprehend each other involves a process of creating and learning new symbols. The communication process involves not only transfer or exchange of ideas, but attributing meaning in order to understand matters in their own way. This process is relevant to the communication style of principals when they attempt to explain, persuade, convince or influence parents about a particular matter.

Recently the meaning of the word 'communication' has become increasingly complex and may be defined from various perspectives in various contexts; for example, in the scholarly fields of anthropology, psychology, politics, architecture, communication, management and cultural studies.

Ruesch (1961, pp. 52−54) identifies at least forty varieties of disciplinary approach to communication. Scholars such as Barrett (2006), Bensman (2000), DuBrin (2010), Lussier and Achua (2010), McQuail (1994), Northouse (2010), Schirato and Yell (2000), and Williamson and Blackburn (2009), for example, define the word 'communication' in very different ways, as they have different disciplinary backgrounds. Scholars in general acknowledge that communication takes place when the sender and receiver agree to share understanding of information, signs and symbols. However, the approach and perspective are varied. Scholars from dissimilar backgrounds might describe the word differently.

Academics such as Berlo (1960), McQuail (1994) and Schramm (1954) view communication as a process of sharing the meaning of a set of symbols. Shannon (1946), a telecommunications engineer, defines communication as a way of transmitting electrical signals. Leadership scholars such as Barrett (2006), Covey (2004), Dubrin (2010), Lussier and Achua (2010), Northouse (2010), and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) view communication as a tool for creating understanding in order to influence, control and motivate followers. Anthropologists such as Hall (1990), and Schirato and Yell (2000) view communication from a cross-cultural perspective. Hall (1990, p. 3) offers a loose definition, saying that culture is communication, and communication is culture.

Schirato and Yell (2000, p. 1) view culture as a product of communication, highlighting that it is a practice of producing meaning, and the way in which members of a culture negotiate systems of meaning. Clearly, Hall (1990), and Schirato and Yell (2000) view communication as a process of sharing symbol systems to form the basis of culture.

Schachter (1951, p. 191), a psychologist, relates communication to power and says that 'communication is a mechanism by which power is exerted'. Educationalists such as Bensman (2000) view communication from an educational perspective, noting that communication in schools is not only in terms of transmitting information and sharing the same meaning, but involves a cultural interchange between teacher and students and the experience of parents learning about the school or classroom culture.

The difficulties associated with the term communication may make it too complex to be defined. Scholars such as Littlejohn (2002) strongly argue that the word is too abstract and possesses multiple meanings. He further explained that those who have deliberated over the term found it difficult to come to grips with the concept:

> Scholars have made many attempts to define communication, but establishing a single definition has proved impossible and may not be very fruitful.

(Littlejohn, 2002, p. 6)

Therefore, one possible way to define communication is to explain its processes and specify its dimensions, components, or elements (Lin, 1973).

Communication is a part of our life and, with the growth of the information age, the increasing emphasis placed on communication is part of the 'global mega-trends' (Law & Glover, 2000; Littlejohn, 2002). Evolution in the communication world, with the growth of mass media and telecommunications, has required more complex definitions. The process of communication becomes

complex, because communication is an interactive and never-ending process. Thus, a precise definition is arguably impossible to put forward.

Many scholars have attempted to minimise the problems by categorising entire definitions. Dance and Larson (1976), for example, analysed and listed at least 126 different themes of definitions. In a more comprehensive analysis, Dance (1970) previously had successfully summed up at least 15 themes from 95 different definitions from the literature, but struggled to integrate them into a cohesive definition. These definitions are categories based on themes or perspectives of the symbol; understanding, interaction, power, process, transmission or interchange, linking, commonality, channel, replicating memories, discriminative response, stimuli, intentionality, situation and reduction of uncertainty. From these 15 conceptual components, Dance (1970) thereafter clarifies the definitions according to their distinguishing elements before categorising them into three points of conceptual differentiations. These are; level of observation, intentionality and normative judgement.

The level of observation refers to how the definitions vary in abstractness. For example, Stevens (1950, p. 689) defines communication as 'a discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus', while Cartier and Harwood (1953, p. 73) say it 'is a process of conducting the attention of another person for the purpose of replicating memories'. Both definitions are broad ranging and ambiguous.

The second dimension is intentionality, which implies the inclusion of purposeful messages, sent or received. Miller (1966, p. 92) suggests that communication is about transmitting a message to a receiver 'with conscious intent to affect the latter's behaviour'.

The third dimension is normative judgement, which includes a statement of evaluation such as a statement of success or accuracy. Hoben (1954, p. 77) defines communication as interchange of thought including statements of evaluation that the communication process was successful. Emery, Ault and Agee (1973) suggest that communication is the art of transmitting ideas and

attitudes from one person to another. However, the term 'transmitting an idea' does not necessarily imply success.

These three levels of critical conceptual differentiation indicate a wide interpretation of the term communication. The word communication is abstract and possesses multiple meanings (Littlejohn, 2002). Therefore, no single definition can cover the entire meaning of the term communication. The definitions suggested are merely an effort to achieve more insight into the term.

2.3 Processes of Communication

Communication is the process of transmitting an idea by any means. It involves three primary elements: a sender, a message and a receiver. The basic communication process begins with the sender encoding and sending a message and ending with the receiver receiving and decoding it (Schramm, 1954). Each of these elements is considered equally important in the communication process. If one of these elements is faulty, the message may not be communicated as intended (Berlo, 1960; Moorhead & Griffin, 1995; Schramm, 1954).

Historically, the communication model has evolved since the Greek philosopher−teacher Aristotle (384−322 BC) first suggested his Classical Communication Model, indicating 'the speaker', 'the speech' and 'the audience' as important elements in the communication process. He insisted that communication does not exist without one of these elements. These three basic classical elements became the forerunners of working definitions in most modern communication models.

Many established communication theories and models developed by scholars such as Berlo (1960), Lasswell (1948), Schramm (1954), and Shannon and Weaver (1949) were mainly influenced by Aristotle's classical model of communication, with some modifications and replacement of the elements such as 'the speaker', 'the speech' and 'the audience' with new terms such as 'the source', 'the message' and 'the receiver', giving more accuracy to frameworks

and conceptualisations based on current communication issues. The model of five stages of the communication process proposed by Lasswell (1948) uses the elements 'who? say what? to whom? in what channel? with what effect?', clearly rooted in classical communication theory.

Although many communication models emerged in recent decades, the most accepted and widely used mainly evolve from the work of Schramm (1954), Shannon and Weaver (1949) and Berlo (1960), whose models were concerned with describing the process of communication in general situations. These theories and models are helpful and practical, because they provide a clearer picture of the process of communication; the fundamental interaction of language, medium, and message; and the socially constructed aspects of each element; and relationships between senders and receivers.

Developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), the Transmission Model of communication process is the start of the modern perspective on communication history. This well-known model shows a receiver mechanism that corrects for differences or anomalies in transmitted and received signals. A novel concept in this model is the introduction of 'noise' as an additional signal that interferes with reception. This additional element was a forerunner of the now widely used concept of interruption that is associated with the problem of effective listening in a communication process. Shannon and Weaver's (1949) 'noise' illustrates a breakdown in message flow from source to destination, a consideration useful to leaders concerned with why communication fails. The model is useful in that it not only explains how communication happens, but why it sometimes fails.

Weaknesses in Shannon and Weaver's Communication Model inspired other scholars to develop further communication theories and models. Schramm (1954) amended Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model by introducing three additional notions in his Interactive Model, namely the fields of experience, noise and immediate feedback. Feedback is the key concept of response to messages received. The two-way communication model considers orientations, attitudes,

cultural roles and expectations of the communicator as essential to the success of any communication process.

One-way communication sources have a direct, immediate and powerful effect on audiences. Classical theory suggested that receivers passively respond to all messages delivered. This model became acceptable in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, with notions of a mass audience highly influenced by the definition of mass society in which audiences generally become more receptive towards information. In the Hypodermic Needle Theory audiences are seen to be impressionable, passive and susceptible to messages transmitted (Kart & Lazarsfield, 1955). Today, perhaps, people are less passive in response, as exposure to media is high, information is available and easy to get, audiences have power and human relations are more complex. Thus, they might verbally, para-verbally or non-verbally show their positive or negative response to the messages they receive.

In school−home communication, for example, a school might receive different responses when it tries to introduce a new learning agenda. Some parents might ignore it, agree or disagree. Some of the parents might argue that the school provides uncertain or doubtful information. Therefore, one-way school−home communications might often be unsuccessful, given the diversity of parents (Law & Glover, 2000). If they want school−home programmes to succeed, schools may initiate two-way communication with parents. Ivancevich and Matteson (1999) indicate that culture-related variables, values, norms and customs can hinder communication processes. Parents with different backgrounds may need different approaches of communication. In this context, face-to-face communication would be advantageous as the principal might be able to clarify doubts and ensure that the parents have understood.

Effective communication is not as simple as sending and receiving messages. Senders and receivers of both parties may need to understand the

meaning of the communication (Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Lustig & Koester, 1996). This implies knowledge of their communication partner such as background, culture, purpose and topic of interaction of sender and receiver. Berlo (1960), in his Source-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) model of communication, discusses the importance of congruence in a communication process. The strength of this model is his recognition of the receiver as well as the source as a key factor in the communication process. The similarity in communication skills, attitude, knowledge, social system and culture between source and receiver is the main criterion to be considered if the communication is to succeed. However, similarity between communicators is often absent, even in interpersonal face-to-face interactions.

The model covers the notions of technical accuracy, such as choosing and sharing the right symbol in the process, encoding and decoding and psycho-linguistic translating messages of a sender into terms that the receiver can understand. However, in real communication, people's misunderstandings may not be due to the problem of sharing meaning, but to disagreement based on differing beliefs, values, attitudes, thoughts and feelings.

Communication may be perceived as a straightforward process of sharing meanings, but, in practice, human communication is a complex on-going and dynamic process often leading to misunderstanding. Galvin and Wilkinson (2006) postulate:

> Communication is a symbolic process of sharing meanings. A key to interpreting communication is to find meanings of the message, and those meanings are found in people, not in words.
>
> (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 1)

The statement suggests that the main problem in human communication is

meaning. The process of communication can break down at any time if senders and receivers do not share the same meaning. Every symbol sent can be interpreted differently from that intended and cause conflict between individuals. Therefore, it may be important to increase shared meaning by becoming familiar with the audience's background and culture before communicating. In the process of communication, ideas and feelings can be transmitted through verbal and non-verbal symbols, but the symbols must be mutually understood for the meaning to be truly shared. As suggested by Galvin and Wilkinson (2006), the concept of 'common' in communication actually means to share the same meanings of the symbol in order to make it possible to communicate. It seems there is no absolute standard of accepted symbols in human communication. People are merely trying to reach a mutual point of understanding in order to connect with others in a comprehensible way.

2.4 Berlo's Communication Model

The study of communicator style has roots in the theory of objectivism. The study of communicator style may be traced through Brandt's (1978) and Norton's (1978; 1983) Communicator Construct. Norton (1978) adopted five different perspectives on the classical communicator style variables suggested by Bales (1970), Leary (1957), Lieberman, Yalom and Miles (1973), Mann, Gibbard and Hartman (1967) and Schutz (1958). In this study, Brandt's(1978) and Norton's (1978; 1983) communicator style indicators will be adapted as a framework to verify principals' communication style, while the communication theory underlying the process of communication between principals and parents will be based upon Berlo's Multi-Ingredient Communication Model.

Berlo's (1960) communication model takes into account the social cultural system, and is better suited to studying the communication process in Malaysian secondary schools, where principals, teachers and students may be of different ethnic origin. Investigating the connection between principals' communication style and ethnicity is not the primary focus of the study, but sociocultural aspects

28

do have an impact in a multicultural society. Berlo's (1960) model suggests that communication is more linear if source and receiver are of the same social and cultural background. He also states that interpersonal skills and attitudes have an effect on communication from source. The model over page illustrates the Multi-Ingredient Communication Model adapted to the Malaysian context.

The concept of SMCR comprises the communication source as encoder; the message; the channel; and the communication receiver as decoder. Berlo's (1960) main idea is clarity of message transmission in communication. He believes that the message must be sent in an appropriate manner, without interruptions, if the source is to elicit an intended response from a receiver.

Figure 1.1

Berlo's Multi-Ingredient Communication Model (SMCR) in the Malaysian Context
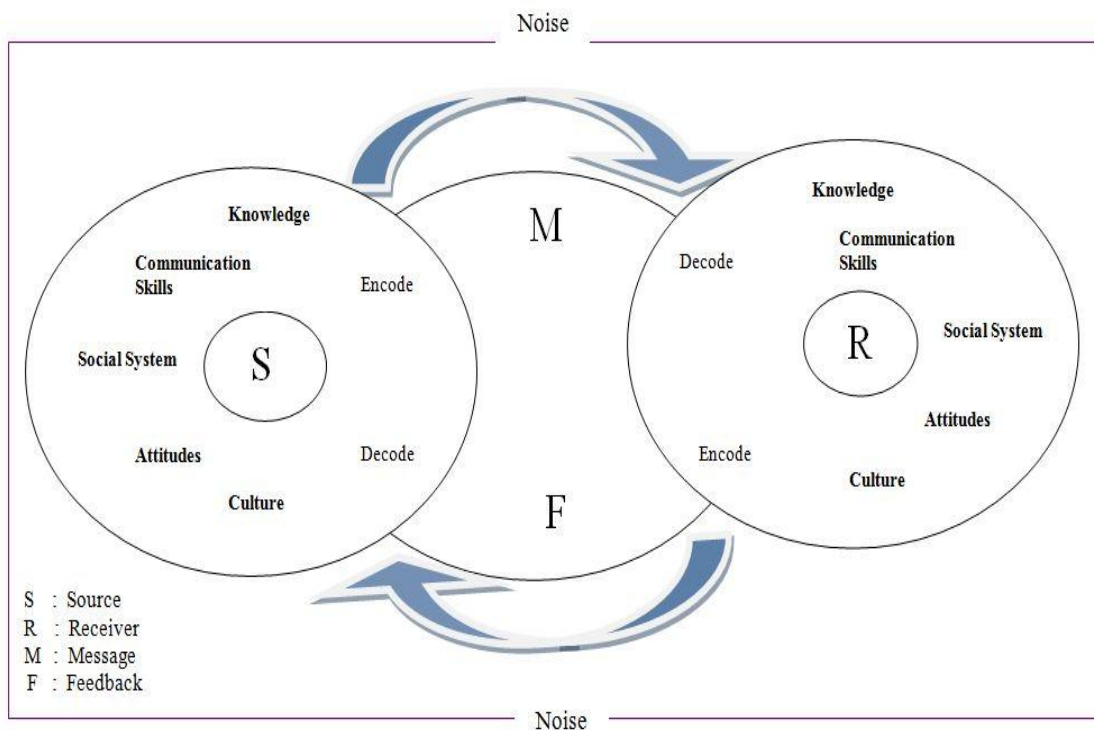
Adapted from Berlo (1960, p. 72)

The concept of fidelity is developed by Berlo in his model, similar to the concept of noise in telecommunication technology developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949). The purpose of introducing the concept of noise in the Transmission Model is to measure how true is the meaning of an actual delivered message to its intended meaning. Thus, the high-fidelity message in Berlo's (1960) model is an extension of Shannon and Weaver's (1948) idea. Reducing interruption or noise can lead to the transmission of the source's intended meaning. Although the concept of noise as a barrier to communication is not the primary focus of this study, any internal or external interruption in the socio-cultural context may affect principals' and parents' communication.

Berlo (1960) separates the various controlling factors of the source and receiver of a communication process: source, message, channel and receiver.

The first element in Berlo's (1960) model is the source. This is the transmitter of the message and represents the origin of the message. The source seeks to communicate thoughts and ideas by encoding message in a form that may be fully understood by receiver. The strength of this model is an animate connection between source as encoders, the message and receiver as decoders. The SMCR Model considered all these elements collectively.

Berlo (1960) believes that communication skills, knowledge, attitudes, culture and social system may affect the fidelity of messages. In order to communicate effectively, sources have to encode and receivers have to decode with precision. However, the main issue that arises regarding this process is how well the receiver will be able to interpret and formulate thoughts from the messages. According to Berlo (1960), the ability of the source to encode messages through verbal signs such as use of language is the main factor in successful message transmission.

Focusing on the individual characteristics of communication, Berlo's (1960) SMCR model stresses the importance of the background and the relationship between source and receiver in effective communication. Knowledge and

similarity of attitudes and possession of a common sociocultural background may result in more successful encoding and decoding. Communication skills concern the ability of the source to speak and the ability of the receiver to listen, think and reason.

Knowledge in this concept includes the knowledge of the topic, knowledge about the receiver and knowledge about how to communicate. For instance, the more informed is the communicator in these areas, the greater will be the ability to communicate. Simultaneously, knowledge of the topic and knowledge of the source are also crucial for receivers as a counterpart to the interaction process. Prior knowledge or lack of knowledge may influence how receivers perceive the message being sent.

Attitude in this model means the way both communicators behave or generally think of each other. This includes attitudes towards self, attitudes towards the theme of discussion and attitudes towards their counterpart. Positive or negative attitudes in these areas may affect the source's transmission of messages and the receiver's interpretation. Membership, cultural heritage, roles and social class in society may influence encoding and decoding. For example, in the school communication process, messages from school principals are regarded highly by teachers due to the principal's higher status as a leader and senior officer compared to others in the school.

2.5 The Importance of Communication

Leaders, including educational leaders, need to communicate in order to lead. The importance of communication in any organisation cannot be denied; prior studies on leadership communication show that leaders spend about 70 − 90 per cent of their time in communication and interaction (Barrett, 2006; Mintzberg, 1973; Robbins, 1993).

Organisational communication comprises messages exchanged between leaders and staff, and external parties. Basically, communication in organisations

assists members to accomplish individual goals, implement and respond to organisational change, coordinate organisational activities and engage in relevant activity. However, the importance of communication in school may be seen from two different perspectives. From the viewpoint of administrators, leaders might view communication as an important instrument to lead, motivate and influence staff. On the other hand, staff members often view it as being important for receiving tasks, submitting reports, comments, grievances, and suggestions. The leaders and staff have different expectations of communication. In school, for example, principals may communicate to gain support while staff members may do so to accomplish personal needs. Although the process of communication in an organisation may be complex, subtle and ubiquitous, because of its different purposes the same organisational goals may be shared if the leaders are skilful enough to communicate them. This is a challenge for leaders.

Many scholars, such as Arredondo (2000), DuBrin (2010), Dexter, Berube and Young (2006), Evencevich (1999), Hargie, Dickson and Tourish (1999), Hentschke and Caldwell (2005), Lussier and Achua (2010), Northouse (2010), Reeve (2008), and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) believe that communication is a key tool to overcome human relation problems. They acknowledge that effective communication is a powerful glue that holds and binds organisations together, but that it is difficult to achieve. Effective communication belongs with effective leaders. Therefore, leaders without good communication skills may cause misunderstandings in others in social relationships. However, the chances of misinterpretation and misunderstanding can be minimised with awareness of how to communicate and what can be expected from good communication. In a school, for instance, students, teachers and parents might become confused, frustrated and disappointed if the principal is unable to communicate appropriately, and work cannot be done. Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004), Hentschke and Caldwell (2005), Reeve (2008), Reyes and Hoyle (1992), and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) all claim that interpersonal skills are essential for effective school leadership. Mintzberg (1973) suggests that effective communication is essential to maintain good relationships and support. He says:

> Leaders must be able to communicate easily and efficiently, and they must share a vision of the direction in which to take their organization. If they cannot agree with reasonable precision on these 'plans', then they will pull in different directions and the team or the organization will break down.

(Mintzberg, 1973, p. 180)

Effective and successful school leaders need to understand the nature and complexity of communication. In interacting, they have to be sensitive to the direct and indirect effects of their communication with students, teachers and parents. Communication in school is not only a process of transmitting information; it is a process of coordinating activity, creating understanding and building acceptance of organisational goals (Moos & Huber, 2007; Crow, Matthews & McCleary, 1996).

Communication may be the primary tool for motivating parents to improve their contribution and involvement with schools, while inappropriate communication may cause conflict and low motivation among parents. Robbins (1993) asserts that good communication skills are essential to avoid personal conflict. Therefore, both leaders and staff need to possess interpersonal skills in order to generate effective communication and ensure congruency among staff. Reyes and Hoyle (1992) indicate:

> For more than three decades, researchers in such fields as organisational communication, organisational behavior, and sociology have inquired into the importance of interpersonal communication relationships within organizational structures.

(Reyes & Hoyle, 1992, p. 163)

At school level, principals communicate in order to lead, but they may have to communicate well in order to lead well. The survey conducted by Hudson and Rea (1996) in Kansas Metropolitan City indicated that the ability of principals to

communicate well is the key factor in school leadership. Sanders and Harvey (2002) investigated an urban elementary school that had been able to develop strong connections with community businesses and organisations as part of its programme of school, family, and community partnerships. They identified communication as the key factor in allowing the school to build successful bridges to the community. The principal gave full support to community involvement and the school's receptivity, openness and willingness to engage in two-way communication with parents indicated the nature and their level of involvement.

Successful school leaders communicate school values and goals to parents, using communication skills in all aspects of organisational behaviour and activities such as decision-making, performance appraisal and motivating teachers and parents to ensure effective functioning. Good interpersonal skills can also create understanding and trust (Barrett, 2006; Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 1999; Northouse, 2010).

2.6 Effective Communication

The importance of effective communication is immeasurable in leadership roles. Effective communication distinguishes between successful and failed leaders. Lussier and Archua (2010) and Northouse (2010) argue that effective communication has long been considered a critical issue because communication effectiveness can mean the ultimate success or failure of organisations. Reece (2008) insists that school principals with clear communication may achieve organisational success. Both verbal and non-verbal communication are important for school leaders to be a success in school (Bennett & Olney, 1986; Dexter, Berube & Young, 2006; Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005; Moos & Huber, 2007; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009).

Leaders such as principals who are skilled in communication may be perceived by others as effective in their jobs, and that earns them respect as role models (Reyes & Hoyle, 1992). Ivancevich and Matteson (1999) explain effective communication as a result of common understanding between the communicator

and the receiver, but there remains a problem because the concept of common understanding varies according to context. Thus, the question remains: in what way do the source and receiver share their common experience? The theories suggested by Berlo (1960), Huseman, Lahiff and Penrose (1988), Schramm (1954), Sanford, Hunt and Bracey (1987), and Shannon and Weaver (1949) bring us back to the idea that communication is more effective if the receiver interprets the message as the sender intended it. They emphasise sharing the same meaning between sender and receiver. Brown (1961) speaks of effective communication as a process of interchange and interpretation of facts, ideas, feelings, and action, but he found that even an unintentional action can contribute to effective communication. This suggests that the way of presenting messages, or style, may also be crucial to effective communication.

Robbins (1993) supports the idea that face-to-face interaction is an effective way of communication. However, effectiveness relates not just to the words spoken. Williams (2002) found that 55 per cent of the public he surveyed recognised the importance of posture, expression and breathing patterns, 38 per cent that of quality of voice and only 7 per cent the actual words. Williams' (2002) study on communication effectiveness may be considered significant as it provides detailed analysis in the field of interpersonal communication. Williams (2002) found four key elements of interpersonal communication, namely vocal enrichment, visual elements, openness and personality, but named a total of nine other behaviours of high-level interpersonal skills. This includes eye communication, postures, gestures and facial expression, dress and appearance, voice and vocal variety, language, use or non-use of pauses and gaps, listener involvement, humour and being one's natural self as important elements for effective communication.

Yukl (2002) discusses the importance of interpersonal communication skills for effective communication, including among school leaders. He concludes that it is achievable through extraordinary skill in coordinating and integrating all the elements: verbal, non-verbal, language, medium, and style of interaction.

Listening is another main element in effective communication. Osterman (1993) concluded that it creates an open, friendly, collaborative and warm environment. However, Adler and Elmhorst (1996), Arredondo (2000), DuBrin (2010), Hentschke and Caldwell (2005), and Williamson and Blackburn (2009) argue that listening is only a part of good communication and leadership. The ability of school leaders in verbal and non-verbal communication is fundamental to sending clear messages to students, teachers, parents and stakeholders in order to sustain quality relationships and the image of the school.

Communication involves the audience's interpretation of symbolic behaviours. In an organisation like a school, a shared meaning may be difficult to achieve as the audience may be heterogeneous and complex. The school's hierarchy may lead to distortion in the flow of the messages. Furthermore, diversity among school leaders, students, teachers, parents, stakeholders and communities may also contribute to misunderstandings, as people tend to interpret others according to the perceived communication experience. Hoy and Miskel (2004) point out that people have different frames of reference in assigning meaning to messages. Differences in source and receiver background can create different meanings of the same message. In communication processes within organisations it is crucial to understand the communication process, the barriers that inhibit effective communication and the various communication styles that people possess.

Berlo (1960) and Schramm (1954) anticipate communication problems when receivers decode messages according to their own experience of decoding messages from others. Receivers with poor communication knowledge in a particular culture, for instance regarding language and body language, might do so in a way that is unintended by the source and misunderstandings may occur when they interpret symbols differently. In some cases, however, people may manipulate the messages they receive; another barrier to effective communication. Campbell, Corbally and Nystrand (1983) postulate:

We consider communication to be effective when its purpose is known, its purpose is accomplished and its purpose is accomplished without creating negative 'byproducts'.

(Campbell, Corbally & Nystrand, 1983, p. 148)

Communication has 'by-products' and, according to Campbell, Corbally and Nystrand (1983), these may lead receivers to manipulate action, even if they have understood the message as intended. For example, a principal may ask parents to monitor student learning at home and parents may do so. However, the parents may resent the direction and display their objections to the matter to the principal. The message is well understood by the parents, but in practice the communication may be considered as ineffective since their response is extremely different from what the message intended. This behaviour is common, as people tend to manipulate messages.

Therefore, effective communication is difficult to define as the results depend on how the audience may respond to the message. Mere comprehension of the message is not effective communication; this involves understanding and reacting to the messages as the sender intended, or in other positive ways.

2.7 Communication Style

The way people communicate varies widely between and even within cultures. Communicators may share the same meanings, but use different language and pronunciation as well as gestures. These might cause misunderstandings, as people are constantly judging and being judged by their communication style. Tannen (1984) indicates that style might affect understanding. Therefore, it is important to study styles of communication to find out how people create meaning.

The study of communication style began after the Second World War, when Ohio State Studies investigated leaders' communication styles and effectiveness (Sagie, 1996). However, lack of structured design and standard

procedures to establish research reliability and validity resulted in many studies being strongly criticised. In the late 1970s Norton (1978) brought new life to the field of study when he developed a standard way to measure subjects' self-perceptions of communicator style, called the Communicator Style Measure (CSM).

The phrase 'communication style' is not a new concept in communication studies. The word 'style' emerged in the Hellenistic Age in ancient Greece when Cicero (106BC−43BC) included the term as one of five sub-disciplines in his Rhetorical Canon. Cicero (106−43BC) incorporated at least three communicator styles, including plain style, middle style and the grand style, that form the basis of oratory (Bryant & Miron, 2006).

Style is inextricably part of any message sent by a source. Thus, a person's communication style is the individual's typical way of communicating and style is always present if communication occurs. Communication style has been defined variously. Scholars such as Bass and Ryterband (1977), Brandt (1979), Comstock and Higgins (1997), Littlejohn (2002), Norton (1978; 1983), Tannen (1984), Richmond and McCroskey (1979), and Wofford, Gerloff and Cummins (1977) explain the concept of communication style from different angles and approaches.

Definitions of communication style were developed by Norton (1978), Tannen (1984) and Littlejohn (2002). For example, Norton (1978) conceptualised communication style as:

> ...the way one verbally or paraverbally interacts to signal how
> literal meaning should be taken, interpret, filtered or understood.

<div align="right">(Littlejohn, 2002, p. 99)</div>

According to Norton (1978; 1983), communicator style may be viewed in terms of meta-messages that contextualise how a verbal message should be acknowledged and interpreted (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey & Chua, 1988). How a

person communicates is reflective of their self-identity and affects others' perceptions of the individual. The style may comprise fundamental elements of unusual or distinctive form language patterns. The verbal message contains definite words, but perhaps unique usage. This includes the tone of voice, volume and speech rate accompanying those messages (Raynes, 2001).

Communicator style was operationally defined by Norton (1978; 1983) as consisting of nine predictor constructs and one dependent variable. The nine predictor ways of dealing with others in an interaction were: dominant, contentious, attentive, dramatic, animated, impression-leaving, open, relaxed and friendly. The communicator image represents the dependent variable. According to Norton (1978; 1983), communicator images were roughly a self-impression of one's own communicative competency. He presumed that individuals with a good communicator image found it easy to interact with others, including strangers. Norton (1978) used his Communicator Style Measure (CSM) as an operational framework, using self-reporting measures on a Likert agree−disagree scale. Norton (1978) attempted to determine the best predictors of communicator image using a quantitative method of analysis; the regression results show that the best predictors for a positive communicator image were an open style, a dominant style and an impression-leaving style.

Norton (1978; 1980) argued that his measurement of communicator style met his self-reporting criteria as his research had a clear operational construct. The self-report questions were to ensure that the questions were relevant to the phenomena, that a trusting relationship was established with the respondents, that responses were voluntary and anonymous, and that a wide range of variance was obtained (Norton, 1980, p. 95). His instrument, however, has been criticised by interested scholars such as Talley and Richmond (1980) and Sypher (1980) who found it difficult to establish validity and reliability by following Norton's (1978; 1983) conceptual framework to measure communicator style. They claimed that some aspects of CSM may contribute to bias. In particular, self-reports may not correspond to the style perceived by others. Therefore, they recommended that

researchers avoided using CSM until the problems of validity and reliability had been overcome.

In this study, parts of CSM, particularly from Brandt (1979) and Norton's (1978; 1980) conceptual definitions and empirical indicators of communicative style are adopted as the conceptual framework, not for the purpose of measuring principals' communication style but as a guide for analysing and identifying communication styles, as their framework provides clear criteria for each style. In the process of identifying principals' communication style, verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal data obtained from principal and parents conversation were incorporated to identify the empirical indicators of communicative style before making correspondence with Brandt (1979) and Norton's (1978; 1980) empirical indicators of communicative style classification.

Littlejohn (2002) and Tannen (1984) shared this view of communication style, describing it in a very simple, straightforward and understandable way. Tannen (1984, p. 4) says 'Anything that is said must be in some way, and that way is a style'. Littlejohn (2002) explained communication style slightly differently when he stated that style is a signal and it is represented when communicators use a certain intonation or body movement to support their verbal delivery. In simple words, style can be explained as a manner of speaking. Style can be delivered if principals relate to teachers about their experience in school management. They might do so with a sense of humour or a note of sadness, also using para-verbal and non-verbal signals and, according to Littlejohn (2002), this is a style. Norton's (1983) definition is more complex. He believed that signals operate as 'style messages' signalling how literally messages should be taken, filtered or interpreted by the receiver (Littlejohn, 2002). Norton and Brenders (1996) qualify this as follows:

> Style messages are signals about how to process content. Style adds to the color, tone, rhythm and distinct 'signature' of one's communication. Style, as such, gives direction, form, or guidance

regarding how content should be understood. In effect, it is a message about content − a message about a message.

(Norton and Brenders, 1996, p. 75)

Norton (1983, p. 38) defines the term 'style' as 'an accumulation of microbehaviour', meaning that it constitutes consistently recurring patterns made up of the repetition of small and apparently insignificant actions. However, the function of communicator style is to signal how the messages are supposed to be taken by a receiver. For instance, many people choose a joking style to convey a serious conversational matter.

Norton and Brenders (1996) established another two concepts related to individual communication style. The first concept is 'microsense', referring to a person's style as being on-going and sending multiple signals (Norton & Brenders, 1996, p. 74). Whenever people communicate, they present at least two sources of information: content and style. Content refers to the literal meaning in the message, while style messages are signals about how to process the content of the messages. The second concept is 'macrosense', referring to how a person communicates over a period of time (Norton & Brenders, 1996, p. 86). A 'macrosense' style establishes communication norms through facial expressions and tones of voice to establish the conditions surrounding the communication. 'Microsense' and 'macrosense' complement each other. Understanding them helps reduce ambiguity and enable predictability in communication processes.

A further approach to defining communication style was developed by Richmond and McCroskey (1979), and Wofford, Gerloff and Cummins (1977). They observed communication style from a management perspective and their orientation is strongly associated with supervisor−subordinate relationships. Specifically, Wofford, Gerloff and Cummins (1977) viewed style as a set of specialised interpersonal behaviour used in a specific context or situation. They identified six styles, specifically controlling, equalitarian, structuring, dynamic, withdrawing and relinquishing. However, Richmond, McCroskey and Davis (1982)

viewed a style in a different way. They see it more as part of organisational decision-making, not an individual's way of speaking. Their intention was to investigate certain organisational communication behaviour in decision making. Thus, Richmond, McCroskey and Davis (1982) developed the Management Communication Style (MCS) construct as their operational framework in investigating certain approaches in organisational decision making. The Management Communication Style is viewed as a continuum representing increasing levels of subordinate interaction with superiors and the construct is operationally defined by Richmond and McCroskey (1979) and Richmond, McCroskey and Davis (1982) as consisting of four major points on a continuum, namely tell, sell, consult and join. However, this construct does not offer much in common with other communication style relationships.

Much study on communicator style has resulted in the identification of various types, clusters or categories of communication styles. Norton (1983) for example, classifies communication style into ten different types, namely (a) domain style, where an individual takes control of social situations, (b) contentious style, where a person is argumentative or quick to challenge others, (c) dramatic style, in which a person is verbally alive with picturesque speech, (d) friendly style, which confirms, strokes and positively recognises others, (e) relaxed style, in which a person is at ease and not conscious of any nervous mannerisms, (f) animated style, where an individual is non-verbally active, (g) impressing-giving style, where someone displays communication stimuli that are easily remembered, (h) open style, in which someone is unreserved, somewhat frank and possibly outspoken, (i) precise style, where a communicator asks for precise and accurate content of communication and conversations, and (j) attentive style, in which an individual is empathetic and listens carefully.

Reece and Brandt (1993) proposed four types of communication style, namely emotive, directive, reflective, and supportive. Emotive style refers to leaders who tend to use facial expression, gesture, posture and emotion when expressing opinions. Directive communication styles, according to Reece and

Brandt (1993), are adopted by those who seem unapproachable, reactive, directive in terms of task implementation and risk aversive. Reece and Brandt (1993) state that a reflective communication style has an emphasis on accuracy, while a supportive style is used by leaders who are approachable, caring and believe in two-way communication.

McCallister (1997) categorised another cluster of three major communication styles, namely noble style, which is directive and straightforward; reflective style, which is non-directive; and Socratic style, in which analysis of details and debate are emphasised. Another group of styles can combine with these three major styles, namely candidate style, magistrate style and senator style. The characteristics assigned to these styles indicate that they are actually combinations of the ten styles categorised by Norton (1983).

Comstock and Higgins (1997) merged Norton's classification of communication styles into four clusters of communication styles. These include cooperative style, which blends social and task orientation; apprehensive style, which is relatively friendly but anxious and submissive; social style, which is expressive, dominant and dramatic but not argumentative or precise; and competitive style, which is precise, expressive, not open on personal issues and likely to be argumentative and dominant.

Communication style can be unique, vague, stable or varied, depending on the individual's cultural background. It may affect interpretation and meaning as style can also be delivered in silent messages to receivers. However, the problem of human communication mostly remains in that people tend to judge others' communication according to their own style, resulting in much potential misunderstanding in their intercourse. The emergence of theories crucial to this issue does not solve the problem, as these tend to explain the dimensions of speech rather than find the solution to solve the problem of misinterpretation in human communication.

Classical communicative theories suggested by Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Wittgenstein (1958) acknowledge speech as action whose meaning is only understood within specific social practices, because effective communication has a close connection with communicator history and cultural background. However, the lack of discussion on how to develop good understanding and the issue of misinterpreting individual communication styles remains problematic.

Many studies have been carried out on the variability of patterns of communication style. Recently, many patterns of communication style emerged but most studies are based on Brandt (1979) and Norton's (1978; 1983; 1996) communication style measures. They will also form the framework for investigating principals' communication style in this study. The ten communication styles described by Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983; 1996) will be used to gauge which style is being used by principals to communicate with parents about their children's education. This study does not recommend that a particular style should be used, but investigates with what principals feel comfortable and how their skill might allow them to react appropriately and effectively in their interactions.

2.8 Communication in School

Communication plays a pivotal role in success and is essential to school leadership. Communication in school leadership is particularly important, as it goes beyond communicating tasks and talking to students, teachers, staff, parents and the local community. It goes from routine duties of giving rewards for good performance to articulating the school's vision for the future.

Hoy and Miskel (2004) indicate that communication plays a vital role in providing a platform for teachers and the local community to share their ideas in order to generate effective decisions on mission, vision, values and goals. Therefore, every single individual in a school community is an important medium in order to develop understanding and organisational knowledge.

44

Lussier and Achua (2010), and Hargie, Dickson and Tourish (1999) state that human relations are the keystone to organisational growth and that organisations may become static or frozen without good communication. Communication can overcome organisational problems ranging from gossip, through accusation, to organisational crisis. In traditionally bureaucratic organisations, normative rules were passed down in a unidirectional and non-interactive basis, but modern leadership is more complex and diverse. Communication occurs horizontally and is bidirectional and highly interactive (DuBrin, 2010; Northouse, 2010). The complexity and diversity of modern school cultures requires principals to be more flexible and to formulate messages that teachers and parents are able to understand (Reppa, Botsari, Kounenou & Psycharis, 2010).

In general, school communication can be classified as one-way, two-way and feedback (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). One-way communication is that in which information travels from the school to the receiver with no opportunity for feedback, for example newsletters, bulletins and media announcements. Feedback communication is that in which there is provision for the receiver to respond with ideas, opinions or evaluations, such as the community questionnaire, the form attached to the school's newsletter or other correspondence. Two-way communication is that in which information flows back and forth between the sender and the receiver. A parent−teacher conference, for instance, where the teachers share information and receive information from the parents, is a good example of two-way communication.

In reality, prior studies have shown that most schools often practice one-way communication with parents (Blendinger & Snipes, 1993; George & Kenneth, 1989; Moore, 1992; Pang & Watkins, 2000). The school is intent on getting messages out through newsletters, bulletins and forms. As George and Kenneth (1989) say:

Principals are familiar with this form of communication and feel comfortable using it.

<div align="right">(George & Kenneth, 1989, p. 2)</div>

The assertion shows that it appears to be the easiest and simplest way of communicating with parents. It may serve many purposes in school−home relations but, on the other hand, it may be difficult to assess the effectiveness of one-way communication since there is no feedback mechanism. In school planning, school leaders have to use a different way to obtain feedback, as the feedback from community and parents may be important for school improvement. The principal has to institute an effective communication plan for the school. The school faculty members may also operate 'open door policy', and be recommended to work together as a team to carry out the plan for both the school and local community (George & Kenneth, 1989).

2.9 Parental Involvement with Schools

Parental involvement in children's learning has long been advocated as the key to their success and to school improvement. Many major studies and programmes for school−home relations in the United States, Europe and Asia have proved that a school needs support from parents, family and community for school enhancement.

A review of 49 research studies about school, external relations and students' achievement by Henderson (1987) concluded that parental involvement significantly improves the educational experience and achievement. Sanders and Epstein (1998) made a cross-national study of nine countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Centre of Educational Research and Innovation, namely Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States. The study on school−family community partnerships concluded that parental involvement in children's learning is important, because it improves children's performance not

only in terms of academic achievement but in terms of behaviour at school. The children have a greater motivation, better attendance, lower dropout rate and more positive attitudes towards homework (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Hill & Tayson, 2009; Hui & Akiba, 2009; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; McMillan, 2005; Sanders, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Parent involvement refers to parents' role in educating children in school or at home. Historically, it begins as long ago as the sixth century BC when the Athenian state regulations governing schools in Greece stated that parents were responsible for teaching their sons to read, write and swim (Berger, 2004). Parents also have been given the authority to choose the pedagogy or school they desire for their children, which shows that parental involvement has long been credited as crucial for children's learning. Domina (2005) states that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct. However, most researchers have usually looked at parental involvement as parents' direct contact with the school. Hill and Tyson (2009, p. 741), for example, view parental involvement in a very simple way. They define it as 'parents' interaction with school and children to promote academic success'. Wolfendale (1983) used the terms 'parental involvement' and 'parental participation' interchangeably. Parental involvement, according to her, is a broad term that describes all models and types of any relationship between schools, parents and community institutions that provide for children learning activities. However, in a more complex definition, Greene and Tichenor (2003) define parental involvement as:

> ….parents participating in the educational process by enhancing their parenting skills, developing positive communication skills between home and school, volunteering, providing learning opportunities at home, contributing to decisions that affect schooling, and collaborating with the community in support of the school

> (Greene & Tichenor, 2003, p. 242)

Epstein (1995; 2001) identified six widely accepted types of parental involvement in school, as summarised below:

i. parents provide children with food, clothing, and health and safety items for school;

ii. parents communicate and exchange information with the school about their children;

iii. parents volunteer to assist a teacher in the classroom, on field trips, or serve on the school committee;

iv. learning at home involves parents helping their children with homework or other home learning activities;

v. decision-making involves parents participating in school leadership activities and school governance;

vi. collaborating with the community for the benefit of schools and families.

Epstein and Sanders (2002) further explained that students at all levels would be able to do better in their academic work and show a more positive attitude, have higher aspirations and other positive behaviours if they have parents who are aware, encouraging and knowledgeable.

Parental involvement generally benefits children in all aspects of the learning process (Lindle, 2006; Lumby, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003; McMillan, 2005; Reeve, 2008; Sanders, 2008; Sang, Kusher & Seong, 2007, Tillman, 2006). Evidence shows that parental involvement is not only important for children's cognitive development and academic achievement, but crucial to children's instructional needs (Becher, 1984; Henderson 1987). A study by Snyder and Ebmeier (1992) found that parents were not only perceived as the main source of support for children's instructional needs but were the most influential individuals in children's learning, as they might be better than teachers at influencing their children and predicting the school contexts that might foster student learning.

Parental support in the learning culture at home is essential. The roles of parents as guides and gatekeepers in children's home learning are pivotal in providing a learning environment at home (Belle, 1999; Berger, 2004; Epstein,

1986; 1995; 2001; Epstein et al., 2009). Related research on children's learning shows that children actually learn about life from the environment surrounding them (Hoover-Demsay & Sandler, 1997). It shapes their life, their ways of thinking, feelings and behaviour (Hart, 1993; Uccelli, Hemphill, Pan & Snow, 2006). The processes occur at both school and home. Children spend a greater amount of time at home, so parental contribution is important.

Parents contribute to school performance and parents and the school have to work together to develop better learning programmes and improve student welfare. Prior studies have indicated that success in school is associated with what parents actually do at home. This includes providing children with an atmosphere conducive to home learning (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hart, 1993; Schneider, 1993). However, in the modern day, the role of parents is diminishing (Berger, 1983; Driebe & Cochran, 1996; Angelides, Theophanous & Leigh, 2006). Decker and Decker (1988) contend that the lack of an 'at-home father or mother' as a provider of guidance for children at home is a phenomenon that has become serious.

Belle (1999) noted busy parents with neglected children in the United States. She estimates millions of children might go absent from school each day before their parents get home from work. Some participate in after-school programmes and some are supervised by older teenagers or adults, but many are on their own either at home or left to prowl around the city. Liontos (1992) observes that the increased divorce rate and complexity of modern life style put children at risk. The growing number of single parents, families with both parents working and families experiencing high pressures often results in parents failing to achieve the goals in many traditional approaches of partnership.

In Malaysia, this phenomenon has a strong link with family background. Some studies show that less educated parents often have less enthusiasm for their children's learning. Therefore, some children in this category do not enjoy strong learning support from their parents. According to Abd. Razak and Mohd. Nor (2007) and Sulaiman, Abdullah and Yusop (2004), a lack of awareness about

the importance of education and busy working lives among less well educated parents are the main factors contributing to children being neglected.

Research evidence indicates that the matter of parental involvement is complex. Most parents may show little interest and be reluctant to become involved in school learning programmes. Educational scholars such as Aronson (1996), Berger (2204), Epstein (1986; 1995; 2001), Harris and Goodall (2008), Gestwicki (2010) and Levin (1982) indicate that the level of parental involvement in school programmes is minimal. This lack of interest, according to them, may be attributed to a variety of factors such as holding different views about the nature and purpose of involvement between teachers and parents. Cultural differences on the acceptability of the school system and socioeconomic issues on the part of parents also might place limitations on a meaningful contribution from parents.

Harris and Goodall (2008) explored the barriers to parental involvement and the benefit to children's learning in a study that involved 314 respondents in 20 schools in England and found economic factors were one of the most cited reasons for not being involved with the school. Most parents view the main limitation to becoming involved with school as arising from work demands and childcare issues. Gestwicki (2010), for example, states that 89 per cent of parents in the United State mentioned that the time constraint is the main factor that limits their involvement with the school. Two parents working and single parents may experience difficulty in being involved during school hours or in day-time activities. However, they might be actively involved with their child's learning at home; as Berger (2004) states, most middle-class and some lower-income working parents perceived their involvement in children's education as crucial. Scholars such as Epstein (1986; 1995; 2001) and Gestwicki (2010) acknowledge that work commitments and childcare are the key issues that prevent parents from becoming actively involved with school. However, the growing number of parents who deliberately hand over their responsibility for educating their children to the school is worrying.

Some parents have a low assessment of their own ability to be involved with their child's learning at home or school (Davies, 1988). Harris & Goodall (2008) stated that most parents claimed that they feel intimidated by the school officials. They feel secondary school administration is too complex as there is a confusing mixture of roles among staff. They asserted that the organisational hierarchy and overlapping responsibility between form tutors, class tutors, heads of year, senior management team and class assistants made them confused and engendered a sense of powerlessness in their interactions with school.

In some cases, a lack of educational background also may create a distance as parents may feel less skilled to communicate with teachers (Gestwicki, 2010; Berger, 2004). To make matters worse, those parents who had negative experiences as students may not only feel uncomfortable but tend to be defensive when dealing with the school (Aronson, 1996; Davies, 1988; Ranson, Martin & Vincent, 2004).

However, in some cases schools claim to welcome parent participation but do not provide a hospitable environment for parents. Davies (1988) states that communication between school and especially parents of lower socioeconomic status are predominantly negative. Most of the parents are contacted only when they are needed. In fact, teachers and staff are cool; indifference may also create a roadblock. Aronson (1996) states that:

> Many teachers and other staff members have not learned how to communicate and work effectively with parents and families, particularly those who have different cultural, socioeconomic, or language backgrounds.

> (Aronson, 1996, p. 58)

These issues show that social relations and economic factors are still powerful barriers between school and parents. Some less educated and low

socioeconomic parents face a dilemma between supporting their children's education and financial needs. They might believe finance is more important as it is the resource to ensure their children continue schooling. Some studies show that less educated and low socioeconomic parents actually realise the importance of education for the future of the child (Berger, 2004; Crozier, 2006; Epstein, 1986; 1995; 2001; Gestwicki, 2010). However, work demands might prevent the parents from actively becoming involved with schools (Aronson, 1996; Berger, 2004).

Many OECD countries are adopting policies integrally to involve parents in the education process. Studies have found a number of interrelated reasons for OECD members to encourage parental involvement, according to each nation's political culture. First, parents become a resource that can be used by the school, whether raising funds, acting as helpers on coach trips or as assistants in sports activities. Secondly, parents may have academic ability to support learning, as well as knowledge about curricula, parenting or literacy activities. Thirdly, in school−parent communication, parents have to find out more about their children's learning progress. While parents may wish to influence the curriculum, at the same time they may transmit family values and cultures. In some countries such as France, Spain, Ireland, Denmark and Germany, parental involvement is considered a democratic right (Kelly-Laine, 1998).

Growing support from policymakers results in greater parental involvement and is reflected in the opinions of advisory bodies on school governance and in law (Kelly-Laine, 1998). This applies in certain European countries such as England, Wales, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland and Spain. However, this participation is not permitted in certain Asian countries such as Japan and Hong Kong, nor in Malaysia. In Malaysian schools parents are welcome to participate in school activities only in terms of fundraising or assisting a teacher in school−home partnership programmes and school decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2006a). They have no role in school policy and parental interference is not considered legitimate. A survey by the Educational Planning and Policy

Research Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2006a) found that primary school head teachers and teachers acknowledged parents' role in improving students' academic achievement, school finance, sporting achievement and landscaping, but they disagreed on the subject of parental involvement in the classroom as improving student learning. This disagreement aligns with limitations on parental involvement imposed by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, that controls parental involvement as an aspect of school management. *The Professional Circular on Parent−Teacher Association Number 5/2001* clearly states that parents are welcome to forward their views or suggestions regarding school administration and policy through Parent−Teacher Associations, but they are not allowed to become involved in any classroom learning activities or school policy decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2001). The enforcement of the rules and regulations under the *Professional Circular on Parent−Teacher Association Number 5/2001* is intended to avoid parental interference in a school system at administrative level. However, the parents, on the other hand, might feel discouraged and frustrated at being controlled and neglected and might withdraw their support.

Policymakers and educators have, however, acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in school. The Ministry of Education, Malaysia, has advised all public schools to set up Parent−Teacher Associations (PTA) and in fact they are now mandatory in all Malaysian primary and secondary public schools. Recently, their role has been accepted as an important component to be represented on the Malaysia Educational Development Master Plan 2006−2010 at federal level (Ministry of Education, 2006b).

Setting up a PTA in a school is regarded as a major communication enhancement, to ensure teachers and parents share mutual expectations and form consistent and stable relationships. Scholars suggest that parents and schools have to possess shared or compatible perceptions of the meanings and functions of parental involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Crow, Matthews & McCleary, 1996; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Hentschke & Caldwell, 2005).

However, parents' involvement has raised issues, as schools and parents have different views on parental involvement.

The work of Harris and Goodall (2008) revealed that teachers and parents acknowledged parental involvement as a 'good thing' (p. 282). However, they also showed a very different view about the purpose of parental involvement. Teachers viewed parental involvement as a way of improving behaviour and support for school. Parents on the other hand, believed their involvement is only to show 'support for their children'. The findings clearly showed that teachers and parents have a different understanding and perception of the concept of involvement. The root of these different views may also indicate that they might have a lack of communication, and the interactions resulted in the creation of different views and commitments that may lead to misunderstanding. Most parents tend to support their children rather than the school, although they fear to overstep the boundaries in order to maintain their relationship with the teachers. However, schools with high expectations for full parental support may become frustrated when they observe that the parents' commitment does not meet this level.

The issues suggest that parents and teachers mutually lack knowledge about school partnership programmes. Uncertainty in their roles and lack of guidance are barriers to teachers and parents achieving mutual understanding. In Malaysian schools, for example, general policy and guidelines for school partnership programmes are provided in the hope that schools will develop parental involvement. However, most schools do not give detailed guidelines on the type and level of involvement, resulting in many partnership programmes failing and both teachers and parents being unclear about their roles; the children may be caught in the middle.

Schools may have to develop clear and appropriate partnership guidelines to ensure that both parties understand and are clear on their roles to support children's learning. Scholars such as Berger (2004) and Epstein (1986; 1995;

2001) stated that an effective partnership often demonstrates a clear shared understanding of the goal, that is a consensus between schools and parents regarding the aims and values of the school, and how this can be consistently and collaboratively put into practice. Goals are typically focused on student learning, sustained improvement and problem-solving and steps are taken to ensure that the curriculum, teaching and learning and professional learning arrangements are consistent with the school's vision and goals.

Although the growth of parental support may be beneficial, it may also cause stress or pressure as parents demand more control over schools. Recently, many parents have become involved in issues that educators do not consider legitimate, such as choosing the school administrator and teachers, which classes their children should attend and what the school curriculum should contain. In some schools in some countries, far from being interested in assisting teachers, parents may try to overrule the school administration. In fact, incidents have occurred worldwide where parents have been tagged 'unruly' or 'troublesome'; they enter schools inappropriately, in some cases 'aggressively', giving verbal abuse or even physically assaulting teachers and administrators (Ranson, Martin & Vincent, 2004). Such aggressive action will affect school−parent communication if further action is not taken. However, unwillingness to involve parents may also lead to lack of trust where what is needed is openness. Blendinger and Snipes (1993) found that some teachers are reluctant to involve parents in their children's schooling and activities because of their negative attitudes and witnessing angry or irresponsible parents; this leads to lack of school administrator commitment and teacher reluctance.

Although educators claim explicitly to be interested in parents' involvement, implicitly their support for parental involvement is quite limited (Nir & Ami, 2005). Parents are welcome only in certain areas such as assisting the school with the children's homework and fundraising, but not in school administration including school policy. A study by Williams and Stallworth (1982) on Arkansas, Louisiana, Mexico, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Texas elementary

school teachers and principals indicated that school−parent communication in local schools was minimal and often one-way. Both teachers and parents were found to lack incentives for making contact, and it was suggested that the school should take initiatives to bridge the gap. Principals and teachers dealt with parents in traditional ways such as attending classes, helping with homework or fundraising, but teachers and principals did not view the parental role in curriculum or administrative decision-making as either useful or appropriate.

Lack of contact between school and parents is not only a United States and European phenomenon; the same is true in Asia. A study on primary schools in Hong Kong indicated that they spent little effort on liaising with parents. Some 36 per cent of primary schools offered two or fewer activities each year for parents. In a typical week, 18 per cent of teachers spent almost no time, 50 per cent spent about half an hour and 22 per cent about one hour with parents (Pang & Watkins, 2000). According to Becher (1984), teachers acknowledged that parents play a crucial role at home and in school but some were worried by high levels of involvement. They claimed that parent volunteers in their classrooms could disturb the classroom and teachers' control of the children. In fact, some teachers also claimed that they were also afraid that volunteer parents might undermine their authority in the classroom.

Increasingly, parents' role as support for children's learning might be accomplished by simply giving parents more information about their children's attendance and assessments, as Sanders and Epstein (1998) have demonstrated. Schools may seek to strengthen their relationships with parents at deeper levels, but schools and parents may work also together to organise school events in more practical ways.

Schools may initiate regular home visits, in particular to 'hard to reach' parents, to open up lines of communication (Georgiou, 1998; McKenna & Willems, 1998; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; Street, 1998; Berla, 1991). Such relationships may develop and perhaps even lead to friendly relations when

teachers show real concern about a child's welfare at school. With regard to middle school level, Berla (1991) comments:

A clear, welcoming parent involvement policy is published for all to see and posted in a prominent place. The policy states when the school is open to parents and whether parents can visit the classrooms at any times; when teachers are available for parent conference; what hours the principal set aside for parent; and when parents may use school facilities for meetings and social events.

(Berla, 1991, p. 17)

However, in some cases, schools also claimed that they faced difficulties in starting a relationship with 'hard to reach' parents (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Educational scholars such as Aronson (1996), Berla (1991), Berger (2004), Epstein, (1986; 1995; 2001), Gestwicki (2010) and Villas-Boas (1998) suggested that sincere two-way effective communication with parents might be a useful start to breaking the barriers and to strengthen the relationships.

The issue of school−home relationship and parental involvement in children's education has long been an issue and serious debate surrounds the question of the ability of schools worldwide to address the problem. Many studies on parental involvement have appeared, with various approaches and suggestions to help school and parents to address this significant issue. Aronson (1996), who has experienced work with nine elementary schools located in a variety of locations in a mix of backgrounds and cultures including deprived inner-city neighbourhoods, upper middle-class suburbs and rural areas populated by poor and middle class families in Hawaii, for example, suggests that schools might have to create a more hospitable environment such as developing a Parents Community Networking Centre (PCNC) at school, led by a parent facilitator paid to be a part-time facilitator working closely with the principal and parents. The effort to increase parental involvement might work well, as the findings showed that overall parent participation increased about 45 per cent in each school. In some circumstances, however, the suggestion might create

another administrative issue. The implementation of the centre may be not only costly but might overstep an unwritten mark of an existing body such as the school PTA. This may create another internal conflict when the implementation is without a clear clarification of roles.

Some scholars suggest that, to reach out for their involvement, a school might provide a room equipped with comfortable chairs, a coffee corner, reading material and a computer as a base for parents (Aronson, 1996; Berger, 2004; Chavkin & Williams, 1987; Mohd Dom, 2006). The suggestion is feasible to in most schools. However, the question is whether schools would be willing to develop a space for parents; Harris and Goodall (2008) found the efforts initiated by some schools to reach 'hard to reach' parents in England were often frustrated as most parents they met in this category were reluctant to become involved. They also claimed that much attention has been paid to minority groups, resulting in the neglect of parents who are already engaged with school.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) emphasised school administrators' support to increase parental involvement. He suggests several strategies to increase collaboration with parents, including developing clear goals for parental involvement, establishing parents associations, individual parent consultations, encouraging teachers and parents to attend workshops and courses, student participation in community organisations and agencies, initiating open house, class visits and parents resource rooms in schools. Liontos (1992) stresses school−home interdependency, focusing on involvement of families at risk in school. He suggests that parents need to be informed that school and parent are interdependent and have mutual responsibility in educating children. Schools are recommended to focus on parents' strength and potential. Building a relationship with trust and trying to involve them in the school's decision-making groups would enhance parents' participation.

Lutz and Merz (1992) focused on reaching out to newcomers such as minority ethnic groups, including 'hard to reach' parents who had previously felt

powerless, and under-represented parents. As an asset they may bring positive beliefs, expectations and experiences about education from their previous communities that would benefit schools. Schools are recommended to develop multifaceted communication to meet the changing demands and shifting power structure, such as empowering parents if necessary. Lombana (1983) believes that a loose organisational structure is at the root of why many partnership programmes fail, and also observed that parents are not homogeneous but have inter-parental strengths and needs.

Aronson (1996) proposes a model of a five steps implementation process to overcome the barriers and to bridge communication gaps between school and parents as summarised below:

i. Reach a shared understanding of what form parental involvement will take;
ii. Develop strategies for involving more parents;
iii. Provide parents with information on the school and ways of getting involved;
iv. Involved those parents who are hardest to reach;
v. Reach out to parents who are reluctant to participate in school.

(Aronson, p. 59–60)

The above suggestions clearly stress increasing parent–teacher communication and interaction to reach mutual understanding. Aronson (1966) added that schools may also have to develop a strategy to involve more parents by initiating phone calls and home visits. She also strongly believes that using fewer written materials and more face-to-face communication may increase support. All written material such as newsletters, reports, meeting agendas must be brief, in straightforward language and free from educational jargon to increase understanding. Schools might also be able to use a liaison person to reach them. Creating a positive environment for welcoming parents might be helpful.

Research on parental involvement also suggests that positive verbal and non-verbal communication such as smiling and showing interest during interaction with parents may influence parent−teacher relations. This is a simple point, but it may provide some beneficial effects on parents' attitudes to the school, and parents may feel valued when schools welcome their involvement.

Promoting clear two-way communication may be one of the strategies. Several studies indicate that frequent home−school communication is an aspect of a parent involvement programme associated with higher levels of student achievement and more positive attitudes toward the school staff (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Moore, 1992; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). Parent and school may work together in order to share ideas and take collective action. However, maintaining relationships is another problematic issue. Parents and school normally find it hard to maintain regular contact as the parents are from various backgrounds and have a range of commitments. Moore (1992) has this to say:

> ...basic level of parent involvement is a necessary precondition for all the rest. If the schools and parents are not in regular contact, parent education programs, parent involvement in decision making, and other forms of parent involvement cannot occur.

(Moore, 1992, p. 142)

This statement clearly shows that parent participation in school activities is crucial. Therefore, schools, particularly school principals, have to plan a specific approach to encourage parents to become involved. Schools may emphasise the importance of two-way communication for success of school−parent collaboration. Openness in communication is also identified as playing a major role in helping partnerships to grow, improve and intensify over time (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Hargie, Dickson & Tourish, 1999; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). Berger (2004) suggests that effective interaction with parents can be achieved by recognising communication barriers. Teachers can increase their communication skills by rephrasing and attentive listening. She points out that:

60

When teachers talk with parents, they communicate in many ways − through their words, their body actions, and their manner of speaking. Every contact communicates whether the speaker respects the person, values that person's input, and is willing to collaborate.

(Berger, p. 207)

Berger adds that teachers also can establish rapport with parents by practicing positive speaking. Positive speaking, according to her, is a constructive way of interacting. A positive message needs to be accompanied by attentive behaviour and good body language, including clear articulation and tone of voice, in order to enhance communication with parents.

In these circumstances, different parents may need different communication approaches to encourage them to become involved in school programmes. It is therefore the purpose of this study to investigate the communication approach used by the principal in three Malaysian secondary schools to encourage parental involvement. The study focuses mainly on principals' communication style during their conversation and discussion with parents regarding school activities.

2.10 School−home Communication Issues in the Malaysian School Context

The main purpose of establishing PTAs in Malaysian public schools is to create a communication channel for parents and teachers to work together to provide a quality environment conducive to teacher teaching and student learning. PTAs are an avenue to show their mutual responsibility in educating children.

However, this effort may be been seen as a burden to both parents and teachers; they may view the relationship as low priority. The study conducted by the Education Planning and Policy Research Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia, to examine the impact of school learning support programmes in six different schools concludes that most collaborative programmes have failed due to the lack of coordination between teachers and parents (Ministry of Education, 2006a).

Overall findings show that both teachers and parents recognise the importance of their role in the children's learning. However, the findings indicate that most parents have little knowledge about the school systems and their child's learning activities in school. A study on the reading programme, *Program Intervensi,* implemented by the state education department to help secondary school students to improve their reading skills, for example, failed to achieve the objectives due to the lack of parental support.

The failure of the partnership programmes clearly shows that there may be a communication gap between school and parents. The schools might not be serious in communicating their programmes. However, parents may also contribute to the failure as they show less interest and effort to contact the school for further information.

Prior study on school−home relationships shows that parents may not be supportive, paying little interest to most school−home partnership programmes. A survey conducted by Wee (1999) to investigate the perceptions of 553 school leaders and teachers in Petaling District of the effectiveness of school−home partnership programmes in their schools concludes that their practice is 'partial'. The findings show that most parents are not supportive and take little interest in the programme. Most partnership programmes implemented by schools are not wholly supported by parents. The parents are reluctant to work together with school as their involvement is limited to the school learning support programmes, such as attending parents' evenings and assisting their children with homework.

2.11 Communication and Ethnicity

Communication is an important component in the progress of human relations, through intercommunication among diverse people worldwide. Even so, there are many issues concerning global communication that have become somewhat serious recently, and unfortunately there has been little political involvement to overcome them. Some effort has been made by interested scholars such as Greer (1962), Goldlust and Richmond (1974), Laumann (1973) and Young (1977)

who identified the role of communication as a mediating factor between individual characteristics and behaviours and placed the importance of communication within the process of acculturation of ethnicity.

People from different backgrounds and ethnic groups often have different ways of communicating. In many intercultural interactions, they may not be able to communicate effectively due to ethnic or cultural barriers. In interpersonal relations, such as face-to-face communication, differences in language, communication style or way of speaking may result in miscommunication. In fact, there may be discrimination against minorities in many high immigrant countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia. These communication difficulties arise because people do not comprehend the different style of communicating and this may lead to wrong conclusions. Sometimes misunderstandings result from a different style of intonation or language use in oral communication. However, the selection of a single language such as English, as an international language, enables people across the world to submerge themselves in another culture. These processes may gradually lead multicultural societies to mutual understanding (Chen & Starosta, 1998).

A high degree of social mobility in a complex world requires different approaches to communication. For example, in the United States and Canada ethnic movement means that America has shifted from a culture of homogeneity to ethnic pluralism. Malaysia is also experiencing ethnic diversification. In Malaysia, the discussion on this issue is not new, but little attention has been paid by policymakers to overcoming the communication problems faced as a result of the communication problems arising when beliefs and norms come into play in different contexts. In Malaysia, the largest ethnic groups are Malay, Chinese and Indian heritage. Malay heritage makes up more than 55 per cent of the population and the term 'Malay' refers to a person who speaks the Malay language, practices Islam and Malay traditions (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). Most Malays are involved in agriculture or work in the government sector. Malaysian Chinese individuals form about 26.1 per cent of the population

(Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). The Chinese are descendants of nineteenth century Chinese immigrants, mostly practising Buddhism. They are often in business and are mostly urban dwellers. They speak different Chinese dialects including Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese and Hakka. The smallest of the three main ethnic groups is the Malaysian Indians. Most of them are Hindus, and they form about 7.7 per cent of the population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). The majority are descendants of Tamil-speaking South Indian heritage immigrants. They came to the Malaysia during the British colonial rule. Interpersonal communication is not a major problem in the country since all the cultures have influenced each other. In fact, this is in line with government policy to create a Malaysian culture in order to overcome ethnic diversity through assimilation and the creation of a *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian race) as a third culture (Ministry of Education, 2006b). However, the assimilation process will take time to accomplish. In fact, ethnic polarisation among students and their parents in many Malaysian schools may be clearly seen in their engagement in school activities. The Malays, Chinese and Indians heritage seem to be more comfortable with their own group, and this is common social behaviour in multicultural societies. People feel more secure with their own kind and this is associated with the concept of similarity in a human social relation context. In most circumstances, people attempt to avoid strangers through anxiety. Lumby and Coleman (2007) comment:

> We may have evolved patterns of survival which favorably predispose us towards similarity. If we feel similar to another, we may be more positively disposed towards him or her. At a more conscious level, we may find it easier to trust if perceived similarity leads us to believe the behaviour of another is predictable.

(Lumby & Coleman, 2007 p. 33)

In the communication context, this suggests that cultural differences between communicators as well as social class, gender and age may be communication barriers and may result in ineffectiveness in communication.

64

Recently, many studies have been made from the perspective of cultural and linguistic conventions affecting communication style. An unexpected tone of voice can cause misunderstanding in inter-ethnic communication. This study will take ethnic origin as one of the context factors and will explore principals' communication style when communicating face-to-face with parents of different ethnic origin.

2.12 Summary

The importance of communication in educational leadership has been a point of focus over the last few decades and continues to be viewed as a crucial ingredient in school management. Communication is a result of perceptions of information exchanged between source and receiver. Communication in education is a fundamental and integrative process (Hoy & Miskel, 2004). In educational leadership, communication is identified as one of the most dominant factors, research indicating that at least 75 per cent of school administrators' time is spent communicating (Bowditch & Buono, 2007; Dexter, Berube & Young, 2006). Principals play a key role in influencing interpersonal relations and setting the atmosphere of a school and local community. Hoy and Miskel (2004) indicate that the work of principals entails communication and interaction with a variety of people in both oral and written form, serving the multiple processes of production, regulation, innovation and socialisation. Therefore, it is crucial for principals to promote a high level of shared understanding.

Many issues are associated with communication. One of the most important is related to the question of the adequacy of a single definition of the term 'communication' as it is currently employed. Communication scholars admit that the term is problematic and difficult to define. Dance (1970, p. 210), who has attempted to define communication, concludes 'We are trying to make the concept of "communication" do too much work for us'. This assertion confirms that the term is hard to define; the word is too abstract and possesses too many meanings. Communication is interdisciplinary and the term in each discipline is

varied. Ruesch (1961) identified at least forty varieties of disciplinary approaches to the subject. However, if formal and informal communications are included, there are at least fifty modes of interpersonal communication that draw upon dozens of separate disciplines and analytic approaches (West & Turner, 2009), so the term might be analysed in at least fifty different ways. Thus, there is no single specific definition of the word; those developed by scholars are too varied.

Different definitions have varying functions and enable researchers to conduct contrasting kinds of research based on their special perspective. Definitions may be evaluated on the basis of how well each enables a researcher to accomplish the purposes of an investigation that often requires a specific definition relating to the purposes of study.

For the purpose of this study, the process of communication will be the main focus. Communication is not just a process of making meaning, but involves a process of creating and learning new meaning through symbols. For instance, when parents and principals converse to discuss issues relating to their children's education, not only might they transmit, exchange and share the same symbols; they might create and learn new symbols through signs called words. In this study the terms codes, signs and symbols refer to the definitions developed by Donald (1992), Morris (1955), Ogden and Richards (1946) and Peirce (1966), as discussed in the previous section.

This study does not examine the usage of language, but language and words constitute symbols that are important elements in the communication process. Therefore, the way principals communicate and the language they use to communicate with parents might indirectly affect their communication style. Words are arbitrary symbols and have no inherent meaning. Therefore, the definition of the term 'communication' in this study is based on comprehended words. This refers to people's interpretations of the signs termed symbols or words. Ogden and Richards (1946) argue that meaning does not reside in a word but in people, meaning that a word is meaningless in itself, and people create

meaning for words to make it possible to communicate. Words are just a medium to enable people to share meaning.

Ogden and Richards (1946) strongly argue that understanding is the main goal of communication and that problems in communication result from misunderstanding. He argues that words have multiple meaning and may mean different things to different people in different situations. Misunderstandings due to the misinterpretation of meaning can cause communication problems when two individuals think they are talking about the same thing but, in reality, they are not in that position and their words are de-contextualised. In fact, problems might become worse if those involved in that particular communication come from different backgrounds and culture.

This study will investigate principals' verbal communication styles involving the use of codes called language to communicate with parents from a variety of ethnic heritages. In this study, the SMCR model is helpful because it provides an appropriate guide for investigating principals' communication style in a multicultural context in Malaysian schools. Generally, this study will investigate how the principals interact with parents regarding their children's education and how the principals perceive their communication with parents from a range of socioeconomic classes and ethnic heritages.

By following Berlo's (1960) communication model, the study will take into account the communication skills, knowledge, attitudes, social system and culture of the principals and parents in order to investigate their communication style. In addition, this study considers the nature of human interpersonal communication behaviour such as the components of message transmission and the factors that affect message delivery, as well as the concept of clarity in transmitting messages and the purpose of communication itself.

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodological approach adopted in this study to answer the research questions dealing with principals' communication style and parents' involvement in Malaysian secondary schools. The explanation begins by outlining the research philosophy and is followed by the research design. It further details the nature of a multimodal approach to data collection and analysis. It considers ethical issues and concludes with a discussion on issues crucial to research validity and reliability.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This is a study of leadership communication style, aiming for an in-depth understanding of the way principals speak with parents. The focus is to comprehend what principals' say, how they say it, and why they say what they say, together with their influence on parental involvement with school learning activities. The data will be captured through qualitative enquiries. The researcher decided to choose an interpretive paradigm as a framework for the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Robson, 2002).

An interpretive stance implies that the researcher chooses a naturalistic way of conducting research. It is also referred to as a descriptive, constructive and phenomenological way of study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Robson, 2002). Researchers who adopt this paradigm are trying to obtain a deep understanding of individuals' lives (Robson, 2002). This includes evaluating their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and perceptions in order to explain the reality of their life as they experience it.

There is some overlap and often no clear distinction made between qualitative and interpretive research practices (Klein & Myers, 1999). Qualitative research is an umbrella term of social inquiry that focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences in the world where they live (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Andrade (2009) wrote that:

> Qualitative research is a broader term. In general, it refers to a study process that investigates a social human problem where the researcher conducts a study in a natural setting and builds a whole and complex representation by a rich description and explanation as well as a careful examination of informants' word and view.

> (Andrade, p. 42)

Interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them, and the interpretive approach used in this study aims to understand in-depth the way principals communicate with parents and the process whereby the way they communicate influences and is influenced by the context. Interpretive researchers begin the study with the assumption that access to reality is only through social constructions and the researcher becomes a vehicle by which the reality is revealed. Klein and Myers (1999) stated that:

> …our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools and others artifacts. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focus on complexity of human sense as the situation emerges.

> (Klein & Myers, p. 69)

The philosophical base of both qualitative and interpretive research is hermeneutics and phenomenology (Walsham, 2006). However, most scholars

acknowledge that interpretive research is distinctive in its approach to research design, concept formation, data analysis, and standards of assessment (Andrade, 2009; Klein & Myers, 1999; Walsham, 2006). So, they might not be the same as Klein and Myers (1999) stated that:

> …qualitative research may or may not be interpretive, depending upon the underlying philosophical assumption of the researcher.
>
> (Klein & Myers, p. 69)

Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that interpretive research is an approach to study in the human sciences that recognises the paradigmatic character of all research including qualitative research. The study uses qualitative comparative case study as a framework, but adopts an interpretative approach of collecting and interpreting data.

The philosophical foundations underlying qualitative study indicate that the study of 'reality' is a study of the 'truth'. This means that the study of reality is a study of the perception of experience of individuals or a group of people at a particular time. Social constructivists believe that reality is developed through a social process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985). Gergen (1985, p. 270) explains that reality is 'something people do together', meaning that reality is a process of sharing knowledge through interaction and communication. Littlejohn (2002, p. 170) believes that reality is a subjective set of arrangements within us achieved through a process of interaction between groups, communities and cultures. Interaction and communication may determine how reality is experienced and the experience of reality may affect communication. This suggests that reality is a product of social interaction and is also constructed in part through language, social dialogue and discourse.

For social constructionists, reality is the knowledge that is gained through

language. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) In this context, not only do they assert the reality of knowledge as socially constructed, but that language is also a product of social construction as they believe people use language to coordinate a social life. From another perspective, Payne (2005, p. 14) states that the social constructionists' view of knowledge may also guide an individual's behaviour. Therefore, we might be able to conclude that the root of individual reality is knowledge. Knowledge might be gained through social interaction through language. Social communication might also shape social values also affecting individuals' social behaviour that can be seen as practices or remain as experiences in daily life.

Reality is the sharing of daily life with others through language. Therefore, the researcher believes that the reality of principals' communication styles might also be shaped by shared knowledge, culture and social values with others around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In the school context, for example, principals may create theory to explain their communication experiences with parents so this study tries to discover principals' communication experiences of what happens when they communicate with parents. The focus will be on the ways in which principals speak and convey themselves and the effect of that on parents' involvement in school. This has a strong link to the social constructionist belief that reality is always filtered through language. This means that the researcher might not be able to gain direct access to the reality of their communication style by just interviewing, as people might tend to describe the way they speak rather than what they actually do. Interviewing the principals in this study is not only a process of confirming their communication style, but of finding out what they say about it. Principals' perceptions about their communication style will be confirmed by parent participants. In this context, the process of gaining access into the reality of the principal's communication style is not only through interviewing them but the parents, and the data from both will be cross-checked with formal and informal observation data including field notes.

Qualitative study situates researchers in real world settings (Patton, 2002, p.

39). Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 27) state, 'They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs'. This suggests that researchers may gain a better understanding about research phenomena when they are close to them. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) wrote that:

> These practices transform the world. They turn the world into series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, memos to the self. At this level interpretive research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.
>
> (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4)

They indicate that qualitative research makes the phenomena visible. The involvement of the researcher in the setting not only accomplishes the need for data collection, but is an experience that gives better understanding, in order to make sense of principals' communication experience. Therefore, the researcher believes that the appearance of the researcher in research settings such as a school is essential to achieve an understanding of the principal's manner of speaking to parents as certain aspects of principals' communication experiences might not be captured using statistical analysis (Robson, 2002. p. 27). As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) point out:

> In education, qualitative research is frequently called naturalistic because the researcher hangs around where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur. And the data is gathered by people engaging in natural behaviour: talking, visiting, looking, eating and so on.
>
> (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 3)

This assertion suggests that a view of human behaviour might be obtained through natural observation and interaction in research settings. This is congruent with the central focus of a qualitative study, to find out what people think and feel. To find answers as to why and how they think in such a way, however, is often

not an easy task for outsiders. To gain that information would normally mean good relationships with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, to discover the reality of principals' communication style, the researcher has to be careful in entering their world in order to gain more detailed information about their communication style.

While in fieldwork a researcher always tries to minimise the impact of the relationships with participants to increase the degree of naturalism in sharing experiences and creating meanings, on the other hand there is also a responsibility to shape the exchange and to lead participants to the goals of the study. This included giving instructions to guide the participants to provide appropriate information and actions that aligned with the objectives of the study. Thus, the presence of the researcher in their world in some degree may have influenced their natural behaviour. The participants may have had to act and to behave in such a way that has been informed by the researcher. As consequence, the actions and communication presented by the participants may have been affected by the reality of their communication experiences. Furthermore, the researcher came from a different cultural background. The values and communication experiences that the researcher has gone through might be different from that of the participants. Thus, the differences that exist between the researcher and the participants in some degree may have affected the way the researcher interprets data.

The experience of human communication may be captured through highly detailed descriptions of the thoughts and feelings of participants. Therefore, to explain the reality of principals' communication style involves the researcher's involvement in judgements about something being 'effective' or 'ineffective'. The empirical data gained from the direct and indirect experience of principals and parents such as informal conversation, observation and interviewing have a role in making value judgements based on their sociocultural background (Robson, 2002). Thus, in some cases, the researcher's personal judgements were needed to visualise the entire process of the principals' and parents' interactions, in order

to provide a clearer picture about style in daily working life.

Value judgements are researchers' personal view of the rightness or wrongness of what they are investigating (Punch, 2005; Robson, 2002). Scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) Punch (2005) and Robson (2002) acknowledge value judgements as moral judgements or moral statements. Value judgements in research, however, have a long and controversial history, as the area of value judgements is unclear and unaccepted by some in scientific enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) strongly argue that facts and values cannot be seen as a separated component in qualitative research. They comment:

> We should be prepared to admit that values do play a significant part in inquiry, to do our best in each case to expose and explicate them (largely a matter of reflectivity), and, finally to take them into account to whatever extent we can. Such a course is infinitely to be preferred to continuing in the self-delusion that methodology can and does protect one from their unwelcome incursion.

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 186)

The epistemological foundations of qualitative research are based on values and value judgements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers believe that the idea that reality can be constructed is tenable. Thus, the researcher and participants will construct the reality of their communication experiences based on their cultural background, and their values will shape the research and the conclusions at the end of the study.

The research is based on the 'social construct' nature of reality to determine how social experience is created and given meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; May, 1997; Robson, 2002). Interpretivists view the researcher as an integral part of investigation. They are not only the investigator but the interpreter of participants' experiences, opinions, emotions and feelings. Therefore, maintaining good relationships with participants is central to

understanding the holistic phenomenon, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe:

> Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationships between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry.

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 14)

The interpretive approach believes subjects and the world are mutually related. In this respect, communication is the process of creating meaningful reality intersubjectively (Mumby, 2001). May (1997, p. 13) points out that subjectivists put a greater emphasis on the 'inner', a world of experiences, rather than the world 'out there'. This means that the scope of study in qualitative research is narrow and deep. Subjectivists stress the meanings of their own environment rather than the environment as a whole. For example, this study focuses on principals' communication styles when dealing with parental involvement in schools. The researcher focuses just on three principals and six parents' conversations in order to explore the reality of their communication style.

This research seeks a naturalistic, interpretive approach to produce a rich description of principals' and parents' communication experiences through fieldwork. During the fieldwork the researcher tried to share the communication experiences with the principal and parent participants by observing and interviewing them. However, the researcher tried not to manipulate or influence the participants, as these actions lead to bias. The researcher also realised that his presence in school in some degree may have affected behaviour or communication. However, some steps were taken to prepare to minimise impact such as conducting a pre-pilot and pilot study with a series of observations and interviews before conducting the real fieldwork as a contribution to reduce bias.

Interpretation is the right way to decipher the complexity of human behaviour (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1978). The researcher believes that using this paradigm might constitute the strength of this study. Using multi-method data collection such as field notes, observations, recordings and interviews is not only helpful in capturing rich data but allows the researcher to triangulate the data from various perspectives in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Robson, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

3.3 Research Design

This section provides details of the research design. The discussion begins with a definition and explanation of case study, followed by a detailed outline of the research plan and rationale for using this method as a research framework.

A case study allows researchers to explore in depth and to describe a case in detail (Bassey, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The strength of a case study is that it is a bounded system that is usually under natural conditions; thus the complexity of the system can be understood naturally in its own environment (Stake, 1995). The main distinction of a case study is that it focuses on the detailed investigation of an individual or small unit such as an organisation or institution, but not a whole set of cases (Bassey, 1999; Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003). This parallels this study's exploration of secondary school principals' communication with two parents in three different schools.

Historically, case study as a social research method has been controversial and defining it can be problematic. Recently, the term 'case study' in social research has been strongly debated (Mason, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). It is a broad term related to a wide range of disciplines. Thus, most scholars define the term according to the purposes of study (Yin, 2003) and, before describing this research design, I present a few definitions from the literature and explain my own understanding and view in relation to this research.

Case study as a research method has been explored by a number of scholars such as Bassey (1999), Creswell (2007), Kumar (1996), Stake (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Yin (2003). Yin (2003, p. 13) defines a case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. Stake (1995, p. ix) states that 'Case study is a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstance'. Kumar (1996, p. 99), however, describes case study as 'an approach to studying a phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case; the case may be a person, group, episode, process, community, society or any other unit of social life'. To Creswell (2007, p. 73), a case study 'is a problem to be studied, which will reveal an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system, which involves understanding an event, activity, process or one or more individual', whilst to Bassey (1999, p. 47) 'a case study is a study of a singularity conducted in-depth in a natural setting'.

The definitions suggested by many scholars vary according to their own interpretation. Yin (2003) and Creswell (2007), for example, put a great emphasis on the term 'case' rather than the whole meaning of a case study. They stress the case boundary and context that make a case study different from other research methods. Yin's (2003) explanation of a case study is quite clear. He says that a case is a phenomenon or event with a clear boundary and context. A case is within the boundary and surrounded by its context. Yin (2003) views the relationship between context and the phenomenon to be studied as fundamental as case events occur naturally in a real-life context. Bassey (1999) and Stake (1995), however, choose a general meaning of a case study. Stake (1995) states that a case study is a study of a single case but, according to some scholars in the same field, a case study can also involve a study of several cases. Moreover, Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 25) say a case is 'a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis. Study may be just one case or several'. This definition is similar to the definition

suggested by Bassey (1999, p. 47). His definition emphasises in-depth study in natural settings, but the usage of the term a 'study of singularity' is unclear and rather confusing when he defines the term singularity as a particular event such as an experiment, a non-random survey and case study (Bassey, 1999). The view of some scholars is that we could conclude that defining a case in case study is problematic, resulting in many researchers such as Kumar (1996) choosing to explain a case study from the perspective of a research process, but not highlighting clearly key terms. For example, Kumar (1996) does not speak at length about the structure of the case to give a clear picture about what is a case in a case study, but just lists some examples. The concept of case study is broad. Therefore, there is no single definition that covers the entire approach and concept of a case study.

Creswell (2007), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Yin (2003) have a clearer and straightforward explanation of the concept of case study, particularly in describing 'case' in relations to its context. If their definitions are taken into account, the phenomenon or problem to be studied in this study is school−home communications. This study focuses on three bounded cases, the communication of a principal with parents in a single school in each case. The case in this study refers to the three principals in three government public secondary schools and the boundary defines parents, school and teachers in the chosen schools as the context. The data was collected in the context, and it is also bounded by a three-month period from August to October, 2009.

The case study is an appropriate approach for the study of a social situation as it unfolds in context (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003, 1994). This study clearly falls into this category, as it focuses on specific contemporary social issues, dealing with principals and parental involvement in school. Applying a case study to this research is not only helpful to determine a border between a case and a context, but offers a framework to examine interrelated elements in the case, such as current political issues, policies, socioeconomic backgrounds and programmes outside the boundary that might

influence the case to be studied. Stake (1995) suggests that the selection of a case should offer the opportunity to maximise knowledge. He says:

> The first criterion should be to maximize what we can learn. Given purposes, which cases are likely to lead us to understanding, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalization?

<div align="right">(Stake, 1995, p. 4)</div>

Stake's (1995) suggestions indicate that knowledge contribution is a key consideration in a case study. This research clearly fulfils this requirement as the case to be studied is focused on a contemporary event about school−home communication considered critical in schools worldwide. It is hoped that the findings of this study may not only provide insights into why parents are reluctant to become involved in learning activities, but will be useful for the three school administrators to plan their communication strategies towards parents' participation in schools.

The research design is conceptualised as a qualitative case study focusing on two main aspects of principal−parent communication. First, it focuses on the process of principal−parent communication to see the impact of the communication process on their communication styles. Secondly, it attempts to identify which style is used by principals to speak with parents. Although the main purpose is to explore principals' communication style, the communication process is also taken into consideration because style and process are interrelated. Style is part of a communication process and an individual's style is often influenced by its process. Berlo (1960) indicates four main factors affecting an individual's way of speaking. They are communication skills, attitudes, knowledge level and position within the sociocultural system of senders and receivers. Analysis of communication without accounting for the four critical factors is less likely to be effective. Therefore, Berlo's (1960) SMCR Communication Model can be seen as a useful model to adopt as a guide to exploring principals' communication styles.

Many studies have investigated communication style, but few have given a clear operational definition of communicative style. The literature shows that most surveys of communicative style adopt Norton's (1978) Communicator Style Measure as an operational framework. The study of communication style has only been addressed in quantitative studies, and no established conceptual framework has been suggested in a qualitative study since this study was conducted. Thus, an established framework of communicative style developed by Brandt and Norton has been adopted as a conceptual framework. Norton's (1978; 1983; 1996) Communicator Style Measure (CSM) and the conceptual definition of Communicative Style developed by Brandt (1979) are useful as a conceptual framework, as both scholars are concerned with the definition of style as a means of communication, rather than what is communicated. They emphasise style as an individual's way of communicating. This is congruent to the operational definition of style in this study, with its focus on the way principals' speak.

Communication style is complicated, as a style can be observed in the combination of three different communication modes. The style element can be traced in the form of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal interaction. Therefore, to explore principals' communication style means that we have to focus on all three types of interaction. Thus, a clear conceptual definition, indicator and description of communicative style developed by Brandt (1979) and Norton' (1978; 1983; 1996) are helpful to design interview questions and to develop conceptual definitions and empirical indicators for analysis of each communicative style.

Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983; 1996) set out to investigate the way leaders speak. Ten styles developed by these scholars are selected for the purpose of this study, namely dominant, contentious, dramatic, friendly, relaxed, animated, impression-giving, open, precise and attentive, will be used to examine which style is used by principals to communicate with parents.

This research is focused on principals' communication style and parents' involvement in three secondary schools in Malaysia. Three secondary school

principals and six parents participated throughout this study. The selection of nine participants fulfils the requirement to explore the case in depth. Patton (2002, p. 46) indicates that 'qualitative inquiry typically focuses on a small sample, even single cases (n=1)'. While he states that qualitative enquiry can be too small to be representative, convenience sampling offers the advantage of the in-depth study of a phenomenon. Qualitative scholars generally acknowledge this view. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 24), for example, indicate that 'qualitative research usually works with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth'. This research clearly fulfils this requirement. The study of the three principals and six parents as participants in this study enables exploration in depth and complexity in its context. In simple words, the researcher will look at a small number of people with a broad range of experience (Patton, 2002).

A case study often claims to produce rich description, as the study is detailed and intensive (Bassey, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). In order to achieve this, gathering of multiple sources of data such as interviews and observations will allow the researcher to strengthen the evidence, because communication involves verbal and non-verbal communication. Sometimes people tend to talk and behave in different ways. Thus, to obtain quality data, the researcher has to observe in detail and this includes the use of word, language and body language during conversations. Although non-verbal communication is not the main focus of this study, evidence shows it to be a strong additional factor in determining principals' communication style. Yin (2003) says:

> In addition to the attention given to these individual sources, some overriding principles are important to any data collection effort in doing case studies. These include the use of multiple sources of evidence.

(Yin, 2003, p. 83)

Audio and video recordings of principal−parent conversations are the main data source of this research. Along with this, the researcher also investigated the

phenomena using different sources, including individual interviews and field notes as supporting documents and additional evidence (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003; 1994).

Through observations and interviews as well as audio-visual recordings, researchers may also uncover factors important for understanding the research problem that may not have been clear when the study was designed. This is the great advantage of this approach, because we may not always ask the right questions. Thus, what is learned from observation and interview may help to understand what data may need to be collected through other methods and design questions that give understanding of the phenomena being studied.

3.4 Sampling

The participants in this study were secondary school principals and parents in schools in the district of Bentong, state of Pahang, and the district of Tanjong Malim, state of Perak, Malaysia. The process of sampling in the study can be divided into several stages. The first stage was identifying the schools, using purposive sampling where the principal and parents matched criteria of ethnicity. The researcher selected from a list provided by the state education department those with an almost equal percentage of students from three main ethnic heritages. The second stage involved convenience sampling, selecting schools that matched the criterion in step one. The schools were selected based on the concept of simplicity, where the school was geographically located nearest to the researcher's accommodation. The third stage was choosing parent participants through convenience sampling. The selection of the parents was based on those parents who attended the briefing and were willing to give their consent to participate in the study. The selection of the parents was also based on their ethnicity. Two parents with the same ethnic heritage as the principal and the other one from a different ethnic heritage from the principal were chosen from each school.

The selection of school and principal participants uses purposeful and convenience sampling as it not only offers rich information and substantially increases the credibility of the results but fulfils the criteria of simplicity (Mile & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) and Patton (2002) explain that purposeful sampling is useful in any in-depth study as it allows a wide range of issues to be explored. They claim that choosing specific people who have specific experience and unique knowledge of specific issues is better than having a large number of respondents with little knowledge of the issues to be explored. For example, choosing those three principals with specific experience of dealing with parents of different ethnic origin not only provides a wide range of opportunities for the researcher to construct the reality of their communication, but it is useful for the researcher to understand the communication experience of each participant at a deeper level.

The sampling procedure in this study was primarily based on the purpose of the study to explore close-up the way principals' speak with parents. Thus, those principals who have relevant communication experience dealing with parents from different ethnic origins such as Malays, Chinese and Indian heritage parents were a priority as participants, because they might have been able to provide rich information about their communication experience.

Patton (2002) argues that there are no set rules for sampling in qualitative research. He states that:

> …the size of the sample depends on what you want to find out, why you want to find out, how the findings will be used, and what resources you have for the study

(Patton, 2002, p. 244)

Patton (2002) remarks that convenience sampling is a way of choosing a sample according to the needs of a study. In this context, researchers have the right and authority to judge who is a suitable sample, and sample size is based on

the purpose and rationale of the study. The rigour and meaningfulness of this study is also a consideration. The observation analytical capabilities of the researcher and the richness of information are more important than sample size. Rigour in this research is based on the participants' and the researcher's ability to develop a set of results that offers sufficient complexity and depth. Thus, the selection of participants is crucial, and it was a main concern. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) remark that the selection of participants in a qualitative study is not random:

> You choose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory. This is not 'random sampling'; that is, sampling to ensure that characteristics of subjects in your study appear in the same proportion as they appear in the total population.
>
> (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 67)

In order to achieve this, criteria were purposely applied to identifying principals and parents as participants in this study:

i. The principals are Malay, Chinese and Indian heritage and have served at least 15 years in a government public secondary school and at least two years in the school chosen for participation;

ii. The parents were Malay, Chinese and Indian heritage, who had children attending the secondary school of the principal selected as a participant;

iii. The parent participants were selected from those who had children in Form 3 or above in each school;

iv. The participants, particularly parents, are able to speak and understand the Malay and English languages;

v. The parent participants were selected from the schools' PTA committee members;

vi. Each of the principals and parents agreed to take part in a short conversation and discussion concerning the progress of their children's learning and the concept of parents' involvement in school;

vii. Each of the principals and parents agreed to be interviewed.

The parent participants are those from the PTA committee members. The selection of PTA is based on their position as a representative of parents in school and used convenience sampling, that is, where the participants are selected at the convenience of the researcher (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The researcher makes only a limited attempt to ensure the sample is an accurate representation of some larger group. Thus, the selection of the parent participants might have led to bias as there are limitations associated with parent respondents. First, the selection of three PTA parents as participants in each school may not represent the views of all parents, as the number of the sample selected is small compared to the number of parents in the school. Secondly, PTA parents are those who are familiar with the principal and school and they may not represent the views of those who are less familiar. Finally, the PTA parents selected as participants are those who possess hierarchical power, thus their way of interaction as well as their views on the principals' communication style may not be representative of the view of parents not in the same position. The choice of PTA members as participants will be discussed in more detail in the ethics section.

3.4.1 Schools

The procedures for sampling in this study began with recruiting the school and principal participants. Most schools attended by students of different ethnic origin such as Malays, Chinese and Indian heritage in Malaysian schools are found only in urban areas, so the selection of the three public secondary schools for this study focused on urban secondary schools. The selection of schools is based on the principal's ethnic group, the experience of the principal in dealing with the

parents of different ethnic origin, and the balance of Malays, Chinese and Indian heritage students in the school.

3.4.2 Principals

Three secondary government public school principals participated in this study. Their selection was based on convenience sampling after the researcher had determined criteria based primarily on ethnic group, work experience, school location and pupils' ethnic group.

According to the research plan, principal participants would have been selected from the same district of Bentong in the state of Pahang, but one withdrew at the last minute due to health problems so a principal participant who matched the criteria had to be substituted from the closest district of Tanjong Malim, located in the state of Perak. Although the schools are located in two different states, they are actually nearby, being adjacent to the border of the two states.

The participating principals were all male. This is associated with their predominance in the sector, especially in secondary schools attended by students of different ethnic origin. The principals of Katara, Seri and Tanjong (pseudonyms) secondary schools were of Chinese, Malay and Indian heritage. The choice of the principal participants is also based on their experience, as educators who had served for at least two years as a principal in the school. This is an important criterion for choosing principal participants because it tends to reduce the problem of power relations. The longer a principal serves in the selected school, the more communication experience they are likely to have had with parents and local community. Both principal and parent participants may be less anxious and stressed in their interaction, as they are familiar with local culture and school leadership. It was hoped that their familiarity would provide a comfortable environment in which to communicate.

The selection of principals of different ethnic origins as participants also relates to the possibility that the principals may use different styles to speak to parents of different ethnic origin. For this purpose, attention was paid to how they speak with the parents from their own and different ethnic groups and the effect on parents' involvement in school learning activities.

3.4.3 Parents

Two parent participants from different ethnic backgrounds were chosen in each school. The parent participants were recruited from PTA committee members by the PTA. Flyers written in English and Malay explained in brief the objectives and the benefits of the study, and were distributed by the participating principals to parents via their children. The flyers were distributed to all PTA committee members in the three schools at the beginning of fieldwork in mid-August 2009 and were expected to be returned in a week. Unfortunately, only a few flyers were returned on time. The researcher and school principals next tried to contact the parents by telephone. After a short explanation, six parents agreed to meet the researcher and principal to discuss the study. The researcher and the principal of each of the three selected schools arranged a short meeting about a week after the contact. The meetings with the parents and the principal at the three schools were successfully completed in the first week of September 2009. Most PTA committee members attending the meeting were willing to volunteer as participants, and were asked to return their response via their children to school for the selection. All flyers were returned within a week in all three schools. After a short discussion with the principals, two parents particularly familiar with the school principal were chosen in each school. One of them was of the same ethnic group as the principal and another was from a different ethnic group. The reason was to observe possible differences in communication style perceived to be related to ethnicity.

The six parents chosen to participate in the study were asked to provide their contact details for the researcher. The selected parent participants were

then invited to have a short conversation with the principals about their children's progress and about the concept of parental involvement in school.

3.5 Data Collection

The data from the study were analysed using Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Attention was paid to the multimodal nature of the environment and the interaction throughout the data collection process to ensure the data gathered could be subjected to Multimodal Discourse Analysis inquiry.

3.5.1 Capturing the Multimodal Nature of Observation Data

This study investigates the communicator style. Norton (1978; 1983; 1996) strongly argues that communicator style is not only the manner of speaking, as defined by many scholars such as Tannen (1984, p. 99), but that it goes beyond, and is 'the way one verbally or para-verbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered or understood'. This definition shows that communicator style might influence the meaning of the message, meaning that the style might change the meaning depending on the way people speak and the way they act. The context background where the interaction occurred might also affect the meaning and interpretation.

Kress and Van Leeuween (2001) referred to a communication as meaning-making systems or modes. In this context, they view spoken language, gesture, gaze, posture, proximity, music, colour and other material objects as modes. Each of these modes has its own role in shaping meaning in the process of meaning-making during human interaction. This view suggests that organisation of modes is suited to this study to investigate principals' communication style. Therefore, the combination of three main communication modes such as verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal communication will be the main components underlying the determination of principals' communication style in this study.

As an investigator in this field, the researcher realises that multimode communication such as verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal data is crucial because these are interlinked and often interdependent in the process of creating meaning. For example, the volume level of a voice is necessarily linked to gaze and gesture in the process of creating meaning. The volume might change the entire meaning of the word or sentence, depending on how the speaker integrates voice with the complex configurations of non-verbal action. However, capturing the entire process of principal and parents' conversation is difficult and important information might be lost during observation. Thus, the researcher decided to use a combination of video and audio recordings to give access to the multimodal nature of contemporary communication discourse as this approach allowed integration of multiple modes of data in data analysis (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Kress & Leeuwen, 2001; Norris, 2002).

Marsh and Keating (2009) acknowledge that there is no specified method of analysis in qualitative study. The method depends on the purpose and the phenomenon of the study. They believe using more than one method might provide a more valid account. Therefore, the multimodal nature of the environment and interaction shaped the framework for designing the pattern of data collection and analysis. In data collection, parents were invited to an informal conversation with the principal. The length of conversation was about 30 to 45 minutes and the interaction was audio-visually recorded. Field notes were also taken at the beginning and end of observation. The presence of the researcher and camcorder might potentially have affected their natural behaviour and the way they communicate. However, efforts were made to reduce the impact by locating the camcorder in the corner of the office or room to allow a clear view of the process of conversation. The interaction was recorded without zoom or volume adjustment. The camcorder was set up in half view of participants, with the main focus on the principal's hand and head movements as well as his gaze. The recording volume was set to the highest level beforehand to allow maximum impact and the camcorder was started running before the conversations started and left on until the end, so as not to cause inconvenience to the participants.

A similar recording procedure was tested in a pilot study conducted in mid-August 2009. The observation and conversation were successfully conducted. There was no discomfort detected among participants. The thirty-minute conversation showed the principal and parents interacting naturally. They managed to interact at ease, joking, smiling and laughing. Informal interviews with both principal and parent participants after the observation also confirmed that they felt at ease and comfortable with the conversation environment. Therefore, the researcher presumed that this was the best way to capture conversation data hence the same procedures were used in observation sessions in the main study.

3.5.2 Interviews

Interviewing principals and parents to gain insight into their experience in communicating with each other may be seen as crucial information in investigating principals' communication style. Interview information from principals and parents on how they perceived their communication style during their conversation with each other might be helpful in determining the way principals spoke. It is also a useful and direct approach to gain information on how parents and principals perceive their conversation with each other and in what way parents and principals expect or prefer their conversation partner to speak to them.

Interviewing in this study may be seen as a process of finding out from principals and parents information that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002). Bogden and Biklen (1998) view interviews as an important tool to gather data in the words of the participants that allows the researcher to interpret a piece of the world being studied. Kahn and Cannell (1957, p. 149) describe interviewing as 'a conversation with a purpose', while Yin (2003, p. 89) terms it a 'guided conversation'. Watts and Ebbutt (1987, p. 25) refer to interviewing as 'a conversation with a specific purpose for obtaining relevant information for a specific research objective'.

From the above viewpoints, we can conclude that a research interview is not an ordinary conversation (Oppenheim, 1992). It is a purposeful and bounded conversation. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 108) say that qualitative interviews are more focused, in-depth and more detailed than ordinary conversations. The purpose is to understand the participants' points of view and to discover the meaning of their experience. Interviews allow people to convey to others their perspective in their own words. Patton (2002) states the purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective. However, Seidman (1998) posits that the purpose of interviewing is to understand the experience of people and to find the meaning of their experience. In other words, interviewing is a conversation to find out how people view their world, specifically to capture the complexities of individual perceptions and experiences.

At the root of interviewing is an effort to understand the participants' lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience. Interviewing gives access to the context of participant behaviour and thus provides a way for researchers to understand perceptions of the meaning of that behaviour. People's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of others around them. Meaning is the principals' and parent participants' experiences in their life within its context. To understand participants' meaning is to comprehend their process of making meaning or telling us about the story of their own life related to this study. Seidman (2006) describes the very process of participants putting their experience into language during interview as a process of making meaning in their life.

At this stage, the researcher is interested in interpreting the meaning of what they said, as well as how they said it. In this study, interviewing may be defined as a process of interacting between researcher and participants with a specific purpose of capturing more detailed information about principals' communication styles and the relationship to parents' involvement in school. Interviews in this study were conducted on a one-to-one basis. All participants involved in the study were interviewed by the researcher for about half an hour.

The interviews with secondary school principals and parents took place after the observation session. Interviews with principals and parents helped to capture more information about principals' communication styles and were essential to the study, because the researcher could not observe their feelings, thoughts and intentions directly from observation (Patton, 2002). Interviews yield richer insights into principals and parents' experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings (May, 1997; Oppenheim, 1992; Patton, 2002). Therefore, the interview data was crucial. The data gained from interviews may be considered as supplementary information to those gained from observation.

The interview themes and questions were generated from the literature review and related to research purposes, objectives and the research questions. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. The details of the interview questions for both principal and parent can be seen in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6. As this approach required the formulation of some spontaneous questions during interviews, the researcher developed an interview framework as guidance to minimise bias in the interviewing process. Patton (2002) indicates that an interview guide is a list of questions or issues to be explored. The interview guide provided themes, issues or topics within which the interviewer was free to explore, probe and ask questions to explain and clarify.

Kumar (1996), Mason (2002), May (1997) and Patton (2002) indicate that a semi-structured approach to data collection is useful when in-depth information is needed. In-depth information in this study means detailed information about principals' communication behaviour, particularly their communication styles linked to the parents' involvement with the schools. Their perspectives and opinions on a particular idea, programme, or situation dealing with principals' communication style and parents' involvement is considered as detailed information. For example, the researcher asked every participating parent, principal and associated others within the context of their communication experiences in school. A series of questions relating to their relationship with school was posed in order to shape their thoughts, perceptions and expectations.

The flexibility of this approach allowed the researcher to elicit rich information from participants and is the strength of this approach. However, the interview guide may become a problem. Free conversation and interviewer interruption may introduce investigator bias (Kumar, 1996; Yin, 2003). Patton (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that the quality of information obtained during an interview largely depends on the interviewer. Rubin & Rubin (2005) say:

> How you feel and how you act in an interview can greatly affect the quality of the exchange.

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 79)

Patton (2002) states that:

> …a deep and genuine interest in learning about people is insufficient without disciplined and rigorous inquiry on the skill and technique.

(Patton, 2002, p. 341

Bias in the context of interviewing means that the information elicited from participants is not a natural answer, but is influenced by the interviewer (Oppenheim, 2001). However, Griffith (1998, p. 46) has a different view about bias in qualitative studies. He explains:

i.   Researchers should keep in mind that facts are value free;

ii. Researchers expect that value judgements will always bias research, and research is better when bias is eliminated;

iii. All facts and information are value laden, but it is not helpful to describe this as bias, as bias depends on the possibility of there being a neutral view. Knowledge gets its meaning from the value systems of knowers;

iv. Value systems have social and political dimensions. Knowledge gets its meaning from the political position of the knowers.

Griffith's (1998) argument suggests that bias often derives from systematic errors when consistently measuring a phenomenon. Such measurement in a qualitative study is problematic. The concept of bias in a research study is ambiguous and multi-faceted, because the concept of bias often depends on many other concepts such as the concepts of truth and objectivity.

Bias in qualitative research is debatable because dealing directly with human beings is more about subjective and uncertain relationships. Burns and Groves (2005, p. 628) claim that 'all researchers have bias, but reflectivity is necessary in qualitative studies to reduce bias'. Reflectivity in this context is an analytical method of critical self-reflection of potential biases in order to reduce the impact of bias in research. However, the issue arises as to how researchers are supposed to reflect on their bias when there is no specific definition of how the elimination of bias may be carried out in operational guidelines. The concept of bias in a qualitative study, understood from the perspective of positivist research, is difficult because the notion of both paradigms is clearly dissimilar.

Conducting a pilot study might be helpful in gaining experience and determining potential problems before conducting the actual interviews. David and Sutton (2004) point out that piloting may reveal hidden resentments and resistances. In this study, for example, a pilot study was conducted to test logistics, procedures and gather information prior to the main study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Research interviewing is a complex task. Although some scholars acknowledge research interviews as conversations in everyday life, the parties are not equal partners because the researcher defines and controls the conversation, including the topic and direction of conversation. Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 108) indicate that research interviewing is less balanced because 'one person does most of the questioning and the other does most of the answering'. The topic of the conversation is introduced by the researcher, who critically follows up on participants' responses. In this circumstance, researchers and

participants have the freedom to share knowledge and experiences, but the scope and the context is determined by the researcher. Kvale (1996) says:

> An interview is a construction site of knowledge: an interview is literally an 'inter' 'view', an rather change of views between persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.

(Kvale, 1996, p. 2)

This means that research interviews are a process of conversing in which participants are free to explain and answer questions, but they are only allowed to talk in relation to the topics introduced by researchers because the conversation is controlled by the interviewer.

The issues regarding power relations, particularly power imbalances between interviewers and interviewee, are a major concern among researchers. Limerick, Limerick and Grace (1996) highlight crucial issues related to power relations in the interviewing processes. From their experience of interviewing three different groups of participants in three different styles, including structured interviews on study of school−community relations, conversational interviews with small business owners and semi-structured interviews with distance learning students, they conclude that interviewing is a gift from participants as they realise that, as subjects under study, they may actually be uncomfortable because of power inequity between interviewer and interviewee. Interviewers are seen as more powerful as they lead the interviewee to facilitate their study. In this context, interviewees sacrifice their time, but then may also feel vulnerable depending on the degree of their willingness to participate in the study.

On the other hand, the researchers also noticed that they faced more serious problems when they tried to empower interviewees as a reward for their willingness. The process of balancing power is also influenced by politics and is time consuming as, given the power and freedom to choose the time and place, interviewees cause delays as they often change the interview settings (Limerick,

Limerick & Grace, 1996). Therefore, interpersonal skills in conducting an interview are crucial, as Oppenheim (1992) remarks:

> The interview, unlike most other techniques, requires interpersonal skills of high order (putting the respondent at ease, asking questions in an interested manner, noting down the responses without upsetting the conversational flow, giving support without introducing bias); at the same time the interviewer is either limited or helped by his or her own sex, apparent age and background, skin colour, accent etc. When taken seriously, interviewing is a task of daunting complexity.

(Oppenheim, 1992, p. 65)

The pilot study conducted in the middle of August 2009 revealed deficiencies in the design of the proposed interviewing instrument and procedures. Some parents found it quite difficult to respond to some proposed interview questions relating to communication style, as they had little knowledge of the field. Therefore, the researcher restructured those interview questions, reorganised the key themes and put them in a more appropriate sequence to help their understanding. In some cases, the questions needed to be explained further. Some probing questions were added, again to lead respondents to comprehend the questions, but with attention not to influence their answers. After adjustments, the questions were put to another group of parents randomly chosen from the pilot school. The second piloting was conducted successfully due to the revision of the questions. Parents showed their understanding of the interview questions. Therefore, the researcher decided to retain those questions for the main study, which was conducted three weeks after the pilot.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data in this study are in the form of audio, video and text. This motivated the researcher to employ in relation to the audio-visual data Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Its application as data analysis groundwork was fundamental as it allowed the researcher to integrate multiple modes of communication data such

as verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal, that was captured in the form of audio-visual recordings during the fieldwork (Kress & Leeuwen 2001; Scollon & Wong, 2001).

3.6.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a study of language use (Brown & Yule, 1983). The term discourse analysis was introduced by Harris in 1952 when he applied a text-based approach to analyse both speech and writing (Paltridge, 2006).

Social constructionists believe that people are products of social interaction, and a way to understand social interaction is discourse analysis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1985; Schiffrin, 1994; Scollon, 1998). At the beginning, it was adopted by constructionists in qualitative studies to examine spoken, signed and written language, including conversations, interviews, articles, speeches, flyers, newspapers, memos, reports, broadcasts and gossip. Discourse analysis increasingly has become common in modern language and communication research.

Discourse analysis is often used to examine the way language is used to discover how people organise text and speech, including word choice, sentence structure, semantic presentation and pragmatic analysis (Brown & Yule, 1983; Gee, 1999; Paltridge, 2006). However, in communication research, scholars treat discourse analysis as an important method of understanding why people succeed or fail in conversation. People interpret what others intend to convey, try to make sense of what they read and filter what they hear or read. The notion of discourse analysis assumes that all language is context-based and that context helps to constitute meanings. Therefore, some communication scholars such as Buldry and Thibault (2006), Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), Scollon and Wong (2001; 2003) and Norris (2002) acknowledge the importance of discourse analysis as a way of analysing communication data in Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

In his functional grammar, Halliday (1978, p. 192) found that a language grammar is not a code or a set of rules to produce correct sentences but a resource for making meanings, and this can be seen as the beginning era of semiotic theories. The notion of using Halliday's (1978) systematic, functional grammar to view language as network systems in meaning-making led many literacy theorists to the realisation that language must be understood in relation to other systems of meaning that are pervasive in contemporary society. Halliday's (1978) framework is useful for this study; functional grammar reflects the way in which grammar is organised to interpret the meaning of principals' and parents' verbal text in the context. The concept of functional grammar is incorporated with multimodal analysis to determine principals' communication style in three ways. First, to trace experience in terms of their cultural background, secondly, to analyse interactions − the focus is based on who is communicating with whom − and thirdly, to analyse how the messages are constructed. These three interrelated resources are also considered as important factors in evaluating communication effectiveness.

The emergence of semiotic studies such as the semiotics of image of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), the semiotics of visual art of O'Toole (1994) and the semiotics of sound by Van Leeuwen (1999) show that communicative modes such as an image, language, voice, gesture, posture, context and socio-cultural factors are significant in meaning-making in spoken or written communication. Talking to parents about a child's education, for instance, is more effective on the school premises rather than at the market, because the semiotic context of the school building, teachers, pupils, furniture, classrooms, colour, drawings, pictures, language, voice and gestures and posture are integrated or integral. Therefore, Baldry and Thibault (2006) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) strongly recommend multimodal analysis in accordance with current communication analysis as the method encompasses various semiotic modes including the social cultural in multimodal discourse to find out how people make meaning through their use of words.

The definition of the term 'discourse analysis' is problematic, and there is no universal agreement (Johnstone, 2002). However, linguists often view discourse as occurring within a language and the term 'language in use' is generally accepted, and also 'language above the sentence' or 'language beyond the sentence'. They refer to the purposes and functions of language (Brown & Yule, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994). 'Language above the sentence' is basically a simple form of language in daily spoken language. It is also defined as naturally occurring language (Norris, 2002). It appears in any form and context including the sentences in sequence in a tape record of a conversation, interview, meeting, novel or play (Tannen, 1989).

The study of texts and multimodal meaning-making practice as contemporary communication data analysis has developed since the early 1990s (Baldry & Thibault, 2006). Its primary goal is to develop rules about the ways in which words are arranged to form sentences or phrases based on syntax and vocabulary to describe and evaluate the meanings of different modes in human communication (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) developed multimodal discourse analysis. Beginning with the claim that modern human interaction communication is multimodal. Multimodal refers to all kinds of meaning-making systems or 'modes' and diverse semiotic modes. Human languages and objects are combined to form multimodal texts. Prior to this era, language was seen as central and fully represented communication. However, in multimodal discourse, language is seen as only a part of communication modes. Multimodal assumes that multimode is in the form of verbal, para-verbal, non-verbal, and contexts are central and concurrently contribute to meaning-making in human communication. For example, meaning in any human discourse is not only conveyed by words but by various semiotic contextual modes. Meaning-making in communication, according to Kress and Van Leuween (1996, 2001) is the combination and integration of language, gaze, gesture, posture, glances, voice, images, animation, room design, spaces, colours and furniture.

The position discourse in linguistics is unclear and defining the term in concrete ways is usually hard to achieve, resulting in discourse being defined in a number of different ways. Donahue and Prosser (1997), Gee (1999), Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (2004), Johnstone (2002), Schiffrin (1994) and Tannen (1989), for example, have different views about the term. Johnstone (2002) give a simple and straightforward definition. He describes it as involving any act of talking, writing or signing. Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (2004) and Tannen (1989) view it as an umbrella term for either spoken or written communication beyond the sentence, meaning that discourse is not a channel, but a mode of speaking or writing.

Donahue and Prosser (1997) offer a different explanation. They argue that discourse is a text when they postulate:

> …discourse and text become identical in meaning. Originally, discourse and text were distinguished by language mode − spoken or written. However, this distinction has lately become blurred, two terms become excessive.

(Donahue & Prosser, 1997, p. 33)

Schiffrin (1994) went through a complicated process of defining the term 'discourse'. In general, he used the word 'utterance', but admitted that his definition is problematic as the relationship of the terms discourse and utterance is unclear. He says, 'The main problem with this definition is that the notion of "utterance" is not really all that clear' (p. 39). Thus, he defines discourse as utterances in terms of 'language above the sentence', that is, contextualised language in use, not a collection of decontextualised units of language structure. As discussed before, most of the problems faced by linguists in defining terms like discourse are due to the different ways of thinking about such terms. For example, the formalist paradigm emphasises particular units of language or autonomous systems, while functionalists stress the social function of language use (Schiffrin, 1994).

However, Gee (1999, p. 17) explains discourse in a different way. In general he admits discourse as 'language-in-use' and calls it 'stretches of language'. Gee (1996) introduces a capital 'D' to distinguish this complex meaning from discourse with a small 'd' in its everyday usage tied to spoken language. Gee (1996), a socio-linguist, defines the word 'discourse' much more widely than Discourse with a capital 'D', classified as the language process:

> …ways of being in the world; they are form of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A discourse is a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize.

(Gee, 1996, p. 127)

He believes the word Discourse with capital 'D' is broader than language itself when he goes on to say, 'I will use the term social language to talk about the role of language in Discourses' (p. 25). His statement clearly shows that the word Discourse with a capital 'D' does not occur within a language, as such, but 'beyond language, meaning that a 'Discourse' is not only the way of speaking, listening, reading and writing in specific social languages, but includes interaction, action, feelings, thinking, beliefs, dress code and valuing people or objects (Gee, 1996). In short, a 'Discourse' as Gee (1996) defines it is the way of thinking, doing and saying. Discourse includes tools of enquiry and structuring to grasp better how texts are organised and convey meaning.

The study of discourse is the study of any aspect of social language use (Gee, 1996, 1999; Brown & Yule, 1983). In relation to this study, discourse analysis will be utilised in multimodal discourse analysis to enable the researcher to investigate principals' communication style. The text analysis approach is considered an appropriate approach to examine principals' communication style, because it reveals words and meaning.

Brown and Yule (1983, p. 27) indicate that 'the discourse analyst is describing what speakers and hearers are doing and not the relationship which exists between one sentence or proposition and another'. Discourse in this research refers to the way of analysing language use above the level of a sentence such as conversations and interviews. On the other hand, the term analysis in this research focuses on language in use, the context and cohesion within the text. It thus investigates principals' communication styles and parents' involvement. Two types of data will be captured from participants. They are conversation and interview data, both of which are in oral medium. Recording data is important in discourse analysis. Brown and Yule (1983) recommend:

> In general, the discourse analyst works with a tape recording of an event, from which we then make a written transcription, annotated according to his interests on the particular occasion.

> (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 9)

In this study, the whole process of conversation between principals with parents and interviews was video recorded. The recordings were transcribed into a written form before analysis of how meaning is constructed through a text. Meanings in this context include linguistic behaviours such as word choice, sentence structure, semantic representation, patterns of pronunciation and pragmatic analysis of how principals organise their speech in order to determine communication styles.

A table of the principals' and parents' multimodal data, consisting of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal elements, was developed in order to integrate visual and text data. The verbal data were listed in the table in the form of the conversation text. Non-verbal and para-verbal data of selected communication modes such as gesture, facial expression and tone of voice, which are considered as strong indicators of individual communication style, were given in the form of frequency. The non-verbal and para-verbal communication modes

were coded every time verbal communication occurred. Therefore, the completed table with details of information in the interaction process includes their verbal text, non-verbal and para-verbal indicators of the principal and parents. The details in the table used the conceptual definitions and empirical indicators of communicative style adapted from Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983) to identify the style.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Two issues have dominated ethical guidelines; informed consent and the protection of human subjects from harm. In brief, ethics begins with the principle of voluntary participation, which requires informed consent in order to protect participants from the risk of harm as a result of participation (Fox & Randell, 2002; Kimmel, 1998; Punch, 1998; Scott, 1997; Seidman, 2006). Further related issues are confidentiality and anonymity which essentially mean that the participants will remain anonymous throughout the study.

Ethical standards for researchers are only general guidance and therefore researchers have to make a choice on their own. As Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens (2003, p. 141) point out, 'researchers should be knowledgeable about professional codes and ethics but in the end ethical decisions should be based on reasoned beliefs regarding the goodness and correctness of what to do'. However, this introduces a subjective element. When a decision is made according to 'goodness' and 'correctness', ethical problems will always arise because goodness and correct judgement for some researchers might not be accepted as goodness and correct judgement by some participants. Even though clear ethical standards and principles exist, there may be times when the need for accurate research jeopardises the rights of potential participants. In other words, it is difficult to set standards that anticipate every circumstance. For that reason, ethical panels review proposals to give a ruling on what is good and correct to assure both researchers' and participants' rights are protected.

In some cases, ethical issues may arise from conflicting values between researchers, participants and the goals of study (Kimmel, 1988). Conflicts of interest or different expectations may arise if the attempt is to extract maximum information from participants for better research outcomes, but deal with participants who want freedom, privacy, safety and protection. In this respect, intentionally or otherwise, researchers may abuse their power in order to gain specific information from participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; May, 1997; Robson, 2002).

Ethical guidelines may be too broad and there are no specific ethical guidelines for specific contexts, so common sense and experience play a crucial role. In some cases the complexities of the ethical issues in research settings requiring immediate judgement are a dilemma for most researchers (Scott, 1997). Lack of knowledge about the participants and their sociocultural background might also lead to wrong conclusions. Decisions taken in certain circumstances might be right so far as the researcher is concerned, but wrong for participants and this might lead to psychological conflict between researchers and participants. Working in a familiar location is preferable, so a good choice is a setting with which researchers are familiar from their cultural and socio-background. In this research, for example, the districts of Bentong in the state of Pahang and Tanjong Malim in the state of Perak, Malaysia, were chosen on grounds of simplicity and the researcher's familiarity with community research settings.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

Montada (1998) indicates that informed consent is crucially important to research validity. The participants have to be informed clearly about the research before they can give their consent. Fox and Rendall (2002, p. 63) strongly argue that ethical principles in research are socially constructed. Thus, it is valuable that the participants understand the meaning and have a good feeling about the study. Therefore, obtaining full consent may help to ensure the validity of the data.

The notion of informed consent also assumes that both researcher and participants are clear about the role that they are consenting to perform. For this reason, at the beginning of the recruitment stage both groups of participants, principals and parents were properly informed about purposes, procedures, confidentiality, cost, benefits and risks, and freedom to withdraw. The participants also had the opportunity to ask for further clarification about the research. All the principals and parents volunteered to participate in the study. Nine participants in three different secondary schools, including a principal and two parents in each school, attended short briefings organised by the school and the researcher. They gave their full commitment and support to ensure that the process of data collection was well conducted and signed their consent. They arrived on time for all observation and interview sessions. There was no sign of anxiety during the sessions as they had met the researcher three or more times before data collection started. It was hoped that transparency would stimulate the participants to give their informed consent freely and encourage confidence in contributing data on their communication experiences.

3.7.2 Power Differential

Power differentials are a problematic issue in research. A power differential is an imbalance in power arising naturally in relationships and from differing interests between researcher and participant. Researchers are believed to have more power than participants because of their specialised knowledge and responsibility for defining the conditions of the research (Kimmel, 1988). This power differential may have a negative impact on participants. If they sense a loss of freedom or vulnerability, or less leverage of protection against the research procedure, they may refuse to participate (Kimmel, 1988; May, 1997).

Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens (2003) in general agreed with Kimmel's (1988) views about researchers in positions of power, and found that power imbalances exist on two levels, namely real and perceived differences. The former relate to money and education and the latter to a sense of inferiority and vulnerability.

Thus, it might have been that the two groups in this study required a different approach, but in general a few steps can be taken to reduce the power imbalances. Furthermore, legitimate use of power may occur as the researcher seeks to maintain a partnership with the participants (Kimmel, 1988).

Kimmel (1988) indicates that sharing common norms and values defines the limits of usage of power. This was one of the reasons why parent participants in this study were selected from PTA committee members. It was hoped that their familiarity with the school environment would diminish the power imbalance between principal and parents in their conversation session. The parents and principal might be able to talk freely, as they are already known to each other.

Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens (2003) suggest some ways to reduce a power imbalance between researcher and participants. They are the researcher's physical appearance, making participant comfortable, avoiding reinforcing feelings of powerlessness and recognising the power dimension of relationships.

These actions were taken, but the suggestions to minimise power imbalances by placing ourselves in a position to make participants feel comfortable and less tense was inapplicable due to the time consumed. It was suggested that 'we could live locally during the period of research. Use local transportation and eat at local eateries. This might mean sleeping on the floor of a mud hut' (p. 151). This can be considered a suggestion to place ourselves in a position so that the participants will feel comfortable because they feel the researcher is a part of them. Some of the suggestions, however, are applicable to this research because the researcher had the opportunity to conduct the research in his own district, and was familiar with local cultures including the language because they are a part of the researcher's community. The researcher was also able to visit the research setting frequently during data collection, because the researcher's accommodation was nearby.

Adherence to British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines, and ethical approval from an institution or university review committee is often

mandatory before fieldwork may be undertaken (Schyvens, Nowak & Schyvens, 2003; Seidman, 2006). Therefore, an application to conduct this research was made to the University Research Governance Office and approval was granted in June, 2009. The fieldwork started in early August 2009. During data collection, participants involved in the study were provided with a participant information sheet and informed consent forms. They were asked to read the information about the study and sign the form to show that they agreed to take part before the conversation sessions started (Darlington & Scott, 2002). The researcher had provided them a copy of the consent form for their own records. All the consent forms will be destroyed at the completion of the study (Oliver, 2003).

3.7.3 Confidentiality

This research is a qualitative case study dealing with secondary school principals and parents. Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens (2003) indicate that confidentiality is a broad term that acknowledges that the researcher may be entrusted with private information. Therefore, the researcher has the responsibility to ensure that any information, such as field notes, tapes, or transcripts are confidential and are stored in a safe place (Oliver, 2003; Punch, 1998; Seidman, 2006). Any identification of participants and research settings are confidential. This information may be used for research purposes, but not necessarily published.

Ethical issues and the nature of qualitative study may cause a dilemma. In conducting this study, for example, the purpose was to explore the real world of the principals' communication behaviour, specifically their communication style, the way they talk, the words they choose, patterns of pronunciation, tone of voice and all other factors in a holistic way. However, to do so it may be necessary to provide a clear picture about the reality of communication and this is hard to achieve, as researchers are subject to ethical requirements that might limit their freedom to tell the truth about certain aspects of the subject. As Darlington and Scott (2002) state:

One of the dilemmas of reporting qualitative research is, however, that if the purpose of the research is to show the phenomenon in a holistic way, disaggregating the data can weaken its essence.

(Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 29)

For this study, however, the researcher did not need to disguise or disaggregate the data, and participants and settings can remain anonymous. Code numbers and fictitious name were used to provide anonymity without interfering with the essence of the study (Oliver, 2003). Schyvens, Nowak and Schyvens (2003) point out that anonymity and confidentiality are the researcher's responsibility, to keep the identity of participants private. Every effort was made to conceal the identities of those involved, including principals, parents, schools, towns and individual participants. Fictitious names of principals and parents and code numbers for schools were used in the writing up. The list of code numbers will be destroyed on completion of the study.

3.8 Research Validation

Research validation is a process of testing validity and reliability. These two interrelated concepts have over time been more commonly used to ensure the quality of quantitative study, but lately they have been applied to all kinds of research including qualitative study. The use of these concepts in qualitative study has been argued by many interpretative scholars such as Creswell and Miller (2000), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Flick (1998), Patton (2002), Seale (1999a), Stenbacka (2001), and Strauss and Corbin (1998) as they claim that quality in qualitative work is difficult to define. Qualitative study requires a better understanding of a phenomenon under study to serve the purpose of 'generating understanding' rather than the 'purpose of explaining' as in a quantitative study (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). Therefore, multiple approaches to data collection and interpretation are used to serve the needs of the study. Unfortunately, this approach has been seen by some as a main aspect of qualitative study and indicative of a lack of validity and reliability. Seale (1999a, p. 7) argues that 'we need to accept that "quality" is a somewhat elusive phenomenon that cannot be

pre-specified by methodological rules'. Thus, this section will try to explain how the current methodology was designed to enhance research validity and reliability.

3.8.1 Validity

The concept of validity is traditionally rooted in the positivist paradigm used to test or evaluate the truthfulness of results in quantitative research. However, the concept is applied to qualitative study to ensure that the research instruments truly measure what they are intended to measure. Many qualitative researchers such as Griffins (1998), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton (2001), Seale (1999b) and Stenbacka (2001) argue that the term 'validity' is not applicable to social sciences, since method, purposes and approaches largely differ from other scientific research. Some suggest a need for new terms to replace the term 'validity' to qualify, check or measure qualitative study. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that researcher perceptions of validity affect their choice of paradigm and assumptions, resulting in many researchers developing their own concepts of validity and using what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as quality, rigour and trustworthiness (Seale, 1999a).

The issue of rigour in a case study is linked with the problem of bias. A case study is focused on fieldwork and interpretive methods. The subjective nature of emphasising the process rather than the results leads to difficulties in establishing validity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Seale (1999b) suggest used a different set of criteria to assess a qualitative study. They state that a qualitative study has to demonstrate its trustworthiness if it is to have credibility. This can be developed by intensive contact in the field, through collecting data from multiple sources and triangulation techniques. Creswell (2007, p. 207) offers eight strategies for achieving trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative enquiry. They are triangulation techniques for coherent justification of the themes to increase the credibility of an account.; member-checking to determine the accuracy of findings through themes; rich and thick description to convey findings; clarification

of any bias the researcher brings to the study; peer debriefing to enhance the account' accuracy; an external auditor to review the project and provide assessment; spending prolonged time in the field to develop in-depth understanding; and presenting negative or contradictory information about the themes

Creswell (2007) suggests that using at least one of these strategies might increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative study. Therefore, to increase the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher fulfilled at least three of the requirements suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Creswell (2007) and Seale (1999a). First, the researcher used rich and thick description to convey the findings. Secondly, the researcher used triangulation techniques to validate the data. Thirdly, the researcher spent three months in the research settings.

In-depth, rich and thick data were used to explain the phenomenon under study. For this purpose, a series of data including interview data, naturalistic observation data, audio-visual data and field notes were gathered to enhance the picture of principal's communication style. The choice of school location was also based on simplicity to enable the researcher to spend more time in the field. The researcher spent about three months from August to October 2009 with the three principals of the three different schools to develop a good rapport in order to attain real perceptions and feelings. Field notes were part of the routine, especially to capture unseen elements such as para-verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours.

Case study researchers are often attached to the site and it might be hard to achieve the aim of investigating the phenomena as they naturally occur, as the presence of a researcher at a site may have an effect on the participants. Some strategies were applied in this study to increase rigour in the process of sampling, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. In the process of sampling, the researcher identified through convenience sampling specific groups of principals and parents who either possessed characteristics or lived in

circumstances relevant to the social phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Patton, 2002). Participants were identified because they would enable exploration of a particular aspect of behaviour relevant to the research. This approach to sampling allowed the researcher deliberately to include a range of types of participants and also to select key informants with access to important sources of knowledge. During the process of data collection through interviews and video recordings, the researcher tried to ensure adequate time to become thoroughly familiar with the milieu under study and to ensure that participants had time to become accustomed to having the researcher present, but at the same time was aware of the need to avoid bias. To increase the validity of findings is the researcher's aim and for this purpose, triangulation techniques are useful. Triangulation of data from multimodal visual and text data, field notes, informal discussion, semi-structured interviews and various sources such as parents and principals further contributed to validity. The selection of PTA parents may also lend reliability, as PTA committee members represent parents and they possess more information about the parents. The principals were selected because of their experience as school leaders and their past communication with parents from different ethnic groups. Stenbacka (2001) states:

> …the answer to questions of how to create good validity is actually very simple. With the purpose of generating understanding of a social phenomenon, one is interested in understanding another person's reality based on a specified problem area. This means that the understanding of the phenomenon is valid if the informant is part of the problem area and if he/she is given opportunity to speak freely according to his/her own knowledge structure. Validity is therefore achieved when using the method of non-forcing interview with strategically well-chosen informants.

(Stenbacka, 2001, p. 552)

The involvement of the researcher in all phases of the study and compliance with all ethical obligations is considered a way to minimise misrepresentation and misunderstanding (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). The

researcher's design of data collecting, interpreting and reporting of the study may also increase the research validity. The combination and integration of multimodal visual data and text in discourse analysis may increase the research findings' validity. Similarly, in the presentations of results, the researcher may also attempt to construct a narrative that relies on the reader's trust in the researcher's integrity and fairness to support the findings with minimal bias (Seale, 1999a).

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability usually refers to measuring how consistently a research method produces data in quantitative approaches. However, obtaining reliability in qualitative work is different, as testing using statistical methods is less of an option (Creswell, 2009).

The difference of purposes behind evaluating the quality of quantitative and quantitative study is one of the reasons the concept of reliability is less relevant in a qualitative study. However, in most aspects of the study design the researcher was concerned with critical issues relating to reliability, as there are no established qualitative instruments to adapt to measure principals' communication style. Therefore, some established instruments for measuring communicator style in quantitative studies were adopted as a conceptual framework to develop interview questions and data interpretations to increase reliability.

Interview questions for principal and parent participants were based on communicative style indicators developed by Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983). The establishment of the framework and communicative styles, providing a clear operational definition and the necessary criteria, was the main reason the communicative style indicators were adopted for the study.

In the process of coding and data analysis, a qualitative multimodal data analysis was applied. The researcher developed a table called a data recording sheet for coding verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal data. The purpose was to integrate multimode communication data. The coding sheet was adapted from

Baldry and Thibault's (2006) co-deployment of space and hand−arm, as guidance for coding, before incorporation with Brandt's (1979) and Norton's (1978; 1983) conceptual definitions and empirical indicators of communicative style as the operational framework. This may also be seen as part of the researcher's effort to enhance reliability.

3.8.3 Triangulation

Triangulation is an important concept in case study research because the approach allows researchers to increase validity and reliability. Denzin (1978, p. 291) defines triangulation as a combination of methodologies in a study of the same phenomenon. Creswell (2009), Creswell and Miller, (2000), Maxwell (2005), Seale (1999a), Stake (1995; 2008) and Yin (2003) view triangulation as a process of verification to increase validity by incorporating different points of view and methods. We can say that triangulation is a way to reduce research weaknesses and bias in order to increase research validity, through integrating multiple data to develop a coherent justification for themes. Therefore, the main purpose of data triangulation in the study is to establish internal validity or rigour. Merriam (1998) suggests that internal validity in a qualitative study depends on how well the research findings match reality.

Wolcott (1998) explains that the triangulation technique is helpful in cross-checking or in 'ferreting out' varying perspectives on complex issues and events. Therefore, triangulation is employed in this study as a methodological triangulation, as defined by Denzin (1978). Denzin (1978, p. 301) identifies two types of methodological triangulation. They are the 'across method' and the 'within method', both of which were used in this study to increase trustworthiness in the interpretation (Stake, 1995).

Triangulation of methodology data in this study was accomplished through on-site interviews with principals and parents to strengthen the accuracy of findings. Additional triangulation was also accomplished through multimodal data such as audio and visual records of conversation as well as field notes. It is often

perceived as a strategy for improving research and results verification. The researcher believes that to investigate principals' communication style by interviewing the principals themselves is not an appropriate way to gain in-depth information about it. Therefore, using the 'within method' of triangulation, such as interviewing parents for cross-verification about the principals' communication style, is fundamental to attaining accurate information.

Principals and parents were interviewed throughout this study to capture in-depth information. They were interviewed using two different sets of semi-structured, open-ended questions. Most of those for principal participants were focused on attaining information about principals' and parents' communication style during conversation sessions. A similar procedure was used to interview parents. A series of questions about their communication style and the principal's communication style was formulated to verify principals' communication style.

Cross-checking with observation data was also designed to increase credence in interpreting the principals' communication style. Triangulation within observation data occurred when the multiple mode of communication such as verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal indicators were integrated into the data recording table for coding verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal data. In this respect, the principals' communication style can be observed when three different communication modes lead to the same result. For example, in an animated style, a principal may have a tendency frequently to make use of physical and non-verbal cues such as making frequent eye contact, nodding, facial expressions, a normal tone of voice and gestures. Non-verbal and para-verbal cues are in parallel with their lexical choices.

It is hoped that, by cross-validating four distinct methods, findings will prove to be congruent. If all the collected data reach the same conclusion it will provide a more certain portrayal of principals' communication style.

3.9 Summary

The current chapter described the research philosophy, research design, ethical issues and the procedure by which the study was conducted. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis of the study.

Chapter 4
Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed description of principals' communication styles obtained from the three research settings. The researcher spent three months collecting data in the three research settings, including making appointments and arrangements with principal and parent participants for data collection. Three types of data collection were involved in each site. They are observations, interviews and field notes.

Data were gathered in English and Malay. Two observations and seven interviews were conducted in English and one observation and two interviews were conducted in Malay. The data collected using the Malay language was translated into English language by using meaning-based translations (Larson, 1998). Meaning-based translation, according to Larson (1998), is a translation based on the semantic structure of the language that also takes into consideration the communication situation such as historical and cultural setting, the intention of the author, as well as the different kinds of meaning contained in the explicit and implicit information of the text. A translated version may not represent the exact meaning of the original version, but using this technique of meaning to meaning may well be helpful to develop a version that is as close to reality as possible.

During data analysis, the data captured through observations, interviews and field notes were incorporated and subjected to multimodal data analysis to find out how principals speak to parents and encourage parents to become involved in school learning activities. Audio-visual data captured through

observation and interviews were coded directly into text before going on to the next procedure, open and focused coding.

Communication researchers such as Baldry and Thibault (2006), Kress and Van Leeuween (2001) and Norris (2004) believe that meaning-making in human communication is not only a result of verbal activity alone, but a combination of verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal and settings. Therefore, to analyse the observation data, a multimodal table was designed to identify the styles of each participant, namely the Observation Worksheet for Coding Conversation Data.

The first column of the table is time. The column indicates the duration of the conversation from the beginning to the end of the conversation session. The time is considered as a part of the analysis as the time is used to relate to the frequency of occurrence of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities. The second column is visual image. This column contains a short, general statement about visual observation, especially information about the communication environment, the way the participants communicate and their proximity. The purpose of the column is to provide a clearer picture about the participants' physical communication activities. The third column is verbal, referring to the participants' speech or utterances. Every utterance by the participants was translated into text. The fourth column is non-verbal, referring to the participants' body movements, including postures such as welcoming and distancing, gestures such as hand movements and head nodding, facial expressions such as smiles and laughter, and gaze activities such as eye contact. The fifth column is para-verbal. Para-verbal is the participants' voice variation such as loudness. The final column is meaning. This refers to the each utterance produced by each participant. It is the final stage of analysing speech and the result of interpreting and synthesising after the utterance was incorporated with para-verbal and non-verbal cues. The results in the column displayed the indicators or adjectives that describe the meaning of the utterance, gesture, posture, gaze, facial expression and voice variation and allowed the researcher to conclude the style, based on

the Conceptual Definition and Empirical Indicators adapted from Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983), as shown in the table below. The approach may lead to subjective interpretation. However, it is hoped that the use of established indicators of communicative style as guidance, as suggested by Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983), may reduce the degree of subjectivity.

The participants' verbal activity in the table was displayed as a text but non-verbal and para-verbal cues were presented through frequency of occurrences. The use of body language may vary between different cultures and ethnicity as some people may understand and use body language differently. Therefore, the meaning of the speech utterance in the study is also interpreted based on understanding of the local culture.

Table 4.1

Conceptual Definitions and Empirical Indicators of Communicative Style Adapted from Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983)

	Style	**Definition**	**Indicator**
1.	Relaxed style	A tendency to be <u>calm and collected</u>, not nervous under pressure and to not show nervous mannerisms	1. Degree of <u>ease</u>. 2. Degree of 'steadiness' in the voice. 3. Using correct pitch and tone of peaking. 4. Not conscious of any nervous mannerism. 5. Amount of eye contact. 6. Frequency of an inoffensive manner.
2.	Friendly style	A tendency to <u>encourage the other</u>, to acknowledge other's contributions to the interaction and to openly express admiration	1. Frequency of <u>agreement</u> and/or <u>acknowledgement</u> of the worth of the other's statement. 2. Frequency of smiles. 3. Amount of warmth gestures movement such as eye contact, nodding and hand to show friendliness. 3. Frequency of positive feedback to recognise others such as praise, encouragement, appreciation and welcome. 4. Frequency of reinforcing or 'stroking' statements. 5. Always prefer to be tactful such as reasoning, explaining and questioning 6. Very encouraging to people.
3.	Open style	A tendency to <u>reveal personal things about the self</u>, to easily express feelings and emotions, and to be frank and sincere	1. Frequency of <u>statements of personal opinion or experience</u>. 2. Frequency of 'high risk' self- disclosive statements. 3. Openly express feelings or emotions (unreserved). 4. Honest and straightforward. 5. Affable, convivial and approachable. 6. Frequency of smiles and laughs to show friendliness. 7. Possibly outspoken.

4.	Impression Leaving style	A tendency <u>to be remembered</u> because of what one says and/or the way one says it.	1. Characterised by <u>leaving a memorable impression upon others</u>. 2. Frequency of unique nonverbal mannerisms or gestures, especially hand and head movement. 3. Frequency of 'unique' verbal expression. 4. Frequency of smiles and laughs.
5.	Animated style	A tendency to <u>make use of physical and nonverbal cues</u> such as provides frequent eye contact, to use facial expression and to gesture often or very expressive nonverbally in social situations.	1. <u>Frequency and variety of body movement</u> or amount of 'communicative' gesturing especially hand and head movements. 2. Frequency and variety of facial expressions. 3. Amount of eye contacts. 4. Vocal fluctuations in range, pitch and loudness.
6.	Attentive style	A tendency to <u>listen, to show interest in what the other is saying</u>, and to deliberately react in such a way that the other knows she/he is being listened to.	1. <u>Listening to others</u> carefully. 2. Amount of nodding. 3. Amount and duration of eye contact. 4. Frequency with which a communicator repeats rephrases or paraphrases the other's statement back to him/her. 5. Frequency requests for additional information pertaining to previous statement made by the other. 6. Always shows empathetic and deliberately reacts.
7.	Precise style	A tendency to <u>use very specific language and try to be very accurate and specific</u> about what one means by what one says.	1. Frequency of <u>giving example and illustrations to clarify a statement</u>. 2. Use of definition. 3. Choice of words with specific meanings. 4. Frequency with which a communicator elaborates on a previous statement 5. Grammatical correctness of speech. 6. Always ask for precise accurate content.
8.	Dramatic style	A tendency to be <u>verbally alive with picturesque speech</u>.	1. Frequency of <u>verbally exaggerate to emphasis point</u>. 2. Frequency of manipulating fantasies, metaphors, rhythm, voice and other stylistic devices to highlight or understand content. 3. Frequency of act out a point physically and vocally through jokes. 4. Frequency of using anecdotes and story to highlight content.
9.	Dominant style	A tendency to '<u>take charge' of the interaction and/or attempt to lead or control</u> the behaviour of others in it.	1. <u>Controlling situations</u>. 2. Frequency of speaking. 3. Direction of topic(s) of conversation. 4. Frequency of interrupting behaviour. 5. Frequency and duration of eye contact.
10.	Contentious style	A tendency to be <u>argumentative or overtly hostile</u> towards others.	1. Frequency of <u>challenging statement</u>. 2. Attempts at pushing one's point or opinions in order to make them appear in the right. 3. Frequency of disagreement with other. 4. Frequency of aversive nonverbal contemptuous statements made about the other. 5. Frequency of insist upon some kind of proof in arguing or quick to challenge others and require them to show proof. 6. Aggressive and defensive in arguing.

The next stage of coding was focused coding. Focused coding involves classifying and assigning meaning to the information related to the participants' communication. Words, phrases or events that appeared to be similar indicators

of a certain communication style were grouped in the same category. A specific code was applied to each category before the categories were gradually modified. Overlapping coding categories were also eliminated, combined and subdivided in order to accommodate the conceptual framework underlying the study. The analysis of the interviews and field notes data was undertaken in the same way.

The purpose of the study is to explore in depth the principal's communication styles. The size of the sample is small. Therefore, the percentage values used in the findings, particularly in the graphics and triangulation tables, is not for the purpose of ranking but to show the relative frequency of style as perceived by the principals and parents, for the purpose of comparing styles between participants.

The presentation of the findings is based on the themes generated from the research questions in the three different cases. It begins with a brief explanation of the school's background, followed by participants' background and ends with the explanation of the findings, structured by the research questions. The discussion of each case is divided into two sections. The first section explores principals' communication styles and the second section focuses on parents' communication styles. The description of the interview and observation content is also presented, based on the original speech of the participants. In order to give a meaningful impact to the data and to preserve the way they spoke and their meaning, there was no attempt made by the researcher to change minor grammatical errors.

4.2 Katara Secondary School: Case One

4.2.1 The School Background

Katara Secondary School, categorised as on urban secondary school by the Ministry of Education, has 82 teachers, 18 staff and 1,102 students. The school is located in resettlement area and has low economic group housing. Most students in the school are those from the nearest feeder primary school, set in the heart of

the housing area. Most parents are self-employed drivers, labours, rubber tappers, farmers, mechanics or hawkers. The school was established in 1962 and is attended by students of different ethnic heritage such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and Indigenous heritage groups. The school has average academic achievement but has a history of academic achievement in certain subjects in the past few years. The most recent achievement of the school was being awarded the accolade of being an excellent secondary school for performance in mathematics, biology, accounting and ICT by the district education office (Katara Secondary School, 2008).

The researcher spent eight alternate days in Katara Secondary School. Most of the first and second days was spent with the principal arranging the research schedule and distributing flyers to the parents. Twenty flyers were distributed to the parents via their children. Eight were returned, but only three agreed to take part in the study. While on the site the researcher spent most of the time collecting field notes about the school environment, structure, achievement and history. Sometimes the researcher was offered a walk around the school with the principal, and the offer was taken as an opportunity to build rapport and to observe the ways the principal interacted with students, teachers, staff and parents.

4.2.2 Participants

Principal Participant

For the purpose of the study, the principal participant of Katara Secondary School was given a pseudonym, Mr. Law. Mr. Law is a 55 year old Chinese heritage principal who started teaching in 1980. He has a range of experience as a classroom teacher, senior assistant and lecturer at four secondary schools and a teacher training college before he began his journey as a principal in a rural area secondary school in 1997.

Parent Participant 1

Parent participant 1 in the Katara Secondary School is a male Chinese heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 1 was given a pseudonym, Mr. Chong. Mr. Chong is 50 years old and a former student of the school. He is a self-employed and has a daughter studying at the school.

Parent Participant 2

Parent participant 2 in the Katara Secondary School is a female Malay heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 2 was given a pseudonym, Mdm. Murni. Mdm. Murni is 45 years old and a housewife also on the school PTA committee. She is actively involved with school PTA activities. She has a daughter studying at the school.

4.2.3 Findings Related to Research Questions

How Do Principals Perceive Their Communication with Parents?

The Principal Describes His Communication Styles

Mr. Law explained that his 30 years' experience in the teaching profession had increased his confidence in leading schools, even though he realised that leading a school is challenging. He has to meet the high expectations of students, teachers and parents. Mr. Law described that he faced no problems with his task of dealing with students, staff and teachers, but dealing with parents was not easy as some parents felt uncomfortable sharing their ideas with the school. He said that:

> I think the most important aspect in our communicating as well as developing relationships with parents is frankly we have to be truthful and transparent. First of all, we have to make them feel easy…before we go to the next step to build the trust….

> (Transcription of Interview with P1)

Mr. Law explained that communication with the parents is primarily based on honesty, and that respect is the key to developing a good relationship. However, he also acknowledged that communicating with the parents was always a challenge and it may become trickier when communicating with economically disadvantaged parents. In some cases they approached the school with defensive and angry attitudes. He said that:

> Most of parents in the school come from a quite low socioeconomic background. They work as farmer, rubber tapper, and labour. So that the way they communicate with you also different. You might feel these parents are rude because of their manner of talking and dealing with you is quite different. They might use some rude words with you because their culture is like that. The sons or daughters also speak in the same manner… using all those 'dirty words' is part of their way of talking. So, in this case it will be better for you to know them before you communicate with them…..

(Transcription of Interview with P1)

In the interview he was asked how he managed communication with the 'rude' parents, and he suggested that he was very experienced in handling parents when he explained that:

> We have to understand that communicating with them is also involved feelings and moods. If we want to talk about their children good performance… that's fine… we just have a normal conversation but if we want to talk about their child weaknesses, we have to be careful with the word… as well as the way we present it to them…. Don't discuss it in the public…. Some parents might feel shame to talk about their children weaknesses in front of others. So that… I will call them to my office…

(Transcription of Interview with P1)

He also added that his communication style with the parents of different ethnic origin was often based on their culture and socioeconomic level. The principal believed that he always tried to be sympathetic and flexible in his communication to accommodate the parents' communication styles and language

proficiency. Mr. Law explained that he communicated in different ways with different levels of parents. He might use a standard language with educated parents and a simple and straightforward language with less educated parents. Thus, Mr. Law believed that he faced no communication difficulties with parents, especially with the parents of his own ethnic origin. He further described that:

> ….but for me, that's not a problem as I know them… furthermore…
> I am Chinese… so there should be no problem.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P1)</div>

Analysis of his interview data shows that he repeated 'I didn't face any communication problem with parents, and I can communicate well with most of them' ten times when he was asked about the problems that he might face during his communication with parents.

Parents Describe Principal's Communication Styles

Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni, who were involved in conversations with the principal, believed that Mr. Law is a friendly school leader. Mr. Chong explained that:

> ….he is a very simple and pleasant man. There is no sign of rudeness or unpleasant. He attends to our relationships and he listen to our suggestions… We are also most welcome…

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with CP1)</div>

Mdm. Murni also recalled that:

> He is polite. He is good in the sense that he is approachable. The great things about him… he does not really mind about your socioeconomic background… he will talk to everybody…

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with MP1)</div>

Both parents also admired Mr. Law's personality. They concluded that Mr. Law was a calm and reliable principal. Mdm. Murni said that the principal was very committed to his job. She further explained that:

> I know some of our suggestions are hard for him to carry out as he is also bound by the school systems but he never said no… he will try his best to make the school better…

(Transcription of Interview with MP1)

Mr. Chong had a high regard for Mr. Law's openness with parents. He explained that the principal also encourages two-way communication. He added that:

> Now… he has opened the door for us… whether to speak about the teacher or… the children. I think he has made a very good point… at least we feel the closeness.

(Transcription of Interview with CP1)

Both parents also explained that the principal had successfully changed the atmosphere. They added that the environment was now conducive to teaching and learning. Mdm. Murni said that the school building looked cheerful, with colourful murals on the walls, and the school environment was also very clean with a beautiful fountain surrounded by a herb garden. She added that the students and teachers might feel proud of their school as the students also have shown improvement in their academic work and behaviour. She explained that 'previously this school was considered as a "gangsters' school", that is, worse; but now this school is better than other schools'. She added that the teachers' and principal's warm gestures also made her feel comfortable and welcome:

> I prefer to talk to Mr. Law rather than other principals in this area because of the manner in which they speak to you… like you never exist in front of them… but Mr. Law will paid attention… he will always ask for your opinion about his management…

(Transcription of Interview with MP1)

126

Mr. Chong compared Mr. Law's communication style with the previous principal's and concluded that:

> I think that it is a very important point that he has given us the chance to forward our ideas. Before this… maybe the gap was too great. She never gave us a chance to suggest…

(Transcription of Interview with CP1)

Both parents also acknowledged that Mr. Law's appearance and characteristics such as transparency, frankness and respect made him appear modest and approachable. Mr. Chong said that the principal deserved to be respected, as he himself respected and valued parents. He explained that:

> The first time I met him... he said 'it's nice to meet you here'. So, I have a feeling that he is a man who is approachable.

(Transcription of Interviews with CP1)

The principal's visibility and accessibility may contribute to his leadership reputation because he can be easily accessed by the parents. Mdm. Murni was positively impressed by the way the principal managed the school and gave her explanation of how the principal's informal interaction with the parents had changed their negative perception of the school:

> He always practices 'give and take'. It's actually two-way communication. For example, in previous days the school implemented a rule that disallowed students from using the main gate… but you can just imagine, there are more than a thousand students who have to use the small gate after school… It was congested. The parents made a complaint… after a few days the rule was abolished….The parents were happy…

(Transcription of Interview with MP1)

Mr. Chong said that most parents preferred informal interaction as they were busy. He added that informal interaction may allow more suggestions, as

the parents are able to forward their views at any time without school officials and suggested that the school initiated more, to increase relationships with parents.

Both parents also gave positive feedback about the way the principal communicated with them. Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni claimed that they felt comfortable and understood the content of conversations. They expressed their satisfaction by saying that the principal was able to communicate well. Both also said that they were very clear about the vision and mission of the school. Mdm. Murni said that:

> He is a good communicator… the message is very clear. He tries
> to explain one by one….
>
> (Transcription of Interview with MP1)

Mr. Chong also acknowledged that he felt at ease talking to the principal because the principal was modest and always kept a low profile. He said that, 'he just takes others as friends'. The parent believed that communication with school may become meaningful and more effective with less distance between principal and parents. He added that the parents might also try to find the way to support the school when they felt they were valued and appreciated by the school.

Principal's Prior Knowledge about Parents' Background in Relation to His Communication Style

Mr. Law understood that the ability to show warmth and welcome through communication is important as the parents may judge the school based on how they have been treated. Furthermore, he believed that building a relationship with parents begins with a positive and constructive communication. Communication with parents is not only to get them informed, but also a strategy to show his positive attitudes to develop a relationship. Therefore, he always planned the communication with parents. He further explained that:

Normally, I study the background of the parents like their profession. At least I get some clear idea of how I should communicate with them.

(Transcription of Interview with P1)

He added that knowledge about parents' background is a key tool to ensure a smooth communication that might encourage a positive perception of the school. Mr. Law added that he never faced serious problems with parents, but does not deny that he faced difficulties with some parents who are unfamiliar with educational jargon. He explained that:

This miscommunication probably is because they can't understand some educational terms… especially some Chinese elderly parents but overall… there is no problem at all. If there are any problems… I will explain it in Chinese…

(Transcription of Interviews with P1)

Mr. Law explained that the preparation before meeting parents is very important, because prior knowledge such as their background and the topic to be discussed would not only increase his confidence but also enhance parents' satisfaction. He said that 'I find that they are happy… this is to show that they are really understood'. Mr. Law concluded that the parents are the most important working partners. Therefore, their satisfaction may not only increase positive attitudes, but encourage support and involvement.

The Role that the Principal Perceives His Communication Style Plays in Influencing Parents' Involvement in School

Mr. Law acknowledged that parental support is the key for school improvement and success. However, he also realised that obtaining parental support had been a problem since he began to lead the school about twelve years ago. He believed that parental support is based on the school's positive atmosphere for parents so. its ability to demonstrate sincerity is crucial as parents will react according to the school's commitment to involving them in school programmes.

129

The principal realised that encouraging parents to become involved is quite challenging as their involvement is dependent on their perceptions and attitudes toward the school. He explained that some parents might have had bad experiences when they were at school in the past, and might have negative perceptions of school. Therefore, he always showed a positive attitude to promote positive perceptions from parents.

Mr. Law also observed that most critical issues related to school−home relations are rooted in the failure of either the school or the parents to initiate the communication. He strongly believed that 'school has to start because we have to show them the way'. Therefore, he tried to start relationships with parents by adopting a school open door policy to encourage meaningful communication. He explained that, the policy emphasises two-way communication where parents are given priority direct access to him without school officials, but unfortunately the response was below his expectations. He added that most parents are reluctant to become involved and he concluded that the policy was not effective with busy parents.

Some parents may have felt uncomfortable with schools because the implementation of certain rules by the government limits their involvement. He said that 'because of certain rules… it is difficult for them to really come forward. But I like to see some suggestions from them'. He added that that the rules become barriers that may also create a distance. Therefore, he initiated informal meetings as he strongly believed that the approach might be the best alternative and the most effective way to reach parents. He said that:

> ….the school has to make an effort to approach them and then later on somehow they will come back to us.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P1)

Mr. Law explained that, in his experience as a principal, parents prefer informal interaction with school. Parents might be most comfortable talking

outside the school buildings, where they would feel free from officialdom. He further described that the strength of informal interaction is not only in being able to provide a strong platform to build rapport, but to maintain relationships with existing parents.

The principal believed that his efforts to meet parents informally had been fruitful. He explained that he gained much useful information and feedback from his informal interactions with parents while they were waiting to fetch their children home from school. He further explained that 'when I try to control the traffic, some parents also come forward to see me and discuss with me about the certain issue… it's very helpful'. He also added that the approach is the easiest way to meet and develop rapport with parents.

Mr. Law also believed that parents are children's most influential teachers at home. Thus, building good rapport might be the most effective way to improve children's learning and behaviour. He said that a series of campaigns and partnership programmes including home visits had been launched to show that the school was concerned about their children's education. He said that 'we wanted to pay them a visit… especially to those "fearsome" parents, because we wanted them to know that we are care about them'. A 'fearsome' parent, according to the principal, is a parent who tries to avoid the school as a result of having had bad experiences in dealing with a problematic child in the past. He explained that the 'fearsome' parents normally come from the lower socioeconomic families who are always busy with working life and their children are neglected. Most 'fearsome' parents come from a broken family. Some parents might have divorced and the children be staying with their siblings or grandparents.

Based on the problems faced by certain parents, a 'caring school' campaign was launched by the principal to promote collaboration with parents. He added that the campaign involved a series of collaborative programmes with the purpose of building strong relationships between teachers, parents and

children. The principal said 'it has been carried out very successfully in other schools because we get full support from the parents... and also that's why the students change'. He also insisted that the support from parents, especially from the 'fearsome' and 'hard to reach' parents, is of primary importance in ensuring their children benefit from schooling.

Parents' Ethnicity and the Principal's Communication Style

Analysis of observation data show that parents' ethnicity does not affect the principal's communication style. Analysis of the principal's verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal data shows that he was welcoming to parents. There is no sign of distancing, as he showed warmth and positive postures, gestures, face expressions, gazes and voices such as welcome, laugh, smile, eye contact and voice in his conversation with the parents, as detailed on the table below.

Table 4.2

Observation Data on Mr. Law's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication in Conversation with Parents
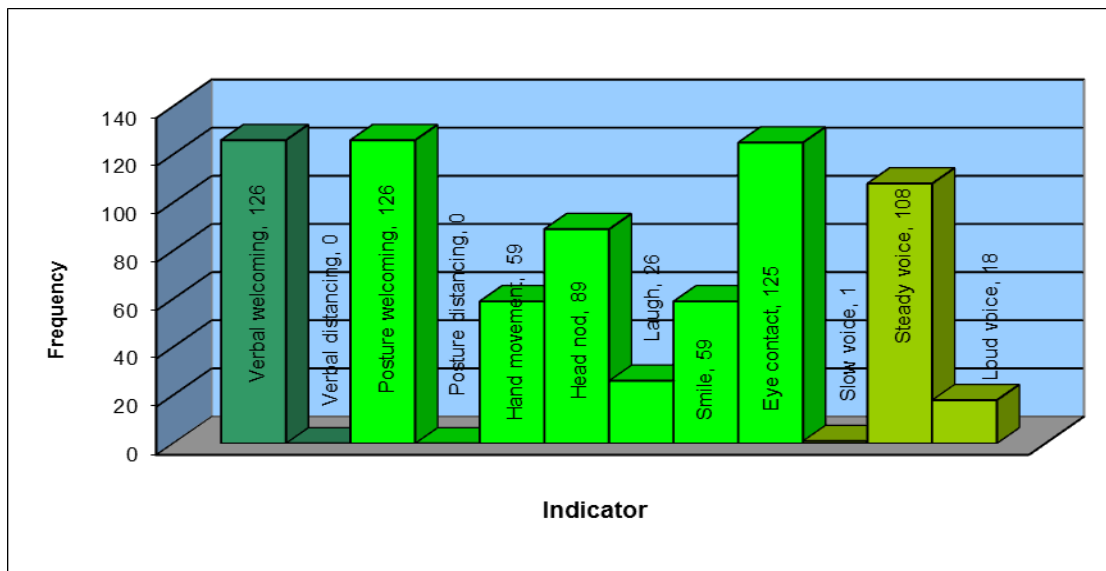
Analysis of the interviews with Mdm. Murni, who is of a different ethnic heritage, also indicates that she felt very comfortable with the conversation as the principal always showed her a positive attitude. She said that:

132

> He doesn't mind about your race… he will talks to everybody. He also does not really care about your socioeconomic status. He will treat all of us the same.

<p align="center">(Transcription of interviews with MP1)</p>

Mdm. Murni confirmed that she did not detect any distancing signs in her conversation with the principal. The conversation was fluent, with good responses, as they were quite familiar with each other. However, in my interview with the principal he had suggested that communication difficulties in speaking to parents unable to communicate effectively in Malay or English language might affect his communication style. For example, parents who have difficulty expressing themselves in his language may speak less. They tend to listen and occasionally show confusing body language, especially facial expressions, which may disrupt his efforts to communicate as he has to use alternative approaches to increase understanding. He added that communication with such parents is always one-way and from the interaction it might appear that he is quite dominant, as he has to deal with explanation rather than discussion.

The principal did not deny that the ability to speak in various languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Malay and English is a great advantage for the principal in dealing with parents of different ethnicity and backgrounds. He also stated that his communication style might change with parents of a different ethnic group to avoid misunderstanding in some circumstances. He says that:

> Communication with parents is dependent on their ability to communicate with our national language, their race and their socioeconomic background. A clear explanation is important when communicating with low socioeconomic parents such as a rubber tapper… Normally, it is easy for them to understand when we use a simple word. Explanations must be straightforward…direct to the point.

<p align="center">(Transcription of Interview with CP1)</p>

<p align="center">133</p>

The principal does not deny that the use of this style may sometimes also create misunderstandings. He said that:

> Of course there is a little bit misunderstanding or miscommunication but not very serious….

<p align="right">(Transcription of Interviews with P1)</p>

The principal claimed that most parents in the school are of Chinese heritage. Some are less educated and only able to speak their mother-tongue, such as Mandarin or Cantonese, and this affected the way he spoke. He explained that the rate of speech and method of explanation might be different, based on the parents' degree of understanding. The delivery might be slow and the degree to which words and sentences were repeated increases in order to allow parents to comprehend.

Mr. Law observed that language barriers have a great impact on parental involvement. However, he also explained that he did not face a serious communication problem as he is able to communicate in some Chinese dialects. He added that '60 per cent of my parents are of Chinese heritage. If I can't communicate with them I definitely won't get their support'. The statement reflects that the ability of the principal to speak various languages might be an advantage. Not only was he able to create a comfortable communication environment, but it was easy to create rapport with the parents of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The principal also pointed out that he did not face any communication difficulties with Malay and Indian heritage parents, as they are also able to communicate in Malay or English.

Observations and Interviews Data Analysis of the Principal's Communication Styles

Multimodal analysis of the principal's communication style, based on the criteria listed by Brandt's (1979) and Norton's (1978; 1983) indicators of communication, show that Mr. Law used at least four communication styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open and attentive during the 45 minute conversations with parents.

Analysis of the empirical indicators of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities including principal's words, posture, gestures, facial expressions, gaze and loudness shows that 32.19 per cent of his activity is attentive style and 22.60 per cent each in friendly, relaxed and open styles.

Mr. Law's communication style is evident not only from observation data, but through a cross-verification of observation data, interviews data and field notes. Table 4.3 shows that the findings from multimodal analysis of Mr. Law's verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal observation data were triangulated with his own interview data, Mdm. Murni's and Mr. Chong's interviews and field notes based on the descriptions of his communication style. The cross-verification of the empirical indicators of communicative style from the principal observation data, parents' interviews data and field notes reveal similar results, as shown below.

Table 4.3

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Law's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Law's styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Law's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mdm. Murni's interview to the style of Mr. Law Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Chong's interview to the styles of Mr. Law Number of Occurrences (f)	References in the field notes to the style of Mr. Law Number of Occurrences (f)
1. Friendly	123	10	14	8	8
2. Relaxed	123	6	11	6	1
3. Open	123	6	6	4	1
4. Attentive	175	5	6	3	2
5. Animated	0	0	0	0	0
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0	0
Communication style (%)	Friendly 22.6% Relaxed 22.6% Open 22.6% Attentive 32.1%	Friendly 37.0% Relaxed 22.2% Open 22.2% Attentive 18.5%	Friendly 37.3% Relaxed 29.7% Open 16.2% Attentive 16.2%	Friendly 38.0% Relaxed 28.5% Open 19.0% Attentive 14.2%	Friendly 66.7% Relaxed 8.3% Open 8.3% Attentive 16.6%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

How do Parents Perceive Their Communication with Principals?

Parents Describe Their Communication Styles

Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni believed that the principal had succeeded in creating a positive school atmosphere where they feel valued and appreciated by the school. In the interviews they said that the principal always asked for their feedback, making them feel proud, and they tried to communicate with the principal in a very respectful manner. Mdm. Murni in the interview said that she preferred the friendly type of interaction, as this provides a pleasant environment in which to talk. Mdm. Murni added that she did not like an aggressive manner as it might not only create misunderstanding and conflict, but may hurt the other's feelings, resulting in problems that would be difficult to solve.

In the interview Mdm. Murni stated that she preferred informal interaction with the principal. She also added that she felt very comfortable and relaxed as the interaction is not rigid, as with school officials. She said that informal meetings allowed informal conversation such as using her everyday mixed Malay−English language, giving her more confidence to speak. She said that:

> Malaysians normally speak in both languages. So the language makes it easy to communicate. The term will be more accurate. Sometimes I also speak Chinese to the principal. I know a little bit Chinese....

> (Transcription of interview with MP1)

She said that familiarity with the language may allow her to express her true feelings. Mr. Chong, however, had a different view. He preferred assertive ways of expressing his feelings, as he believes that being assertive is the most effective way of influencing the principal. He further explained that:

> Sometimes I prefer to talk more than others… because I want the principal listen to our problems. Actually… in our daily communication we are not really concerned with the accuracy of the sentence… the important part is to be understood… feel comfortable with each other…

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interviews with CP1)</div>

Mr. Chong also said in the interview that he preferred informal conversation with the school. He said that, 'I prefer the informal way of conversation because the situation makes it easy to communicate'. He added that an informal environment allows informal ways of interaction, such as joking. He also said that informal ways of interacting may create a positive environment for certain parents to speak their mind and make criticisms. He believes that parents who feel uncomfortable with a formal environment might be able to express their mind through humour, to avoid violating the rights of others.

The Principal Describes the Parents' Communication Styles

Mr. Law explained in the interview and field notes that Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni are school PTA committee members. They always gave their full support to the school. The principal added that he liked to share his ideas with both, as each had their own strengths and styles of communicating. He believed that the parents were pleasant, friendly and approachable. He also said that, whilst Mr. Chong was quite aggressive, he was very transparent and willing to speak his mind, always giving positive comments on improving the school. He added:

> He is very frank, telling me certain points that I think can be implemented…. Now I can get them so they want to know how we are using the fund. We have done lots of things, but we don't channel it to them. So, they create misunderstanding…. maybe next time I can publish more information through local newspapers or the school bulletin.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P1)</div>

From the interview and field notes, it is clear that Mr. Law regarded both parents as good partners as they often contributed constructive ideas for school improvement. He added that they were among the parents willing to contribute when he needed input from parents in developing a strategic plan for the school.

The Role That Parents Perceive Their Communication Styles Plays in Influencing Principals Regarding Their Involvement in School

Mr. Chong observed the school's positive attitude such as its willingness to share problems with parents as a great opportunity to help the school. In the interview the parents explained that he was willing to sacrifice his time for the betterment of the school and the children. His involvement in PTA meetings, for example, made him able to share the latest issues regarding the school and the parents and perhaps also aided the school in making the right decisions to develop their strategic plan, based on the real problems. He said that:

> …for me, attending a meeting with the principal is a chance to voice something good for the school, but whether the school wants to accept that or not is beyond our control.

> (Transcription of Interview with CP1)

Mr. Chong said that his communication with the school was based on trust. He explained that trust is dependent on the degree of truthfulness in the relationships. He further explained that the school only can be considered truthful when it puts parents' ideas into practice. He stated that:

> Make sure the programme is implemented… it is better to put it to work rather than just keep it as paperwork… That is not effective at all.

> (Transcription of Interview with CP1)

Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni asserted that they had bad experiences in their dealings with the previous principal. Both believed that the principal was not

truthful with parents. They felt that attending meetings had been merely a formality and a waste of time, as the principal never considered their views. Mr. Chong said that:

> …even we have given her some suggestions but I don't think that she will take into consideration because… so far I can't see any positive actions taken upon those suggestions.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interviews with CP1)</div>

In her interview and field notes, it is clear that Mdm. Murni felt that her communication with school is based on her role in the PTA. She realised that becoming a PTA member meant she had to sacrifice time and be ready to face challenges, as her task was not only to convince the school but the parents. Mdm. Murni said that she had a variety of responsibilities, the most challenging being to build and maintain good relationships between parents and school.

She had to meet both parents' and the school's expectations. In some cases she had to act as a gatekeeper as she needed to filter complaints or suggestions in order to meet both parties' expectations. She realised that the school might have been bound by certain rules and regulations that might not be fully understood by the parents. Therefore, communicating with the parents was always a challenge as they might demand something beyond her remit. Some parents who were not satisfied with certain teachers may suggest replacing the teacher without a definite proof. This may have become a problem as that was beyond her control. She asserted that most parents have a lack of knowledge about the roles of the PTA, and that this might be a factor contributing to misunderstandings. Mdm. Murni said that the PTA tried to make the parents aware of the roles through workshops, but that attendance had been below her expectations.

Mdm. Murni also expressed her feeling that her social interaction with the parents, especially whilst waiting for her daughter after school, increased her

knowledge about parents' expectations and made it easy to deal with the school. Furthermore, the principal being willing to listen motivated her to work closely with the school. She further described her experiences in dealing with the principal. She said that:

> He has implemented a rule to ensure the students are safe when crossing that main road, but it's a little bit confusing…. The parents made a complaint. After I forwarded the problem to him and he talked to the parents at the main gate, there… he might notice the rule is not applicable… so he stops it….

> (Transcription of Interviews with MP1)

She added that Mr. Law's always showing a sympathetic attitude and taking positive action upon these suggestions had motivated her to work hard to achieve a better relationship with the school. She also believed that the school is on the way to reaching a better understanding with parents, as the parents begin to show their trust and positive responses.

Parents' Prior Knowledge about the Principal in Relation to Their Communication Style

In their interviews, Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni acknowledged that prior knowledge about the principal is important guidance in the conversation with him. They believe that the way they communicate might influence the principal's perception of them. Therefore, basic knowledge about the principal's background is crucial for smooth interaction.

Mr. Chong visited the school to welcome Mr. Law after he received the information from his daughter about the arrival of a new principal. He said that:

> When he first came in here... I have met him to introduce myself. I think he is also happy to see us around… he is not like the earlier one.

> (Transcription of Interview with CP1)

Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni expressed in their interviews that they always made the first move to meet a new principal in the school, because they wanted to know about the principal's attitudes to parents. They claimed that they feel very comfortable with Mr. Law after their first meeting, nearly two years ago. The parents also claimed that always meeting the principal around the school makes them feel comfortable and increased their confidence to communicate. Mr. Chong said that he never felt nervous with Mr. Law since he noticed the principal had a positive attitude towards him. He said that 'I didn't feel any fears to communicate with him… meeting with him is very natural and relaxed'. However, Mdm. Murni said that her relationship as a working partner with the principal might affect her communication style. She added that the mutual familiarity with the style of the other makes the conversation became meaningful and many problems dealing with parents and school able to be easily solved.

The Principal's Ethnicity and Parents' Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data shows that the principal's ethnicity was not a barrier that affected Mdm. Murni's communications with the principal. The analysis of Mdm. Murni's verbal data, as shown in Table 4.4, indicates that there was no sign of a distancing attitude. The way she communicated and the words she used indicates that she had a positive attitude towards the principal. In fact, analysis of observations data based on the use of the main indicator for communication styles, such as posture, gesture, face expression, gaze and voice, also support the findings.

Mdm. Murni presented the highest percentage of welcoming words and posture, showing that she was comfortable with the interaction. She also showed frequent eye contact, smiles and laughs, showing that she was comfortable with the conversation.

Table 4.4

Observation Data on Mdm. Murni's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication in Conversation with Principal
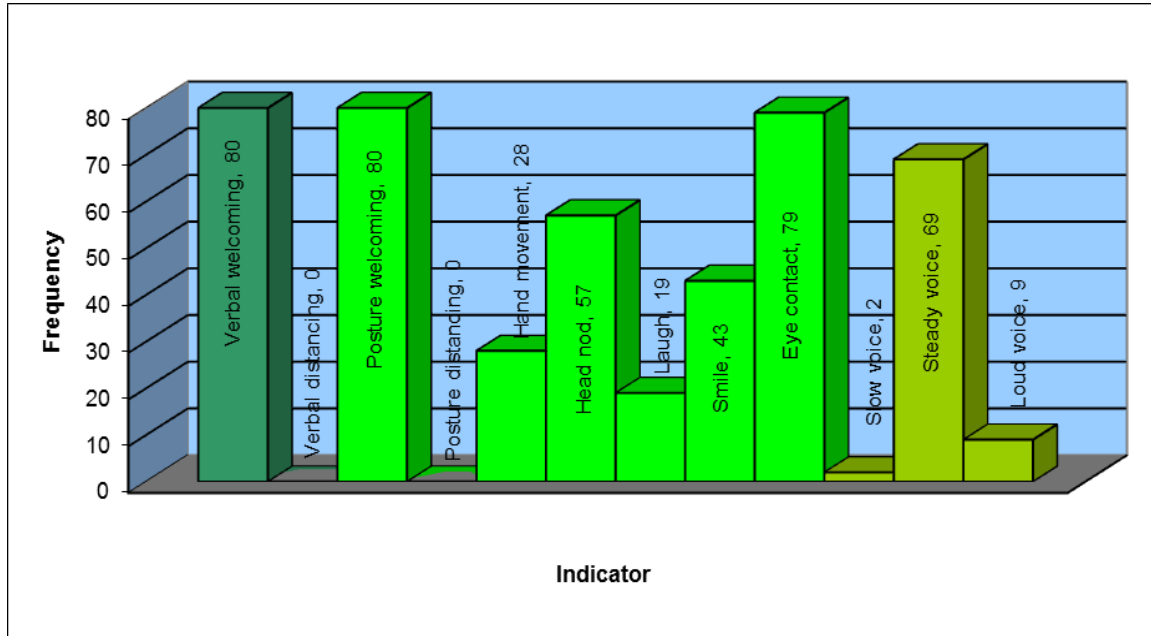
The principal in the interview also said that he received more attention from parents from his own ethnic origin. He confirmed that the parents from his own ethnic origin gave him more support. He explained that:

> In some cases, they come to the point when they are willing to help me to pass some messages that they gain from school to other villagers. So, I am very happy….

> (Transcription of Interview with P1)

Mr. Law believed that he had much support from Chinese heritage parents, as the parents felt comfortable with him. Furthermore, his familiarity with the local Chinese culture and social relations, such as being able to speak their native tongue, might have been an advantage as the parents may have accepted him as a part of their community.

Data Analysis of Observations and Interviews of the Parents' Communication Styles

Observation and interview data show that both parents demonstrate more than one style during their conversation with the principal. Analysis of her verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal observation data shows that Mdm. Murni presents four different styles.

The most frequent style she used in the conversation is attentive style (33.90 per cent), friendly and open style (each style 22.10 per cent) and relaxed style (21.80 per cent). Cross-verification based on the references of her styles in the observation, interviews and field notes also reveals similar results to the observation and field notes, as shown in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mdm. Murni's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mdm. Murni's styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mdm. Murni's interview to her own style. Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Law's interview to the style of Mdm. Murni Number of Occurrences (f)	References in the field notes to the style of Mdm. Murni Number of Occurrences (f)
1. Friendly	75	2	1	7
2. Relaxed	74	2	0	2
3. Open	75	1	0	9
4. Attentive	115	0	0	2
5. Animated	0	0	0	0
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0
Communication style (%)	Friendly 22.10% Relaxed 21.80% Open 22.10% Attentive 33.90%	Friendly 40.0% Relaxed 40.0% Open 20.0% Attentive -	Friendly 100% Relaxed - Open - Attentive -	Friendly 35.0% Relaxed 10.0% Open 45.0% Attentive 10.0%

∗ Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

A similar pattern is revealed in Mr. Chong's triangulation data. Analysis of his verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal observation data shows that he presents seven different styles namely friendly style (31.10 per cent), open style (30.38 per cent), animated style (26.6 per cent), dominant style (7.77 per cent), contentious style (1.85 per cent), attentive and relaxed style (each 0.88 per cent). The cross-verification of observation, interviews and field notes data based on the references to his styles also reveal similar results in the observation and field notes, as shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Chong's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Chong's styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Chong's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Law's interview to the style of Mr. Chong Number of Occurrences (f)	References in field notes to the style of Mr. Chong Number of Occurrences (f)
1. Friendly	84	3	1	3
2. Relaxed	3	5	0	2
3. Open	82	2	0	5
4. Attentive	3	0	0	2
5. Animated	72	0	0	3
6. Dominant	21	0	0	4
7. Contentious	5	0	0	7
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0
Communication Style (%)	Friendly 31.10% Relaxed 0.88% Open 30.38% Attentive 0.88% Animated 26.60% Dominant 7.77% Contentious 1.85%	Friendly 30.0% Relaxed 50.0% Open 20.0% Attentive - Animated - Dominant - Contentious -	Friendly 100% Relaxed - Open - Attentive - Animated - Dominant - Contentious -	Friendly 11.53% Relaxed 7.69% Open 19.23% Attentive 7.69% Animated 26.92% Dominant 11.53% Contentious 15.38%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

4.3 Seri Secondary School: Case Two

4.3.1 The School Background

Seri Secondary School is categorised by the Ministry of Education as a rural secondary school. The school is located in the heart of the village, surrounded by resettlement areas and plantation estates. Historically, the school was founded in 1966 with five classrooms and 110 students, but has now expanded to become the biggest secondary school in the district with 92 teachers, 1,292 students and more than 50 classrooms, including computer laboratories with Internet. It is the only school in the area attended by students of different ethnic origin, as the feeder schools are from the nearest Malay, Chinese and Tamil primary school in that particular area. The parents are mostly involved in agriculture such as rubber tapping, farming and labouring. The school has been maintaining average academic achievement, with 40 to 50 per cent passes in the national Malaysian Certificate of Education for the last five years, but is outstanding in extracurricular activities such as clubs and sport. Its greatest achievement is winning the National Anti-Drugs Campaign in 2007 and also being the champion in school district athletic events since the year 2000 (Seri Secondary School, 2007).

The researcher spent nine alternate days in Seri Secondary School. Most of the first three days was spent with the principal to arrange the research schedule and distribute flyers to the parents. Twenty flyers were distributed via the children on the second day, but only five were returned with a positive response to being involved in the study. The parents were called for a short meeting with the principal and the researcher to arrange the research schedule for conversation sessions and interviews and there only two parents who finally agreed to be involved in the study.

While in the research setting, the researcher was allowed to move freely around the school and so took the opportunity to walk around to observe the school environment and sometimes talk to the teachers to collect the information about the school history, achievement and enrolment. Sometimes the researcher

also joined the principal and teachers for a breakfast or lunch at the school canteen to develop rapport and strengthen the relationships with the school.

4.3.2 Participants

Principal Participant

The principal of Seri Secondary School was given the pseudonym, Mr. Ali; a male, Malay heritage principal aged 51 years who started teaching in 1982. He had 19 years' as a classroom teacher and was a senior assistant for two years before he became a principal at a rural secondary school in 2003.

Parent Participant 1

Parent participant 1 in the Seri Secondary School was a male, Indian heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 1 was given a pseudonym, Mr. Chandran. Mr. Chandran was a 47 year old businessman and a former student, and was a PTA committee member. He had a son and a daughter studying at the school.

Parent Participant 2

Parent participant 2 in the Seri Secondary School was a male, Malay heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 2 was given a pseudonym, Mr. Ahmad. Mr. Ahmad was 60 years old, a retired management consultant and also a PTA committee member with a son and a daughter studying at the school.

4.3.3 Findings Related to Research Questions

How Do Principals Perceive Their Communication with Parents?

The Principal Describes His Communication Style

In the interview, Mr. Ali referred to parents as important partners. He believed that parents are the most influential individuals as they know their children better than

the school does. He said that 'parents are the pillars who support the school against collapse', reflecting that parental support is the key factor contributing to student success and school improvement. Therefore, a positive relationship with parents is of paramount importance. He added that:

> …to communicate with the parents is not only to provide them the information… but also to develop a good relationship….

<p style="text-align: right">(Transcription of Interview with P2)</p>

The principal further described that building a good relationship with the parents was part of his responsibility to improve student learning. Therefore, every meeting with the parents was an opportunity to build relationships. He explained that:

> This is the time to show our friendliness to make them feel comfortable with the school. I believe that… if we have good rapport we face no problem with them.

<p style="text-align: right">(Transcription of Interview with P2)</p>

Mr. Ali added that he always aimed for a long-term relationship with the parents. Thus, the communication was always based on friendship and on-going support. The communication is often two-way, as he strongly believed that sharing ideas was not only an effective means of obtaining constructive ideas and feedback, but may create a sense of belonging that encourages a better understanding and positive perceptions toward the school. Therefore, he always shared the school goals with parents. He said that 'when they come to see me to discuss about their children… I also take this opportunity to share our school mission and vision'. He believes that sharing the school goals is critical to make the parents feel they also have roles and responsibilities to prepare their children.

The principal also said that he does not face any difficulties in communicating the school programmes or activities to the parents, as they have a clear picture about the goals. He said:

No… no… so far we don't face any serious difficulties with the parents… We manage to understand to each other... in most cases, we face no problem with this new generation of non-Malay parents… most of them are able to communicate in our national language and English language very well….

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

In the interview with the principal he repeatedly indicated that he did not face any communication difficulties with parents, stating this six times throughout the interview. However, he also explained that some Chinese and Indian heritage elderly parents tended to use *bahasa Melayu Pasar,* or Malay pidgin, with him. He added that use of the informal language might affect his communication style. He further explained that:

In this case… if they use Malay pidgin I also have to follow their way of talking... I have no choice… this is not the right way to deal with the public but I have no choice… we can't solve their problems if we are not flexible, but are rigid to those rules. For me, solving the problem is the priority.

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

The principal added that he is not familiar with the language, as the informal language is only widely used by certain isolated communities such as the Chinese and Indian heritage elderly, who are unable to communicate using the national language. Furthermore, the language is not permitted to be spoken on government premises, especially schools. He added that communicating with the parents is quite challenging as he has to give it full concentration in order to capture the content of the conversation by referring to their body language.

Mr. Ali added that the interaction also became more challenging when dealing with problematic parents, such as angry parents. He explained that they may speak very quickly and he had to be increasingly sensitive to catch the meaning. He said that:

…this kind of parents normally comes from a low socioeconomic background. They only come to school when we call them to help us to solve their children's misbehaviour.... In terms of speaking… I will be very careful. Sometimes the way we convey ourselves and the word we use may become another issue to attack the school… I use a simple word to avoid misunderstanding.

(Transaction of Interview with P2)

Mr. Ali observes that angry parents always feel on the defensive about their child. They may have a bad impression about the school as they might have had poor experiences with school. They speak very loudly, displaying anger. He explained that:

If the parents come with anger... I will welcome them as usual by shaking their hand… if the parent is a man… I also rub their shoulder softly to make them calm… it also shows that we are willing to solve their problem… I find that they are very happy with that… you can see by the way they speak… as long as I am concerned…. it makes sense… it really works.

(Transaction of Interview with P2)

The principal further explained that his dealings with the parents were often based on his experience. He realised that most parents might feel uncomfortable with the school as they were surrounded by unfamiliar teachers and staff. Thus, starting a conversation with small talk was important to make them feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. He said that:

I will always shake their hand to show welcoming... I also ask about their children's progress, family and jobs. Just to show that we are care... that is very important to start a relationship.

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

The principal believed that the environment and cultural differences between school and parents might affect the way the parents communicate. Therefore, he tried to provide a better environment and said that 'we don't want

the parents to feel uncomfortable and pressured'. He also believed that a positive atmosphere such as friendly two-way communication with parents may not only encourage positive interactions, but also mutual understanding and meaningful relationships.

Parents Describe the Principal's Communication Styles

Mr. Chandran and Mr. Ahmad believed that the school atmosphere could be seen through its communications. Therefore, communicating with the principal was critical as it could demonstrate the school's attitude to parents. The parents explained that they became acquainted with the principal during his two years leading the school. They believed that the principal was a good leader as he frequently showed a warm welcome and tried to get parents involved in school. Mr. Chandran recalled that:

> He is very friendly and jovial. He is also very dedicated in doing something good for the school. I find that he is very open. He accepts our views. He understands that the PTA is important for school development.

> (Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Chandran's view was supported by Mr. Ahmad when he observed that the principal was not only able to communicate clearly, but to mix with all parent:

> …he is very kind and open minded. He is also caring.... He speaks to anybody... he is an easy-going person. He is also approachable and can be reached at anytime and anywhere….

> (Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Both parents expressed the view that Mr. Ali was also a generous principal. He was very committed to his job and always ready to help parents. Mr. Chandran added that, although the principal was not a local person, he had a good relationship with parents and PTA. He further explained that:

150

He came here about two years ago… but through PTA… the relationships between the principal and local community become closer…. Furthermore, he has a good character and reputation… so that I didn't see any obstacle to develop the school….

(Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Ahmad had a similar view. He added that involvement with local social activities, such as encouraging the school clubs and teachers to carry out charity work for the local community, was a good example that the school actually practised 'give and take'. It also showed that the school was willing to work together with the parents. Therefore, the principal may have gained respect from parents and local community. He said that:

….he got full support from the villagers, parents and teachers because he is very modest…. He tries to solve any problems… I would say that the principal is a problem buyer, but not a problem seller.

(Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Ahmad was asked in his interview about his statement, 'the principal is a problem buyer but not a problem seller'. He explained that this statement referred to the style adopted by the principal. He added that the principal was a good leader as he practised two-way communication. His intention was to help, not to blame parents. Mr. Ahmad added that a principal categorised as 'a problem seller' might lose support by often creating misunderstanding and blaming parents for their children creating problems in school.

Both parents explained in their interview that they also liked the personality of the principal. They believed that he matched the characteristics of a school leader, and was not only approachable, but had a sympathetic characteristic that made them feel comfortable. Mr. Ahmad further explained that:

When I meet him… he will greet you and talk to you…. He always asks about my health, children and family members….. Sometimes he also asks us to say something about his leadership….

(Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Both parents also said that they felt at ease with the principal as he liked to tell jokes. They said that the ability of the principal to create a comfortable atmosphere, such as by showing warmth, welcomed parents as friends during the conversations and increased their concentration and participation. Mr. Ahmad stated that he was clear regarding the content of the conversation. He said that:

Of course I understood what he said in just now. From the discussion I can see his vision and mission for the school… I'm now very clear with the direction.

(Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Chandran also said that he understood the content of the conversation because the principal able to communicate well. He explained that:

His body language… especially his facial expressions and hand movements, increased our understanding… he also used simple language.

(Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Chandran observed in the interview that the principal's human touch was also a great strength encouraging on-going support. He said that 'the principal invited me personally to be a part of the school and I'm very happy'. He added that he felt very proud that the principal had given him the opportunity to serve the school.

Principal's Prior Knowledge about Parents' Background in Relation to His Communication Style

Mr. Ali explained in the interview that his communication with others in the school, including parents, was based on prior knowledge. The principal emphasised that prior knowledge about parents' background and the topic to be discussed was most important, as it might provide general guidelines on how to communicate with parents. He explained that:

> Prior knowledge about the issue to be discussed with them is very important to set the appropriate of how to communicate… but it will be better if we know about… their jobs, socioeconomic status and educational level.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P2)

He added that prior knowledge about parent's backgrounds might be helpful when communicating with the lower socioeconomic Chinese and Indian heritage elderly parents, as they might have difficulty in communicating in Malay or English. Therefore, he had to prepare in order to use the most appropriate means of communicating with them such as attempting to avoid educational jargon and using more examples to make matters easy to understand. The principal explained in the interview and field notes that the prior knowledge about parents' background was also important, as it might provide basic information leading to smooth interaction.

The Role That the Principal Perceives His Communication Style to Play in Influencing Parents' Involvement in School

Mr. Ali described in interview and field notes that in his 27 years' experience of dealing with parents the school is often frustrated at receiving little response to its partnership programmes. He explained that those who always come to activities are often not the ones who most need to be involved. The targeted parents, especially those with problematic children, are often unresponsive and reluctant to become involved in workshops and counselling. Therefore, he always tried to bridge the gap, especially with 'hard to reach' parents, through informal channels.

Mr. Ali explained that 'hard to reach' parents were often those who felt intimidated by the school environment as they might have poor experiences with school in the past. He added that the parents are from a highly mobile, two-income community. He tried to reach the parents by phone as an alternative contact. He further explained that:

> By a phone call I can talk and build the relationship... I often started the conversation with small talk… say something good about their children... we also try to get their opinions… I find that they are very happy.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P2)

Mr. Ali explained in the interview and field notes that he felt proud as some of the parents he had contacted subsequently appeared at the school PTA meeting. He explained that the presence of the parents in the meeting not only allowed them to share their problems, but enabled them to air their dissatisfaction so that their negative feelings might diminish.

Mr. Ali believed that communication is a bridge that brings parents and school closer together. However, he also realised that a cultural difference on the acceptability of interaction with school officials may be a barrier for some parents. Therefore, dealing with the parents was always based on informal rather than formal channels. He said that:

> The parents don't like formality…. Since I become a principal I find that they prefer informal rather than formal ways of dealing with us… they don't like to sit in my office unless to deal with their children misbehaviour… sometimes I bring them to the canteen. Some parents are able to talk more…..
>
> (Transaction of Interview with P2)

The principal explained that he takes parents as friends. Occasionally, he had breakfast or lunch with the local community to extend his friendships. He further explained that:

Sometimes, I purposely go to the café which is located… just outside there to chat with them. Getting to know them… especially with the local leaders is really important….

(Transaction of Interview with P2)

The principal added that he gained benefit from the relationships with the local community. Many disciplinary problems involving angry parents had been settled with the help of the local community leaders. Hostile parents might also act less aggressively when they found their community leader was involved in settling their problems.

Mr. Ali stated in the interview that inviting parents to become involved is never an easy task, as they might feel intimidated by the school environment and officials. He added that:

I have tried my best to encourage parents. Unfortunately, there are so many regulations, rules and formality they have to follow… especially in the classroom activities.

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

However, most parents were willing to spend time at school events such as prize giving day, open day and sports day to show support to their children. Therefore, he always took the opportunity to welcome them. He explained that:

I also bring them to the canteen… just want to make them feel at home. While in the canteen I also introduce them to the teachers…. This a part of the effort to make them feel comfortable with us.

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

The principal also said that he often brings the parents to walk around the school to show them the school environment and to share the successes of the school. He explained that:

This is the right time to show our friendliness and school achievement.... Sometimes, I take this opportunity to share our

mission and vision… I also bring them to walk around… to show
some of our great achievements such as medals and awards that
we display around the school. All those achievement we try to
share… to make them feel very proud….

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

Mr. Ali believes that sharing achievements with parents is crucial, as they
may then feel proud of the school. He added that the parents' positive
perceptions may not only increase their support, but have a great impact on the
school's reputation.

Parents' Ethnicity and the Principal's Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data shows that parents' ethnicity does not appear to
affect the principal's communication style. Analysis of principal's verbal, non-
verbal and para-verbal activities shows that he welcomed parents. There is no
sign of distancing as he showed warmth and positive postures, gestures, facial
expressions, gaze and voices such as welcome, laugh, smile, eye contact and
tone of voice in his conversation with the parents, as detailed in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7

**Observation Data on Mr. Ali's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal
Communication in Conversation with Parents**
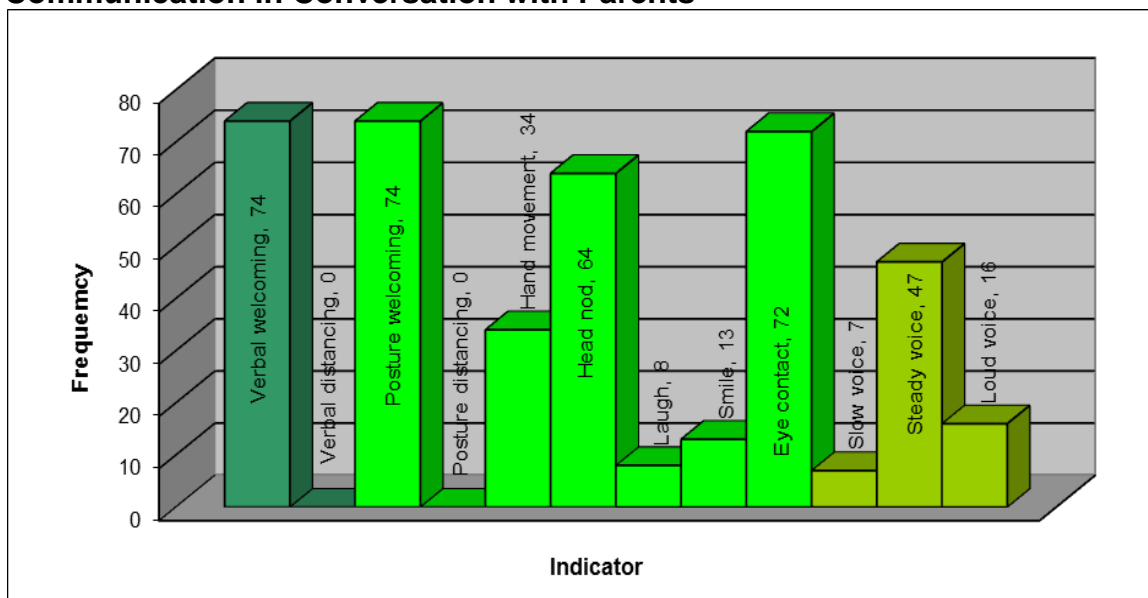
Analysis of Mr. Ali's verbal data showed that there is no sign of distancing utterance with Mr. Chandran; all his utterances indicated that he welcomed the parent. He also showed a high frequency of welcoming postures, facial expressions and gaze, activities that show that he felt very comfortable with Mr. Chandran. Analysis of interview data with Mr. Chandran also indicated that the parent felt very comfortable with the conversation. He said that:

> He entertains us very well… so far… I didn't see any suspicious behaviour… I feel very comfortable.

> (Transcription of Interview with IP1)

He added that the principal had a positive attitude to parents as he always showed friendliness. He said that:

> He always respects parents and it is also easy to deal with him… he is simple. Sometimes he has also called me for a tea.... He takes me as a friend.

> (Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Chandran also explained that the principal's great strength was his adaptation to the local culture. His ability to mix with parents from different backgrounds and ethnic groups made him accepted by the parents of not only his own ethnic origin, but by those of Chinese and Indian heritage.

Observation and Interview Data Analysis of the Principal's Communication Style

Multimodal analysis of the principal's communication style indicated that Mr. Ali presented at least five communication styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive and animated throughout the 40 minute conversations with parents. Analysis shows that 29.90 per cent of his verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activity belongs to attentive, 20.00 per cent belongs to each of friendly, relaxed and open, and 9.49 per cent belongs to animated.

157

The findings from observation data were also triangulated with the interviews and field notes. Table 4.8 below shows the relative frequency and percentage of communication styles as perceived by the principal and parents compared with observations and field notes. Cross-verification of empirical indicators of the communicative style of his observation and interview data, parents' interview data and field notes reveals similar results.

Table 4.8

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Ali's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Ali's styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Ali's interview to his own styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Chandran's interview to the style of Mr. Ali Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Ahmad's interview to the style of Mr. Ali Number of Occurrences (f)	References in the field notes to the style of Mr. Ali Number of Occurrences (f)
1. Friendly	74	27	23	27	14
2. Relaxed	74	16	3	6	5
3. Open	74	6	6	7	9
4. Attentive	105	6	3	6	9
5. Animated	34	3	4	3	6
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0	0
Communication style (%)	Friendly 20.00% Relaxed 20.00% Open 20.00% Attentive 29.90% Animated 9.49%	Friendly 46.55% Relaxed 27.58% Open 10.34% Attentive 10.34% Animated 5.17%	Friendly 58.97% Relaxed 7.69% Open 15.38% Attentive 7.69% Animated 7.69%	Friendly 55.10% Relaxed 2.24% Open 14.28% Attentive 12.24% Animated 6.12%	Friendly 32.55% Relaxed 16.62% Open 20.93% Attentive 20.93% Animated 13.95%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

How Do Parents Perceive Their Communication with Principals?

Parents' Describe Their Communication Styles

In the interviews and field notes, Mr. Ahmad and Mr. Chandran said how a warm welcome by the school not only promoted their satisfaction but influenced their perceptions and communications. They felt comfortable with the school. Therefore, communication with the principal is based on mutual respect.

Mr. Ahmad explained that he always tried to show respect to the principal as he believed that the principal was always kind and open-minded. A meeting with the principal was often two-way. Mr. Ahmad acknowledged that he is outspoken, but never offensive as he believed that might hurt the principal's feelings and would affect the relationship. Mr. Ahmad felt that he always had a good conversation with the principal. His encouragement motivated him to suggest more constructive ideas. However, the parent also claimed that he had less chance to talk, as colleagues always interrupted his interactions with the principal.

Mr. Chandran admitted in the field notes that he always had ideas to suggest. He wanted to take any opportunity to forward his ideas as he believed that being assertive in the meeting was not being rude, but was an effective way of getting attention. Mr. Chandran believed that being assertive allowed him to engage respectfully with others, because assertiveness involves respectful negotiations within a space where everyone in the meeting is entitled to their opinion and suggestion. He observed that assertiveness was a way of influencing without authority so this approach might be the most effective way to influence the principal.

Both parents expressed their preference for informal meetings with the school, even though they were quite familiar with the principal. They said informal meetings allowed informal interaction and made them feel free to talk. Informal meetings were not restricted to school officials, so they might be able to communicate without the constraint of school protocol. Mr. Ahmad felt that an informal environment also promoted closeness and intimacy. He explained that:

> I use informal Malay language. It's a local Malay dialect. I feel more comfortable… as it's my daily language… I don't use *bahasa Melayu Pasar* (Malay pidgin) in the school. But some old Chinese and Indian parents might use the language with me and the principal because they can't speak a standard Malay language.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Ahmad, who had served on more than eight PTA committees in primary and secondary schools, expressed the view that ability in communicating in various language is of primary importance in developing relationships with parents. His ability to speak Malay, English, Chinese and Indian languages is helpful in building relationships with parents of these different ethnic groups. He explains that:

> If the parents can't speak the national language… I will speak the way they spoke to me… Elderly Chinese and Indian parents normally use *bahasa Melayu Pasar* with Malay… If they are Chinese I do not call them by their surname because Chinese men prefer to be called *taukey* (Sir). Sometime I also try to use their language to greet them. For example '*Ni hau ma?*' and '*Chau ann*' means '*How are you?*' and '*Good morning*' in English… the purpose is to make them feel happy and comfortable.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Chandran explained that he never used '*bahasa Melayu Pasar'* in his informal conversation with the principal, although he is quite familiar with the language. He added:

> I don't use that language because the principal is a government officer… I often use a proper language such as English or Malay with him because we do respect him as a principal.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with IP1)

However, he added that he often used a Malay−English mix with the principal. He explained that:

> Using a mixed Malay−English language is a part of our culture… it's the Malaysian culture… it is easy for us to communicate in that way…
>
> (Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Chandran believed that the use of language might affect his communication style, as a less formal environment allows him to speak his mind. Both parents also believed that an informal meeting with the principal is important, as it is not only an avenue for the parents to propose ideas but to hear immediate feedback from the school.

The Principal Describes Parents' Communication Styles

In the interview and field notes, Mr. Ali described the parents as being kind and generous. He regarded both parents as valued partners as they are very committed and willing to lend a hand to support the school. The principal said he did not face any difficulties in dealing with the parents as, while there were always arguments in the meetings, they always showed respect.

The principal explained that Mr. Ahmad has a long history on the PTA, having served for more than ten years. He felt that he has learned how to handle parents. He said that Mr. Ahmad always looked calm and always made rational decisions, even in critical circumstances such as when facing aggressive parents. The principal also described Mr. Chandran as quite aggressive, but always giving constructive ideas for the school. He added that Mr. Chandran was also outspoken, always expressing his mind openly and honestly. The principal said that Mr. Chandran was most helpful and always helped the school to deal with problematic Indian heritage parents.

The principal believed that both parents were friendly, always accepting suggestions and also encouraging others. The principal liked to work with them both as they are motivating. He said that:

> I have a feeling that there are no communication gaps between us…. we can work together to improve the school… they are very clear on what we are going to achieve….'

> (Transcription of Interview with P2)

161

The principal believed that parents' willingness to collaborate with the school is the keystone to establishing a strong school−home link. He explained that the parents' support and contribution to the school not only benefited the school and parents in the short−term but the long-term, as their involvement might become a role model in establishing relationships with other parents.

The Role that Parents Perceive Their Communication Style Plays in Influencing Principals Regarding Their Involvement in School

In the interview and field notes, Mr. Chandran and Mr. Ahmad explained that in their previous experience with the school, there had been a lack of parental support. They claimed that the school had adopted one-way communication and tended to communicate with the parents through newsletters sent via the children, often failing to reach parents and creating a distance between parents and school. They also believed that the way the school had communicated might have created negative perceptions and misunderstandings, as parents might have felt the school was not truthful, making them frustrated and wishing to withdraw from school involvement.

However, Mr. Ahmad and Mr. Chandran explained that the school has now changed. They believed that under the new leadership the school had now shown positive insight and tried to bridge the distance. Therefore, they took the opportunity to work closely with the school to show that the parents were supportive and willing to work together with the school.

Both parents said that their involvement with the school, particularly in solving the problems in dealing with parents, was part of the strategy to improve relationships. They believed that their roles as 'middlemen' between school and parents may have had a great impact on both parties. The school may gain a positive perception of the parents and the parents appeared to be following their example of volunteering to become involved.

Mr. Chandran believed that close relationships are only achieved through positive two-way communication. Therefore, he tried to maintain good contact

with the school. Communication with teachers and principal is not only to keep the school informed of the latest progress, but to remind the principal about the expectations and issues related to parents. He further explained that:

> Sometimes… I come to the school to make a complaint about the teachers who are not performing in the classroom. So that action can be taken…

(Transcription of Interview with IP1)

Mr. Chandran strongly believed that a good school leader always acknowledges and empowers parents as being the eyes and ears of the school, so he always tried to show his support by keeping the school informed about current issues to rectify the weakness of the system. He added that the principal always showed his positive response by taking positive action on the issue being forwarded and this increased his support in the school.

Mr. Ahmad also strongly believed that his integrity, flexibility and openness are the core reason for his being elected by the parents to the PTA for the third consecutive term. Mr. Ahmad added that he respected the principal as a school leader and parents as a client. He acknowledged that both principal and parents played a vital role ensuring the school functions well. However, he added that lack of knowledge about the concept of involvement among parents might create misunderstandings. He explained that:

> Many parents do not understand the concept of parental involvement. They want to become involved in everything including the school policy and management… this is not their job. The PTA regulations clearly state that we are not allowed to become involved in school management and policy.

(Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Ahmad realised that lack of clarity about the concepts might create serious problems. He believed that parents' attempts to remove the principal or teachers from school were an unpleasant example of how parents lacked knowledge about their involvement.

As a PTA member, Mr. Ahmad realised that the problems faced by most parents might become a barrier to establishing a strong relationship. Therefore, he tried always to be sensitive and to inform the parents through formal and informal channels. He used newsletters free from educational jargon and 'legalese' and initiated home visits for busy parents and workshops for those parents who wished to gain detailed information about their roles and responsibilities in the PTA and school.

Parents' Prior Knowledge about the Principal in Relation to Their Communication Style

The field notes show that Mr. Chandran and Mr. Ahmad observed that prior knowledge is an important resource in planning their communication with the school. They believe that communication involves human factors such as feelings and emotions. Therefore, prior knowledge about the principal's background is essential to avoid hurting feelings and misunderstanding.

Mr. Chandran and Mr. Ahmad acknowledged that they had basic knowledge about the principal's background before the start of their relationship about two years ago. Mr. Chandran said he used the information as guidance in his communication. He believed that the information was also important to avoid touching on issues that were sensitive to the principal. Mr. Chandran added that he obtained the basic information on the principal's background from his sons and friends. He also contacted the school for details about the principal.

Mr. Ahmad observed that prior knowledge about the principal such as attitudes, interest and commitment is also important and became a part of his consideration before their first meeting. He added that this knowledge about the principal's background is useful to shape his communication style. He explained that:

> In the first place… we have to know better who our principal is and
> the most important part is to be very clear with his direction… if he
> aims for curriculum improvement, we have to prepare ourselves to

164

be a second liner to give him support. So far I have never faced any problem… I am very clear on what he wanted to do.

(Transcription of Interview with MP2)

Mr. Ahmad explained that he now felt confident to deal with the principal as he was familiar with his interests. He added that the conversation was more meaningful now they were acquainted, as they have topics in common.

Both parents acknowledged that they felt anxious and uncomfortable with strangers, but said that their first contact with the principal was very important as they strongly believed that first impressions are lasting impressions, so they had taken the opportunity to demonstrate their positive attitudes to the principal in order to establish a meaningful relationship.

The Principal's Ethnicity and Parents' Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data appears to show that the principal's ethnicity does not affect Mr. Chandran's communication style. The findings show that Mr. Chandran presents a warm welcome by verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities, even though he was communicating with a different ethnic group.

The analysis of Mr. Chandran's verbal data is shown in Table 4.9 and indicates that there is no sign of distancing attitudes. The way he communicated and the words he used indicate that he has a positive attitude to the principal. In fact, analysis of observation data supports the findings that he has a positive attitude towards the principal.

Table 4.9

Observation Data on Mr. Chandran's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication in Conversation with the Principal
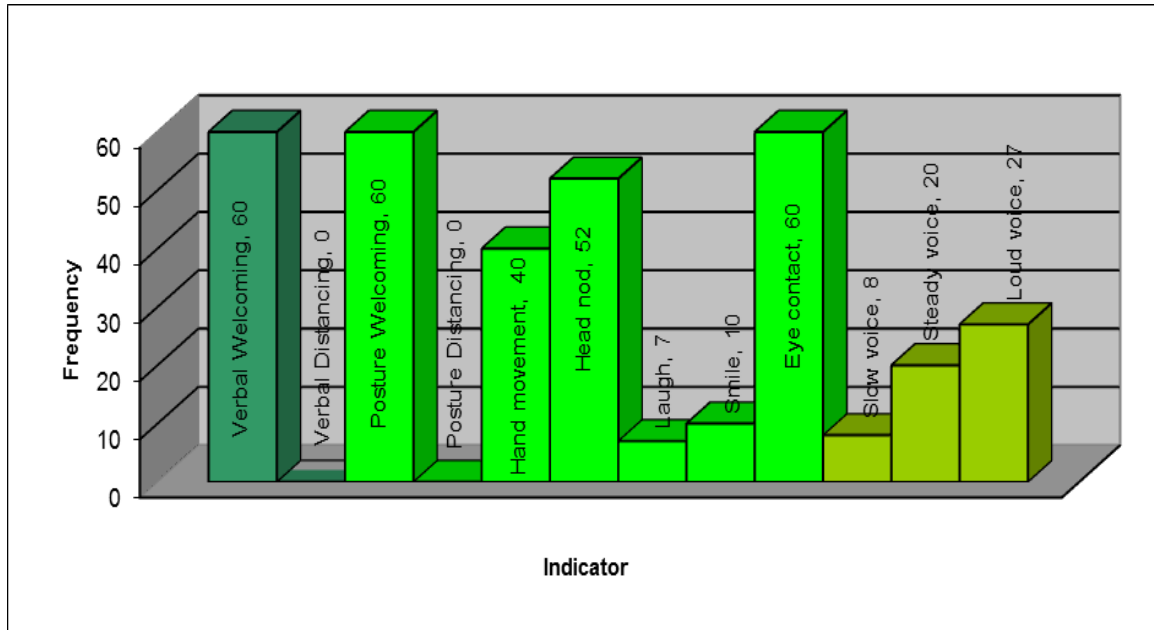
Mr. Chandran presents the highest percentage of welcoming verbal and postural indicators, showing that he is comfortable with the principal. Furthermore, he also made frequent eye contact, smiling and laughing, showing that he is also at ease with the conversation.

Interviews with the principal show he does not face difficulties when communicating with parents of different ethnic groups. He explained that most parents are pleasant and willing to give him their full support. He said that:

> I am sure that every parent in this school is very friendly but there is one condition... you have to know how to respect them... don't ever be rude to them although they appear with angry faces.

(Transcription of Interview with P2)

During the interview, he was asked about his relationships with the parents of different ethnic origin and he said:

> No.... we didn't face any difficulties in dealing with Chinese and Indian parents. We are able to understand each other.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P2)</div>

However, in some instances the principal also said that he received more attention from parents of his own ethnic origin group and confirmed that they gave him more support. He said that:

> Of course Malay parents are more interested in becoming involved… It is very clear… because the principal is Malay. I believe this is a natural tendency…. Actually… Chinese and Indian are still coming as usual but I can see the increase of the support from the Malay parents is more..…

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P1)</div>

Mr. Ali added that he had more support from the Malay parents as they felt comfortable dealing with their own ethnic origin. Sharing a culture with the same language and dialect might be the main factor contributing to this support.

Data Analysis of Observations and Interviews of Parents' Communication Styles

Observation and interview data show that both parents demonstrate more than one style during their conversation with the principal. Analysis of the observation, interviews and field notes shows that Mr. Chandran employs six different styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive, animated and dominant during his interaction with the principal and Mr. Ahmad.

The most frequent style he presents is attentive (26.19 per cent), followed by relaxed (17.50 per cent), friendly and open (16.90 per cent), animated (16.60 per cent) and dominant (2.76 per cent). Cross-verification of observation data,

interview data and field notes based on the references of his styles indicates similar results in the observation and field notes, as shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Chandran's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Chandran's styles Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Chandran's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Ali's interview to the style of Mr. Chandran Number of Occurrences (f)	References in field notes to the style of Mr. Chandran Number of Occurrences (f)
1. Friendly 2. Relaxed 3. Open 4. Attentive 5. Animated 6. Dominant 7. Contentious 8. Dramatic 9. Precise 10. Impression-Leaving	55 57 55 85 54 19 0 0 0 0	8 2 4 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	13 3 6 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	10 1 9 2 3 4 0 0 0 0
Communication style (%)	Friendly 16.90% Relaxed 17.50% Open 16.90% Attentive 26.19% Animated 16.60% Dominant 2.76%	Friendly 57.14% Relaxed 28.57% Open 14.28% Attentive - Animated - Dominant -	Friendly 59.09% Relaxed 13.63% Open 27.27% Attentive - Animated - Dominant -	Friendly 34.48% Relaxed 3.44% Open 31.03% Attentive 6.98% Animated 10.34% Dominant 13.79%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

Multimodal analysis of observation for Mr. Ahmad indicates that he presented at least four different styles in conversation with the principal; 65.98 per cent belongs to attentive, 0.50 per cent belongs to open and 16.70 per cent belongs to friendly and relaxed. Cross-verification of the empirical indicators of communicative style on the observation data, interviews and field notes based on the references of his styles all reveal similar results in the observation and field notes, as shown in Table 4.11 over page.

Table 4.11

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Ahmad's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Ahmad's styles Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in Mr. Ahmad's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in Mr. Ali's interview to the style of Mr. Ahmad Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in field notes to the style of Mr. Ahmad Number of Occurrences (*f*)
1. Friendly	33	5	11	10
2. Relaxed	33	6	5	4
3. Open	1	5	8	7
4. Attentive	30	0	0	2
5. Animated	0	0	0	0
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0
Communication style (%)	Friendly 16.70% Relaxed 16.70% Open 0.50% Attentive 65.98%	Friendly 45.45% Relaxed 54.54% Open 45.45% Attentive -	Friendly 47.82% Relaxed 21.73% Open 34.78% Attentive -	Friendly 43.47% Relaxed 17.39% Open 30.43% Attentive 8.69%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

4.4 Tanjong Secondary School: Case Three

4.4.1 The School Background

Tanjong Secondary School is categorised as an urban government-aided secondary school by the Ministry of Education. The school is located in the outer suburbs of the town, surrounded by middle-class settlement areas and higher learning institutions. Historically, the school was founded by Christian priests in 1925 with simple classrooms in their bungalow, but has now expanded to become one of the largest secondary schools in the district with 75 teachers, 1,219 students and more than fifty classrooms, including science and computer laboratories with Internet.

Tanjong Secondary School is attended by students of different ethnic groups, as the feeder schools are the nearest Malay, Chinese and Tamil primary schools. The parents are mostly self-employed, or involved in businesses, government and factories and have jobs such as entrepreneurs, salespeople, hawkers, educators, rubber tappers and workers in the manufacturing factory. The school has made creditable achievements in both curricular and extra-curricular activities and holds the foremost place in academic achievement, with more than 80 per cent passes in the Malaysian Certificate of Education national examination for the past eight years. The greatest co-curricular achievement is winning the National Robotic Competition and the school also achieved second place at the International Robotics Championship 2008 in Japan. The school has also had an award for the best English debate team and for cultural performance at state level (Tanjong Secondary School, 2009).

The researcher spent ten alternate days in Tanjong Secondary School. Most of the first three days was spent with the principal arranging the research schedule and distributing flyers to the parents. Twenty flyers were distributed via the children on the second day. Eighteen flyers were returned, but only four gave a positive response. The parents were called for a short meeting with the principal and researcher to arrange a schedule for conversation sessions and interviews. Finally, only two parents came and were chosen as participants.

While in the research setting, the researcher was given the freedom of the school. Therefore, the researcher took the opportunity to walk around to observe the environment and to talk to the teachers to collect information about the school's history, achievement and enrolment. The researcher was allowed to attend the school's weekly meeting and not only built rapport with the teachers and principal, but observed how the principal communicated with the teachers. Sometimes the researcher was also invited to walk around with the principal and took the chance to gather further information about his communication with the parents.

4.4.2 Participants

Principal Participant

For the purpose of the study, the principal participant of Tanjong Secondary School was given a pseudonym, Mr. Samy. He is 56 years old, of Indian heritage and he started teaching in 1978. He had 31 years' experience as a classroom teacher and was a senior assistant for six years in a rural area secondary school before he began as a principal at Tanjong Secondary School in 2004.

Parent Participant 1

Parent participant 1 in Seri Secondary School was a male, Chinese heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 1 was given a pseudonym, Mr. Phang. He was a 49 year old lecturer and also a PTA committee member. He had a son studying at the school.

Parent Participant 2

Parent participant 2 in the Tanjong Secondary School was a female, Indian heritage parent. For the purpose of the study, parent participant 2 was given a pseudonym, Mdm. Devaki. She was a 45 year old primary school head teacher. She became actively involved with the school PTA and had two sons studying at the school.

4.4.3 Findings Related to Research Questions

How Do Principals Perceive Their Communication with Parents?

The Principal Describes His Communication Styles

Mr. Samy observed that effective and consistent school−home communication is critical to student success. Therefore, he always tried to maintain good relationships with parents by creating a positive atmosphere to welcome parents. He said 'I told my staff… our main client is parents. So that… if any parents come

to the office... attend to them first'. The principal added that every single member of staff in the school, especially the administrators, are role models and play a vital role in establishing positive relationships with parents.

The principal realised that the level of parental involvement is elastic, depending on motivation. However, he did not deny that perceptions of the school were important, such as the school's physical environment – it is surrounding by chain-link fencing − and having unfamiliar staff also may cause discomfort. Therefore, the school may need to initiate relationships with a warm, hospitable greeting to make parents comfortable with the new environment.

In the interview the principal explained that his communication with the parents is based on mutual respect and trust. He believed that the way he communicated and conveyed himself is critical, as parents might perceive the school on the basis of how they were attended. Therefore, he always tried to listen responsively, and expressed himself honestly and openly, in order to develop trust and respect that may lead to positive communication and collaboration. Mr. Samy asserted that he communicated with all parents, including hostile and angry parents, as he strongly believed that the parents might show a positive response when the school afforded them respect and showed willingness to listen. He further explained that:

> Even though my teachers might have warned me that… if this parent comes, better be careful because this particular parent is a big thug in a town or a particular village… but at the moment they are in my office I will give them due respect…. In fact, he also thanks me… he also said he will go back and make sure the son come back to school….
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal added that most parents in the school are those from the middle and upper classes who are involved in business, attached to the

172

government or private sectors. Therefore, he said that 'most of them are very good'. He believed that he did not face any communication difficulties with the parents, since they were educated.

In the interview and field notes, however, the principal also stated that he always faced difficulties with parents of lower socioeconomic groups such as labourers and hawkers. He added that most of these parents are less educated, always busy and show less interest in their children's education. The parents were hard to involve. Communication was always one-way, relying on the school's initiative to contact them. He further explained that:

> If they come to school because of we are calling them to solve their children misbehaviour… probably there will be a little bit of a problem. From my experience as a principal there are a few isolated cases whereby the parents come with anger… of course they are quite rude but after I have spoken to them they feel better and cool down.

> (Transaction of Interview with P3)

Mr. Samy believed that being patient, tolerant and attentive is the best way to deal with the problems. In some cases, he had to be very flexible, sympathetic and sensitive with the issues they brought in order to avoid conflict. He explained that:

> We have to be very patient with this kind of parent… if possible provide them with a cup of drink. Don't quarrel with them or interrupt while they are talking. Just listen until they have nothing to say, then we talk in the way that we care about them and are willing to solve their child's problem.

> (Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal added that problems in the school are often created by parents who had bad experiences at school in the past. He further explained:

Normally… these problems are created by those young parents who were also problematic students during their school time. When we call them to solve the problem of their child smoking in the school they will argue with you with saying that 'the school always like to create a problem and the school also did the same thing to me last time… what is wrong with smoking? I didn't disturb anybody… is that a big mistake I have done?' They may say in front of their child if their child around…They come to the school not to solve the problem but try to protect their children. Normally if they come with a very aggressive manner but we will try to be very soft… otherwise it will be a disaster.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

Mr. Samy described how he tried to solve problems by creating an environment that made them feel the school is an integral part of them. The principal explained:

When I talk… let us say to the ethnic group of my own origin. I will see their socioeconomic level… where they are not English speaking I will use my mother tongue… I find it goes very well with them. In fact… I can get a lot of things done.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal said that he faced no communication difficulties with Malay parents as he able to use the national language or the local Malay dialect:

I can converse in Malay very well. I can go into their lingo. In fact, I can speak in local Malay with them….

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

However, in the interview the principal acknowledged that he faced difficulties when communicating with certain elderly, Chinese heritage parents who are guardians and also grandparents of the students. He added that they do not understand the national language, and that he always tries to converse in the most understandable way. He explained that:

When the Chinese parents come… of course I don't speak Chinese but basically one or two words which I can reach in Chinese to make them feel at home… because I can have a little bit of *Hokkien* (Chinese dialect) and all that… Sometimes when they converse among themselves also I can understand what they are saying…. so I bat in by saying that… Ha!… This is what you are saying, and all that. I feel that they become more friendly when you do that.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

Mr. Samy further explained that he understood *bahasa Melayu Pasar*, Malay pidgin, but tried to avoid using it as teachers are not allowed to use the simplified Malay language. The use of the language might confuse the parents. He explained that:

They speak '*bahasa Melayu Pasar'*, but I try to put in a simple Malay language… because if I use '*bahasa Melayu Pasar'*…it might make them more difficult to understand... and it might create misunderstandings.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

Mr. Samy realised that teachers are not allowed to use the informal language in school, but he had to use it with certain parents as his priority was to help the parents to solve their problems. However, in some cases he also used teachers as interpreters. He explained that:

Sometimes the grandparents totally don't understand *'bahasa Melayu'* (National language) ….In that case, I will call a teacher who can speak Chinese because I can't speak through the students, because I don't think that it will be right way… otherwise I can just talk to the students, but now I want to talk to the grandparents… then it will better to call a teacher to interpret it.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

In the field notes Mr. Samy explained that communicating with the parents was not an easy task, as they were culturally diverse. They were not only of various ethnicities, but of various educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Thus, flexibility and the ability to adapt to parents of different background was critical to avoid misunderstandings that might affect support and involvement.

Parents Describe the Principal Communication Styles

Both parents who had conversations with the principal believed that the principal was a good communicator. In the interviews and field notes they said that the principal was a good listener. Mr. Phang explained that the principal was 'very accommodating' in the sense that he was always busy but still able to be accessed at any time, either inside or outside school. He added that the principal was approachable and committed to his job and always created opportunities to work with parents and was willing to spend his time them. Mr. Phang concluded that the principal was a good leader. He explained that:

> He did give opportunities for us to speak…. such as in the conversation just now he did said that he would like to hear some suggestions.... and we all started thinking of some suggestions to offer.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with CP2)

Mr. Phang's view is also supported by Mdm. Devaki when she explained that she liked to deal with the principal as he always showed positive attitudes and a warm welcome. She recalled:

> First is the respect that Mr. Samy always shows to us…. he really wishes us to come here, he will greet you hello… good morning… come have a sit. When I come in… I really feel very comfortable with him because he doesn't threaten you: 'Yes… what do you want?'...he won't ask you such a question… he will start the conversation with a smooth leaving. So… that is already a good sign of a good communicator.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with IP2)

Both parents, in the interviews and field notes, acknowledged that the friendliness of the principal was among the factors that made them feel at ease.

176

Mdm. Devaki postulated that:

> He is a very friendly person…. He might be quite firm with the students but when he comes to parents he will be very… very friendly. He is also very outspoken… he will listen to you… gives us more confidence. So we don't feel that we are strangers in the school.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with IP2)

Mr. Phang had the same views to offer, as he described that:

> From the aspect of the manner of speaking… of course he was very friendly…. There is no doubt about it.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with CP2)

Mdm. Devaki believed the principal is not only frank, but kind, as he is able to mix with all parents. She explained:

> I really respect him because he is caring… not to say that just when educated parents are coming, but uneducated parents as well. I have seen he talks to other parents… regardless of race and socioeconomic status and I find he is a very friendly….
>
> (Transcription of Interview with IP2)

Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki strongly believed that the principal's positive attitudes, such as being able to mix with all parents, increased his ability to deal with the parents of different backgrounds and socioeconomic levels. Mr. Phang believed that dealing and communicating with culturally diverse parents is not always an easy task and he has high regard for the principal's leadership. He said that 'I think he is very experienced in handling parents'. In the interview Mr. Phang also said that he was satisfied with the way the principal communicated. Mr. Phang's view was strongly supported by Mdm. Devaki. She related:

When the parents are given confidence that he is not a stranger then the parents also feel at ease to converse with him… sometimes invited us for a tea…The person who came with anger also might cool down because he has given so much comfort.…

<p align="right">(Transcription of Interview with IP2)</p>

Both parents acknowledged that the principal was held in high esteem by the parents. Mdm. Devaki explained that the principal regarded the parents as friends and she could see the positive responses and support from parents through the programmes carried out by the school. She said that 'whatever programmes were being carried out were fully supported by the teachers and parents… that is to show that he is a good administrator'. They also added that the principal's ability to communicate effectively was not only respected by his own staff but by parents and the local community.

Principal's Prior Knowledge about Parents' Background in Relation to His Communication Style

In the interview Mr. Samy explained that every meeting with parents is important, as they may judge the school on the basis of how the school communicated with them. He observed that meetings were an opportunity to change parents' perceptions of the school. Therefore, every single meeting was not only to make them aware of the latest school progress, but to show a positive attitude and warm welcome. The principal added that he always prepared for the meeting:

> Yes… I have to prepare myself with all the information. I also have to be familiar with all that information because their children's information is not in one file, but everywhere… So I have to gather all the information before I meet them. The advantage of this preparation is it is quite easy to answer their questions regarding their children.

<p align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</p>

Mr. Samy observed that preparation for the meeting was important for smooth communication. He believed that smooth communication is essential as it may also show that the school is concerned about their needs and expectations:

Before the particular parents are coming... I find out who are the children and the parents… at least I have basic information about the student and parents.

Mr. Samy added that basic information about parents' and children's background was also guidance to prevent talk about sensitive issues that might affect the relationship. In the interview the principal explained that some parents are sensitive and defensive about their children. Therefore, using a sympathetic manner by referring to their past record is not only useful to find the appropriate way to make them informed, but provides guidance for the parents to assist the children's learning based on their educational ability and academic attainment.

The Role that the Principal Perceives His Communication Style Plays in Influencing Parents' Involvement in School

Mr. Samy strongly believed that parents have the best first-hand knowledge about the child. Therefore, school has to take the opportunity to communicate more often in order to gain information that is important as an aid in understanding and assessing students. The principal believed that information exchange is the key to achieving meaningful relationships. Communication with parents, he believed, is always two-way. He further explained that:

Some information I pass to them so that they can do something about their children. The other way is they give me some suggestions and information so that the school can do something for their children…

He added that communication with parents was much more than just a status report, as he believed that parents were the most important resource about the children's life at home. Therefore, communication with the parents was always based on information sharing and they are also allowed access at the time of their convenience. He explained that:

179

Officially I meet them in my office… but sometimes they don't like that and are reluctant to talk formally…. So sometimes we have to go out and I see them in a very informal way. I am always ready to meet them at any time in any location… but if the parents want to talk about discipline problems… we normally discuss the matter in my office because it has more privacy….

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal added that he often met parents outside the school. He further described that:

Informally I meet them outside or maybe some of the parents even come to extent of looking me up in my house, and I entertain them in the sense that if I am free… .if they meet up in town… so we have an informal talk.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

In the interview and field notes, Mr. Samy said that he also took the opportunity to meet parents during school events. He added that:

Normally we meet during the school functions... either school sports day or during speech day… we also have a formal talk to the parents on the school's open day… when the parents are invited to the school to take the result of their children…. Normally, during that time they will be interacting with the class teacher, but some parents will also meet me and I also interact with them randomly....

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal said that he also gained useful information from his informal interaction, especially with the parents of lower socioeconomic background. He added that the parents are willing to speak their minds and reveal their personal problems in helping their children's learning. He explained that:

When I approach the parents… I get the fact that their children actually already doing some kind of part-time job… or helping their parents business. These particular students have already been involved in such things since primary school and when they come

to secondary… they find their interest in the academic field is getting lower and lower… So we have this type of problem with the parents.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</div>

The principal explained that he always tried to find a way to help the parents by calling them to the office, and that he found that they are willing to share problems with the school. He further explained that:

> These parents come out and see me… of course they say that they want their child to study, but they also say that they cannot do anything about these children as the child is now beyond their control… they said please… seek for my help and I find after consulting the parents the children do show some changes in the sense that…. the student has tried their best not to get their parents to come to see me again.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</div>

The principal believed that teachers and parents have mutual responsibilities in educating children. Therefore, communicating with parents encourages them to become involved, as he also believed that many issues pertaining to the children's learning can be solved when parents and school have a better relationship. He further explained:

> I always give them some advice… at least come to the school to see the teacher or just show their face around the school. I told them their presence is very important because as I have seen and also informed by many parents that their appearance in school really makes sense… their children's behaviour have changed….

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</div>

The principal explained that the school needs full support from all parents, regardless of their educational and socioeconomic background. He strongly believed that every single parent had their own strengths that may contribute to school improvement. Therefore, he always tried to create a positive relationship

by showing respect and acknowledging them as prime educators and role models for their children in the hope that they may positively respond in order to develop a meaningful relationship.

Parents' Ethnicity and the Principal's Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data shows that parents' ethnicity does not appear to affect Mr. Samy's communication style. Analysis of principal's verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities shows that he welcomed parents. There is no sign of distancing as he showed warmth and positive postures, gestures, face expressions, gaze and voice such as welcome, laughs, smiles, eye contact and voice activities in his conversation with the parents, as detailed in Table 4.12.

Analysis of interview data with Mr. Phang, who was not of the same ethnic group as the principal, also indicated that he felt very comfortable with the conversation. He explained that the principal always showed a positive attitude and welcomed him. He was asked how comfortable he was with the conversation with the principal and he expressed that:

> I am fine… I'm fine…. It's seems there is no pressure… I got no problem at all….

> (Transcription of Interviews with MP1)

In the interview, Mr. Phang confirmed that he does not detect any distancing signs during the conversation with the principal. He said that 'he was pleasant. He gives us the opportunity to say what we have to say'. He felt very comfortable with the way the principal spoke to him. He said that 'No… no… not a problem at all… he is all right'. He also said that the conversation became fluent with a positive response from the meeting members, as they are quite familiar to each other.

Table 4.12

Observation Data on Mr. Samy's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication in Conversation with Parents
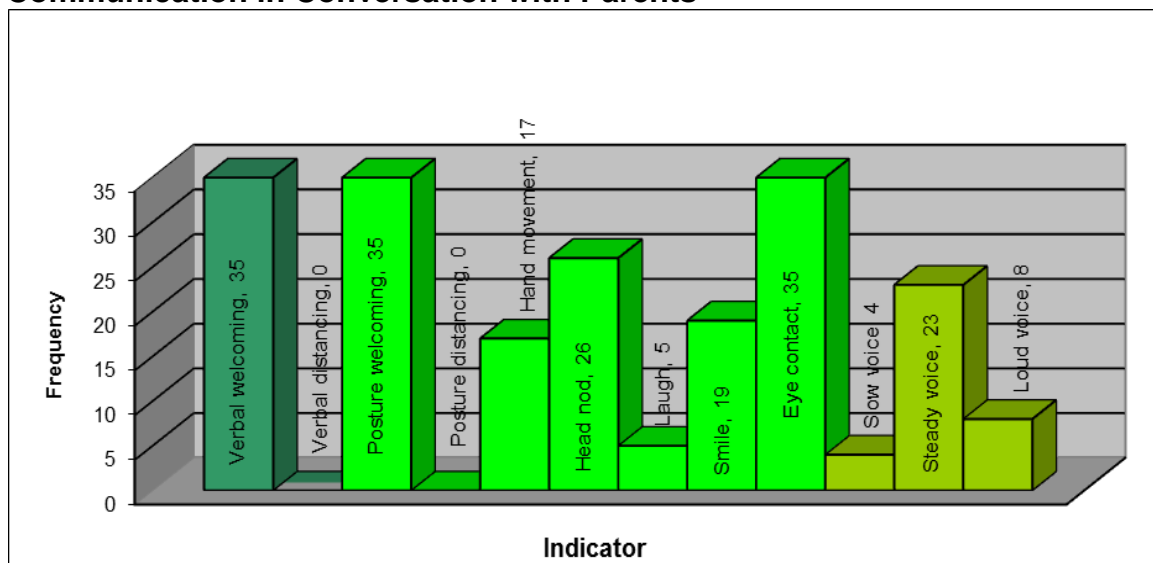
Interview data with Mr. Samy indicates that he had no communication difficulties with Mr. Phang, as he is also an educator. However, the principal stated that communicating with the parents unable to speak effectively in Malay or English might affect his communication style. He explained that:

> My communication style may change in any way with the parents of a different ethnic group? Of course, yes… ethnic group as well as their socioeconomic level.

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

Mr. Samy added that he always tried to create constructive communication with parents of different ethnic origins. He did not face any difficulties in communicating with Malay parents, but in communication with some Chinese heritage parents such as hawkers always showed that he dominated the meeting as the parents tend to listen, rather than to speak. He added:

> I even accounted some parents of this category…. I mean mostly the parents with the problematic children… I find that their socioeconomic level is very low….

(Transcription of Interview with P3)

183

In the interview Mr. Samy explained that most parents in that category understood simple, everyday Malay and English from their primary education. However, they tended to keep silent and were reluctant to talk in the PTA meeting as though they were embarrassed to use this informal language in front of other, unfamiliar parents. However, the principal postulated that parents might show a positive response if he approached them personally. Therefore, he always took the opportunity to talk to them informally when they came to the school for events.

In the interview the principal did not deny that he faced difficulties in communicating with the lower socioeconomic Chinese heritage parents. Some are less educated and only speak their mother-tongue dialect such as Hokkien. He added that this may have a negative impact on the parents and school, as his message may not be interpreted by both parties as intended, but may create misunderstandings.

Data Analysis of Observations and Interviews of the Principal's Communication Styles

Multimodal analysis of the principal's communication style indicates that Mr. Samy presented at least five communication styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive and animated during his conversation with the parents; 29.90 per cent of his verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities belongs to attentive style, 20.00 per cent belongs to each friendly, relaxed and open style and 9.49 per cent belongs to animated style.

The findings obtained from multimodal analysis of Mr. Samy's verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal observation data were triangulated with the interview and field notes data. Cross-verification of the empirical indicators of communicative style of the observation, interviews and filed notes revealed similar results as shown in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Samy's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Samy's styles Number of Occurrences(f)	Reference in Mr. Samy's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences(f)	References in Mdm. Devaki's interview to the style of Mr. Samy Number of Occurrences (f)	References in Mr. Phang's interview to the style of Mr. Samy Number of Occurrences(f)	References in the field notes to the style of Mr. Samy Number of Occurrences (f)
1. **Friendly**	74	10	29	7	22
2. **Relaxed**	74	12	5	3	11
3. **Open**	74	5	8	23	20
4. **Attentive**	105	3	2	2	6
5. **Animated**	34	4	8	0	3
6. **Dominant**	0	0	0	0	0
7. **Contentious**	0	0	0	0	0
8. **Dramatic**	0	0	0	0	0
9. **Precise**	0	0	0	0	0
10. **Impression-Leaving**	0	0	0	0	0
Communication Style (%)	Friendly 20.00% Relaxed 20.00% Open 20.00% Attentive 29.90% Animated 9.49%	Friendly 29.41% Relaxed 35.29% Open 14.70% Attentive 8.82% Animated 1.76%	Friendly 55.76% Relaxed 9.62% Open 15.38% Attentive 3.85% Animated 5.38%	Friendly 30.43% Relaxed 13.04% Open 47.82% Attentive 8.69% Animated -	Friendly 35.48% Relaxed 9.68% Open 32.26% Attentive 17.74% Animated 4.84%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

How Do Parents Perceive Their Communication with Principals?

Parents Describe Their Communication Styles

Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki believed that the manner in which the principal dealt with them might influence the way they communicate with him. In the interview and field notes they explained that the principal always gave them a warm welcome and friendliness to make them try to communicate in the same manner, as they believed that mutual respect is the key to developing a truthful relationship. Therefore, they always tried to be kind and friendly with the principal as they believed that that is the most pleasant and acceptable way of interacting.

In the interview and field notes, both parents expressed that they felt very comfortable and presumed that to be the appropriate way of communicating with

the principal, as he always showed a positive response and encouraged them to make suggestions. They also claimed that the principal often gave a warm welcome by approaching them whenever they met. Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki said that they often met and communicated with the principal during school events or meetings.

Both parents preferred informal to formal interaction as they believed that this provided a more comfortable environment in which to talk. They also said that informal interaction might permit them to communicate on the basis of their own interests and convenience. They added that informal interaction also permitted unrestricted, informal language and always made them feel at ease with the environment. Mdm. Devaki further explained that:

> It is easier for us to communicate when we mix the languages…. I talk to him in Tamil, Malay and English…. but we don't talk formally. He doesn't mind because we are not in a formal meeting….

> (Transcription of Interview with IP2)

The view is supported by Mr. Phang. However, Mr. Phang said that he always used English to communicate with the principal. He said that 'he is Indian and I am Chinese… the common language will be probably English'. However, he also said that he used mixed language when he faced a problem in finding the right word in English. He added that he often used a common word or language to communicate to avoid misinterpretation. He explained that misinterpretation might lead to misunderstanding, since people tended to interpret the meaning differently based on their own understanding and experience. Therefore, communication with a common language is important; it is not only easy to understand, but avoids misunderstanding.

Both parents believed that informal communication such as face-to-face chatting or a phone call was a bridge to bring the parents closer to school. However, they did not deny the importance of formal meetings as a means of

gathering ideas, and strengthening and sustaining the relationships between parents and school.

The Principal Describes Parents' Communication Styles

Mr. Samy observed Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki were dedicated partners, since both were committed and actively involved with the school. The principal believed that they were very supportive as they were also educators with an in-depth understanding of the concept of involvement. In the field notes Mr. Samy said that a clear understanding about the role and responsibility in partnership is crucially important for meaningful parent's involvement. He explained that:

> The parents give us full support… for example we take the recent achievement of our robotic club... to get such a high achievement the student has to spend their extra time as a part of the school. In fact, these children have to stay overnight at the teacher's house where the teacher is giving a necessary training… of course we can't do it without their support.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P3)

In the interview Mr. Samy explained that their involvement was not only in terms of suggesting ideas, but of moral support. He believed that the permission given by the parents to the children to become involved in the school activities was also a part of their involvement. He further explained that:

> It must be coming through the parents' consent… so that their children can stay overnight and spend more time despite the fact may be the examination is may be the following week….They give us all the support….
>
> (Transcription of Interview with P3)

The principal believed that parents' understanding of the concept of involvement and positive attitudes to the school might affect the way they communicated with the school. Mr. Samy said that he did not face any difficulties

187

with the parents as they always showed respect and communicated in a manner that suggested they understood the nature and importance of their parental involvement in assisting school. The principal added that he was very fortunate to have both parents, who were very experienced in partnership and also educators. Mdm. Devaki was a primary school head teacher and Mr. Phang was a teacher before becoming a lecturer in a teaching institution. Therefore, how they communicated showed their in-depth understanding of the concept of parental involvement. He added that communication with the parents is often two-way. The focus is to find a strategic and effective way of encouraging parents to become involved with the school.

The Role that Parents Perceive Their Communication Styles Plays in Influencing Principals Regarding Their Involvement in School

Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki strongly believed that information sharing may encourage meaningful communication and partnerships that may benefit children's learning. Therefore, both parents explained that they had good contact with the principal even though they only appeared in school during formal events. Mdm. Devaki further explained that:

> I only come here during the school occasion like the school prize giving day, open day, sports day, or whatever… when we are invited for collecting our children's report card… but if I am busy my husband will come around often.

> (Transcription of Interview with IP2)

Mdm. Devaki strongly believed that parents acknowledged that their involvement was beneficial not only to the child, but to teachers and parents. Most were willing to become involved, but had uncertainty with the concept and how to support effectively in a limited time and this affected their involvement.

Mr. Phang, who was attached to a learning institution near the school, also said that he seldom appeared in the school unless he was invited to attend a meeting with the principal. He further explained that:

188

> Firstly, I'm very careful about meeting the principal… why do I want to see him? There must be particular reason because he is a very busy man… we are friends outside the school… if I am meeting him on a professional basis I am sure there will some intention.

<div align="right">(Transaction of Interview with CP2)</div>

In the interview Mr. Phang repeated that he always met the principal informally outside the school. Furthermore, his wife is a teacher at the school, so she deals with the school. He said that he was there

> Not really that many times. I think I am fortunate in the sense that my wife is teaching here. So my wife keeps an eye on both boys. I am not really seeing that there is the need because my wife knows the progress about the children.

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with CP2)</div>

He was also asked about whether he shared information with his wife and said 'yes… yes… yes, that is a usual common topic for the day… normally the first question is, how were the boys in the school, today?'. Mr. Phang added that he also obtained information about the school and his children through direct contact with the principal, as he was occasionally invited by the school to attend events and PTA meetings. In the interview and field notes, Mr. Phang explained that he was in good contact with the school as they were in the same neighbourhood. He added that the university needed the school for placing their trainee teachers for teaching practice, and the school needed the university to develop a collaborative programme.

Mdm. Devaki realised that parents' involvement and appearance was a way of controlling the children's behaviour. She further explained that:

> There is a hotspot with the children. When they see the parents are in the school meeting with the teachers or the principal. They might be thinking that 'I have to do well… otherwise the principal or teachers might give wrong information about me… which my parents might feel sad about'…

<div align="right">(Transcription of Interview with IP2)</div>

Mdm. Devaki added that the presence of the parents in school was very important as it might not only enhance the student's behaviour, but increase their self-esteem and confidence to study.

Parents' Prior Knowledge about the Principal in Relation to Their Communication Style

Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki acknowledged that prior knowledge about the principal was fundamental to their interaction with the principal. In the field notes they explained that the purpose of communication with the school was to develop good rapport. Therefore, communication with the school was always based on respect. Respect may denote positive feeling and emotion. Therefore, to achieve positive feeling and emotion they had to be careful when speaking not to touch on issues that were sensitive to the principal. Therefore, prior knowledge about his background was crucial as it may act as guidance in the interaction.

Mr. Phang said that basic information such as background and issues to be discussed not only informed them how to communicate, but ensured the accuracy of the information to avoid misunderstandings. He added that communication without prior knowledge, as if communicating with strangers, might create uncomfortable situations and negative perceptions. Therefore, he believed that knowledge about the principal and topics of discussion were important to ensure smooth communication and encourage positive relationships.

The Principal's Ethnicity and Parents' Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data appears to show that the principal's ethnicity is not a barrier that affected Mr. Phang's communication style, as shown in Table 4.14. Analysis of observation data appears to show he has a positive attitude towards the principal.

Table 4.14

Observation Data on Mr. Phang's Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication in Conversation with Principal
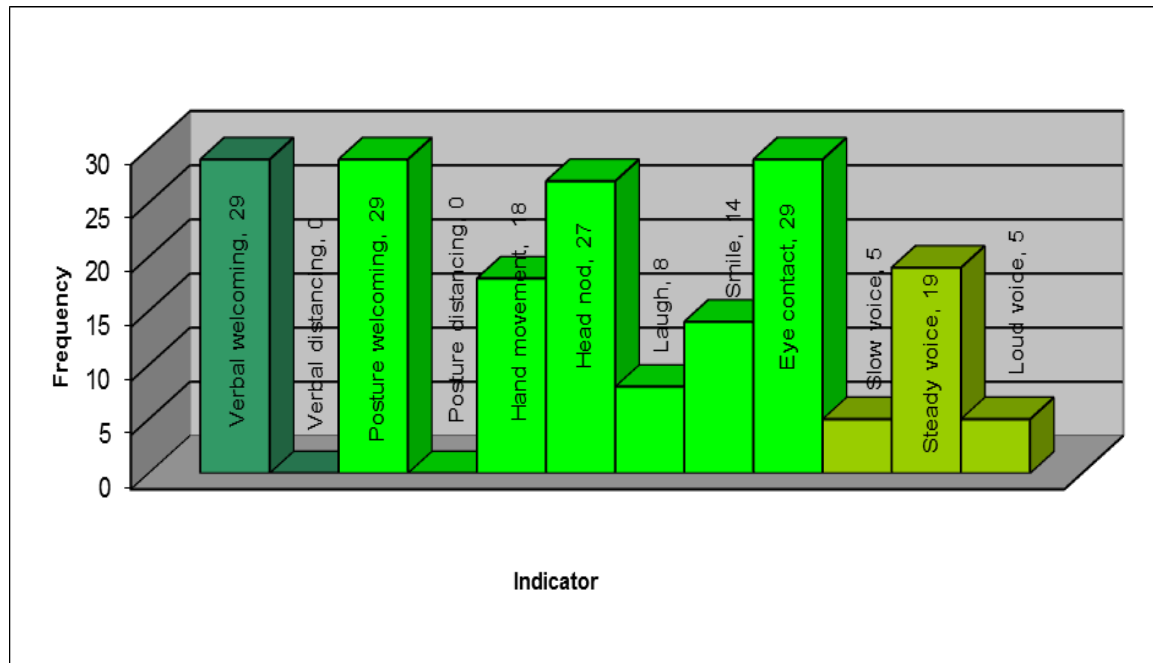
Mr. Phang presents a high percentage of welcoming verbal and postural indicators, showing that he was comfortable with the interaction. Furthermore, he made frequent eye contact, smiling and laughing with the principal, showing that he was at ease with the conversation. The interview with the principal also showed that he does not face difficulties in communication with parents from different ethnic groups. He explained that the parents were pleasant and supportive. He said that:

> The parents are actively getting involved… all the three groups are here. I see all three ethnic groups are very keen and we have parents' attendance to prove that… I can get the support from those three ethnic groups.

<p style="text-align:right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</p>

In some cases, however, the principal said that he received more support from parents from his own ethnic heritage group. He believed that parents from his own ethnic origin gave him more support than others. He said that:

> I would say that… of course I get support almost like 100 per cent from the ethnic group that I belong to. That comes actually…If the Indian parents are called up for an activity… I can be assured that I get 100 per cent of support. I think is a natural tendency. On the other hand… the other ethnic groups such as Malay or Chinese origin. Actually I won't say 100 per cent, but I don't have problem with them.

<p style="text-align:right">(Transcription of Interview with P3)</p>

Mr. Samy added that he was a local; his familiarity with the community may have increased support, especially from parents of his own ethnic origin.

Data Analysis of Observations and Interviews of Parents' Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data shows that Mr. Phang presents five different styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive and animated during his interactions with the principal and Mdm. Devaki. The most frequent style he uses in the conversation is attentive (42.28 per cent), followed by relaxed and friendly (20.13 per cent each), animated (12.75 per cent) and open (11.41 per cent). Cross-verification of the empirical indicators of communicative style of the observation data, interviews and field notes, based on the references of his styles, reveals the similar results to the observation and field notes as shown in Table 4.15 over page.

Table 4.15

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mr. Phang's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mr. Phang's styles Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in the Mr. Phang's interview to his own style Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in the Mr. Samy's interview to Mr. Phang's style Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in the field notes to the style of Mr. Phang Number of Occurrences (*f*)
1. Friendly	30	8	7	14
2. Relaxed	30	4	0	2
3. Open	17	9	2	3
4. Attentive	63	2	0	4
5. Animated	19	0	0	7
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0
Communication Style (%)	Friendly 20.13% Relaxed 20.13% Open 11.41% Attentive 42.28% Animated 12.75%	Friendly 34.78% Relaxed 17.39% Open 39.13% Attentive 8.69% Animated -	Friendly 77.78% Relaxed - Open 22.22% Attentive - Animated -	Friendly 46.67% Relaxed 6.67% Open 10.00% Attentive 13.33% Animated 23.33%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

Multimodal analysis of observations of Mdm. Devaki indicate that she presents five different styles in her conversation with the principal; 40.00 per cent belongs to attentive, 20.66 per cent of each friendly and relaxed style, open 16.66 per cent and animated style 2.00 per cent, as detailed in Table 4.16. Cross-verification of the empirical indicators of communicative style on the observation data, interviews and field notes, based on the references of her styles, reveals similar results to the observation and field notes shown in Table 4.16 over page.

Multimodal triangulation of interviews and field notes of the three principals and six parents reveals similar results to observation data. However, the percentages vary from those from the interview data and this might be associated with the methodological disadvantages of interviewing. The participants were given freedom to answer the questions and some participants may have chosen to answer questions by giving a broad, positive or uncontroversial view about their own and other's communication styles.

Table 4.16

Multimodal Data Triangulation: Mdm. Devaki's Communication Styles

Communication Styles	Occurrence in observation data of Mdm. Devaki's styles Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in Mdm. Devaki's interview to her own style Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in Mr. Samy's interview to the style of Mdm. Devaki Number of Occurrences (*f*)	References in the field notes to the style of Mdm. Murni Number of Occurrences (*f*)
1. Friendly	31	6	7	7
2. Relaxed	31	2	0	7
3. Open	25	2	2	11
4. Attentive	60	2	0	4
5. Animated	3	0	0	4
6. Dominant	0	0	0	0
7. Contentious	0	0	0	0
8. Dramatic	0	0	0	0
9. Precise	0	0	0	0
10. Impression-Leaving	0	0	0	0
Communication Style (%)	Friendly 20.66% Relaxed 20.66% Open 16.66% Attentive 40.00% Animated 2.00%	Friendly 50.00% Relaxed 16.66% Open 16.66% Attentive 16.66% Animated -	Friendly 77.78% Relaxed - Open 22.22% Attentive - Animated -	Friendly 21.21% Relaxed 21.21% Open 33.33% Attentive 12.12% Animated 12.12%

* Percentages are of the total occurrence within each column.

Different people may have a different view of individuals' communication styles. The way they observe the styles might be based on their communication experiences and also their focus and knowledge of styles. The ability to trace their own or their counterparts' communication styles may also be affected by their familiarity and awareness of the styles. The participants appear to give more information about the style that is most common and easily observed. Analysis of Mr. Ahmad's styles, based on the references in the principal's interview data, for example, reveals only three styles, namely friendly, relaxed and open. There is no description or indicators of the attentive style mentioned by both Mr. Ali and Mr. Ahmad during the interviews. Mr. Ahmad might not have been able to trace the styles due to lack of knowledge about the style. However, Mr. Ahmad might have been in a difficult position to explain his own attentiveness, since the style can be

only clearly seen by observation. Furthermore, during the interview the principal was not focused on Mr. Ahmad's communication style, but tended to give a general statement about the way parents communicated with him, resulting in fewer references to Mr. Ahmad's communication style in his interview data.

The focus and the way the participants presented their comments about styles might also affect the percentage as some descriptions of certain styles are broad, resulting in difficulties of categorisation into the styles examined in the study. Interviews with all three principals, for example, reveal that most of their explanation is not focused specifically on the style of the parents who communicate with them; they tend to give a broad statement about how parents communicate with them, resulting in unvarying descriptions about the parent participants' communication styles.

The frequency of the occurrence of these styles may also have an impact. The animated style is an example. The findings from other sources such as observation, interview and field notes show that the animated style is only represented as a small percentage compared to other styles. This small percentage shows that the style occurs less frequently, so principals and parents may not be aware of it or tend to ignore the style as it is not clearly observed. In summary, the ability of individuals to trace the style of their own or others might be influenced by the extent of their knowledge and understanding of particular styles.

4.5 Summary

Analysis of interview data shows that the principals and parents of the three schools believe they have good rapport and relationship. The data show that they have a positive perception of each other. The principals strongly believe that the parents are very supportive and willing to work together with the schools. The parents, on the other hand, observe that the principals have a positive attitude to them as they always show respect and welcome and they also conclude that the principals have good leadership characteristics that fulfil their expectations of a

school leader. Their views apparently reflect that the schools and parents have a positive relationship and communication is not perceived to be a problem. However, analysis of observation data shows that the principals and parents have different methods and goals of communicating and this may affect their relationships. Berlo (1960) suggests that similarity of individuals' backgrounds, including ways of communicating, are critical to effective communication. Therefore, the researcher decided to explore further the way they communicate in close up in order to capture their communication behaviour and styles in the hope that this may reveal further the reality of their communication world, and this will be presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5
Conversation Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Analysis of interview data suggests some differences in perception of the purpose of communication between principals and parents. Therefore, this chapter will explore further how they communicate and why they use a restricted range of styles. The focus is to highlight some critical points of their interaction in order to provide a clearer picture about their actions and behaviours in the conversation.

5.2 Principals' and Parents' Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data indicates that principals and parents had different ways of communicating in order to achieve their communication goals. They tended to show their friendliness and respect to each other. The principals used persuasive ways of approaching parents, even if they tried to control the conversation. The parents also began the conversation with persuasion, but in some cases they became aggressive and defensive when their suggestions were ignored by others.

5.3 Two-way Communication and Interruption Behaviours

Analysis of observation data indicates that the principals appeared to create a positive conversation environment with parents. The principals' acknowledgement that preparation before a meeting, such as gathering information on parents' background and their children's performance, is crucial to smooth communication indicates that they are committed and serious in building a relationship with

parents. They give a warm welcome and try to build good rapport from the start. They begin the meeting with small talk and try to engage with two-way communication, even if they are using directive styles. This can be seen through the styles used by Mr. Samy, as detailed below.

Principal	We are trying our best. Actually we want our students to become one of the top… not only in the district but in all level… and we have a bright record on that… Actually I want to congratulate your children for doing very well in their academic and co-curriculum. To mention that the great achievement is our Robotic Club… We had achieved international level and of course we want to maintain that… with the help of our surrounding community especially the university… (pause)
Principal	They actually play a very important role in helping us or we co-exist in the sense that a win-win situation. …we try to capitalise on the facilities that the university has… we go hand in hand with the university?
Mr.Phang	Emmmmm….
Principal	We gain a lot of help from there... So we try to build the network… especially at the administrative level… we have a very good relationship… especially Mr. Phang is there?
Mr.Phang	I think to be fair… the children's achievement is not just the school... (pause)
Mdm. Devaki	Yes… yes… that's right… it also includes the parents.
Mr.Phang	But the school play a very important role (pause)
Mdm. Devaki	Important roles.... (pause)
Mr.Phang	They take the proactive… they take the… (pause)
Mdm. Devaki	First step (pause)
Mr.Phang	First step to encourage (pause)
Mdm. Devaki	To encourage (pause)
Mr.Phang	To engage the student (pause)
Principal	Ya… ya… engage.
Mr.Phang	You take the first step…. You know the university has the facilities… you take the first step to ask them (pause)
Mdm. Devaki	Ask them… yes… yes (higher voice)

(Transcription of Observation: Tanjong Secondary School)

The conversation illustrates Mr. Samy's communication style when he was explaining the partnership programme to the parents. It shows that the principal tried to engage with the parents not just when telling them about it, and appears to show parents acknowledgement and appreciation. His decision to congratulate Mr. Phang on his children's success may have a positive impact on his interaction as he may concentrate more. This may positively affect relationships and support since, in the long-term, the parents may feel proud of this appreciation.

However, the decision to congratulate the children without acknowledging the parents might also cause dissatisfaction, and Mr. Phang's interruption saying that 'I think, to be fair… the children's achievement is not only school', reflects that parents might expect some recognition, believing that they, too, deserved to be rewarded for their children's success. Furthermore, the argument was supported by Mdm. Devaki when she said 'Yes… yes… that's right… it also includes the parents', to emphasise the importance of their role in the children's success.

Analysis of observation data reveals that Mdm. Devaki interrupted the conversation for the purpose of helping Mr. Phang to complete his sentence. However, the frequency of interruption, use of a higher voice with a variety of facial expressions and head movements to support her words may also serve another purpose. She might be trying to get attention, as the principal was paying too much attention to Mr. Phang. Analysis of observation data shows that the principal spent about five minutes paying attention to Mr. Phang. Furthermore, that the principal congratulated the children during his interaction with Mr. Phang without delivering any convincing verbal or non-verbal signals to show his appreciation of her also may cause her to feel excluded and doubtful, as she may observe that his appreciation is only of her colleague. Her discomfort and wounded feelings can be paradoxically seen in her smiling and nodding to show her encouragement and to support the statement made by the principal when he interacted with Mr. Phang.

Scholars such as Berger (2004), Epstein (2001) and Gestwicki (2010) have suggested that appreciation is vital to parents' involvement. However, the study also suggested that the ability of the principal to address their appreciation and recognition appropriately is also important. Mr. Samy may not have done so and this may have caused feelings of favouritism. This may affect their interaction and it can be seen when Mdm. Devaki interrupted the conversation in a higher voice with the purpose of getting attention. The principal may have realised his mistake and taken positive action, as he shifted his attention to Mdm. Devaki.

Mr. Samy also tried to involve the parents with his explanation when he attempted to obtain feedback through his verbal and non-verbal cues. The use of head nodding at the end of his explanation indirectly indicates that he expected confirmation from the parents. Giving them the opportunity to confirm suggests that he was also willing to share authority. This may positively impact on the parents as they might observe that he was willing to confirm his ideas with them.

The styles adopted by the principal may benefit both parties. The parents may feel they are valued and appreciated by the school and pay attention to the principal to show respect and support. This can be seen through their short responses such as 'Emmmm' and 'yes…', with head nodding offered by the parents to show encouragement. In addition, the situation also may provide a constructive and supportive environment for the principal to continue his explanation. Observation data indicates that the parents gave support and encouragement by paying attention with slight head nods to show agreement, even though the principal took about four minutes to complete his explanation.

Observation data reveals that principals appear to show that they are open and willing to accept suggestions. In the conversation with the parents in Katara Secondary School, for example, Mr. Law acknowledged that the positive arguments and views demonstrated by Mr. Chong, as shown in the conversation below, might be useful to reduce a problem with parents.

Mr. Chong	By right… I would suggest that the school should provide us… a current issue about the school. Let say… any development of the school the parents supposed to be informed.... easy for us to plan.
Principal	Ok… ok.
Mr.Chong	Should give us the latest rather than waiting until the end of the year… (pause)
Principal	Ok… ok.
Principal	Ok... ok… I think we should raise in the meeting (pause)
Mr. Chong	meeting and form a new PTA committee then close book.
Principal	Ha… ha… ha…
Mr. Chong	That's no point….
Principal	Ya… that's part of it….
Mr. Chong	Actually… we as parents don't know what is going on here..
Principal	Maybe another way… for some parents… if they are interested they also can contribute to school….

(Transcription of Observation: Katara Secondary School)

The principal said that from the way Mr. Chong's spoke it may have appeared that he was aggressive. However, his suggestion of increasing the parents' knowledge about school might be useful in that it might increase parental support, as the parents might be able to plan their involvement. Therefore, the principal appeared to be very encouraging. Mr. Law smiled and laughed during the interaction to show his agreement with Mr. Chong. The principal also communicated in a way that admitted his weaknesses and his readiness to make change and showed that he was open minded. He might be sincere with the parents, as in the interview he confirmed that he may consider the suggestion. He said that 'Mr. Chong was talking about the school system… which is good... we can do something about that'. This positive insight indicates that the principal may see the suggestions as a priority. However, analysis of the observation data also shows that the principal might not have been wholly in agreement with the suggestion, as he tried to remind the parents indirectly that obtaining the information about the school was the responsibility not only of the school, but of the parents. According to the principal, parents may also need to seek the information by visiting the school.

As the school leader, the principal made an appropriate response to solve the problem. He showed his agreement by accepting and supporting the suggestion. However, when the principal tried to involve parents in the process of delivering information, Mr. Chong tried to avoid the topic by introducing another. His action may reflect that his intention in communicating with school was merely to obtain information rather than to build a relationship. Furthermore, his intention to communicate with the school was to solve his personal problems; he often tried to interrupt when he found the topic was not his area of interest. Examples may be seen over page.

Mdm. Murni	The parents suggested that the school opens the gate because there is not enough space to park cars.
Principal	I think that area is a private property and does not belong to us.
Mdm. Murni	So far… it's better than before.
Principal	Yeah…. We will try our best to make it better.
Mdm. Murni	Now… it's much better. Thanks…
Principal	We will try to do it better…we will try to do it better.
Mdm. Murni	Before this… the situation was worse! I have to tell you the truth.
Mr. Chong	The former principal spent too long at the weekly assembly. Some students fainted… because standing for too long!

(Transcription of Observation: Katara Secondary School)

The conversation shows that Mr. Chong tried to control the conversation. He not only interrupted but tried to direct the conversation to another issue unrelated to the issue under discussion. Analysis of observations and field notes indicates that the issue he raised may relate to his personal views as, from the field notes, it can be seen that he explained how his daughter always complained and was reluctant to attend the school's weekly assembly on Monday as she felt tired after attending that event. He also frequently challenged others and attempted to be defensive to make him appear in the right. During the discussion regarding the issue of motivating children's learning, for example, Mr. Chong asserted that he always took his family for a holiday as a reward for the children's making good progress. However, the way he communicated may hurt others, as shown in the details of the conversation below.

Mr. Law	Oh… I see… I think this is a very good package to attract them…..
Mr. Chong	Every time I go I bring all my children overseas…I spent a lot... five of them… plus my wife... all seven…. How much I spent?
Mdm. Murni	Lucky for us… .we goes overseas for free by ship…
Mr. Law	Your husband work with shipping company?
Mdm. Murni	Go for free… lucky for us… he… he!
Mr. Chong	But ship…eeeee…very boring!
Mdm. Murni	Yea…..
Mr. Chong	I have tried... stay for two nights….it's boring!
Mdm. Murni	He….
Mr. Law	So…. next time there is any programme… maybe you can suggest something? Not only in PTA meeting. You can come forward and see me at any time. Just suggest something that can contribute to the school.

(Transcription of Observation: Katara Secondary School)

202

Mr. Chong's aggression about the issue of travelling by ship may not really hurt Mdm. Murni's feelings, as he responded in a natural pitch. The inflection of his voice does not show any sign of aggressiveness. However, the way he expressed himself in order to make him appear in the right by showing a negative facial expression and shaking his head in refusal may have hurt her feelings emotionally. She may have felt disappointed and powerless, but concealed her negative feelings by smiling and following up with a rapid nod to show her agreement with Mr. Chong. Mdm. Murni's agreement also showed her positive attitude and tolerance, trying to avoid conflict. However, the principal, who chaired the meeting, realised the problem and took action by taking charge and redirecting the topic of conversation.

Observation data indicate that the principal's and parents' interruption of the conversation may have served different purposes. The principal's interruption may have had a strong link to trying to control the conversation. However, the parents' interruption may have been connected to the topic of interest. Analysis of observation data indicates that the parents appeared to speak more when they were interested in the topic of discussion. This may be seen through the following conversation:

Principal	Maybe others than that… if I may know… what are the roles you as parents play to improve your children's learning?
Mdm. Devaki	I think the role of parents in their child's leaning is very important… think it's equivalent to the role played by the school… probably more than that because the children spent more time at home.... So the first thing the parents have to do is monitor their children… Even when they are on the computer we have to see… whether they are studying or playing games….
Principal	Emmm…. ha ha ha !
Mdm.Devaki	So that is one thing that every parent has to keep in mind… they need more care… another thing that…. we have to look at the situation of our house where they can really study…. buy… if they really need…. Sometimes the children got frustrated because they don't get what they want and this will affect their performance. Another thing we have also given them enough… giving love… giving food…. (pause)
Principal	He… he…
Mr.Phang	Yes…
Mdm. Devaki	Nowadays all the parents are very busy… sometimes the children feel… (pause)
Mr.Phang	They are all left alone sometimes…. (pause)

| Mdm. Devaki | Yeah… sometimes they don't take breakfast… and they have to manage themselves… the problem will start from there…. Second thing we have to look into their parents… the circle of their friends… and the third thing I think is the most important thing… encouragement… we must encourage them… not only teachers but… the parents are also very important… |

(Transcription of Observation: Tanjong Secondary School)

Analysis of Mdm. Devaki's observation data indicates that she spent about three minutes continuing with her explanation, even if she realised that her explanation was occasionally interrupted by others. She showed less encouragement and sensitivity to others as she repeatedly increased her voice when she realised others were attempting to interrupt. This could be a strategy that she used to dominate the topic.

The styles demonstrated by some parents when trying to dominate their favourite topic by giving others fewer opportunities to talk also shows that styles may not only be affected by knowledge, but by attitudes and behaviours. People who believed they were more knowledgeable than others and intended to show that they were an authority in that area tended to speak frequently and to alienate others.

The principals also tended to interrupt when they tried to control the conversation. However, they used the indirect method of interrupting by helping the parents to finish their sentence. This strategy is the most frequently used by the principals to control the conversation, as in the example shown below.

Mr. Ahmad	Comprehensive….(pause)
Principal	Ha…comprehensive because their involvement is very important… their involvement is not just to provide material but also moral support… maybe we can organise a dinner party for fundraising?
Mr.Chandran	PTA meeting….(pause)
Principal	Ha… increase the fund. We want them to become involved in every activity we have… we want to build a relationship…. to see the parents work together with the teachers… so everybody is close together…
Mr. Chandran	Ya… ya…
Principal	Ya…. everybody is close together….we can take this opportunity

204

	to get to know each other better…. In this case, I think the role of PTA is not just a financial support but more than that….
Mr.Chandran	Ya… ya…
Mr. Ahmad	We are going to… to… to… (pause)
Principal	Promotion? ...promote a local product to international level… at this moment it's just a dream, but it's possible…
Mr. Ahmad	We want to internationalise our…. (pause)
Principal	We don't want to see the school PTA just a body… to fulfil our financial needs, but we expect more than that… more than that. Maybe we can train our student to do business….. right?
Mr.Chandran	Ya… ya... all the projects supposed to be based on the school curriculum….

(Transcription of Observation: Seri Secondary School)

Analysis of observation data shows that the principals may also use questions such as 'Right?' to assess the understanding among the parents. Mr. Ali, for example, used this technique to obtain quick feedback and as a tool to double-check understanding. Principals often nodded after their questions. The use of the nods might be to support their words. However, they may also be a strategy to show seriousness, and to confirm their understanding of the parents. Sharing ideas may not be the main purpose of requesting the feedback, as it may interrupt the process of explanation. However, short, quick feedback might be essential to verify the understanding and attention of the parents during the process of explanation.

The use of personal and position power to prescribe or control behaviour of the parents is apparent. This can be seen through the conversation above. Mr. Ali, for example, dominated the conversation. He tried to exercise two-way communication, but analysis of the observation data shows that he also tried to control the conversation. His decision to help Mr. Chandran to complete the sentence by using the words 'Ha….' and 'Ya…' before he continued his explanation may be observed to be a strategy to control the parent. The parent might not necessarily be offended by this indirect interruption. However, frequent use of the strategy may cause disappointment as the parent may feel he has been controlled. Mr. Chandran had been interrupted twice and might be frustrated, resulting in his paying less attention to the principal, as he may have

observed at that moment that the principal was not encouraging.

Analysis of observation data shows that the parent did not show any signs of distancing from the principal. However, continual interruptions by the principal may cause the parents to lose direction and concentration on the issue being discussed. In fact, his colleague Mr. Ahmad may have similar feelings when both parents respond differently to the principal after the explanation. Analysis of observation data shows that both parents proposed different issues with no obvious connection to that being addressed by the principal. The principal described building a relationship with parents, but each parent focused on different issues. Mr. Chandran talked about the roles of the PTA and Mr. Ahmad gave his suggestions on the activities of the PTA. Both parents tried to change the direction and topic of discussion as they may have observed the principal was attempting to control the conversation.

The issues brought by both parents are new topics. This may create a problem and the principal, as chairperson, might be caught in the middle of the three issues. The main concern was which became the priority. He might face a dilemma in continuing with his own issue without considering both suggestions and thus offending the parents. Analysis reveals that the principal began by acknowledging their suggestions '…at this moment… it's just a dream, but it's possible', before he continued the discussion on the preceding issue. The use of this phrase might be a strategy to ignore the parents' suggestions as he continued with his agenda by saying that 'we don't want to see the school PTA as just a body... just to fulfil our financial needs, but we expect more than that… more than that'. The parents might have seen the feedback as positive, as the principal showed his appreciation of the suggestions. This may be seen through Mr. Chandran's feedback; he verbally and non-verbally agreed with the principal.

The uses of the phrase 'we don't want to see the school PTA just a body… just to fulfil our financial needs, but we expect more than that… more than that' also shows that the principal repeated the preceding issue. He might have aimed

to remind the parents about the issue he had been discussing previously. The repetition of the phrase 'we expect more than that… more than that' at the end of his utterance shows that he not only emphasised the issue, but wanted the parents to respond to the issue discussed. The principal might have learned from the earlier experience that the parents' response puts him in a difficult position to redirect the discussion. Therefore, he is trying to avoid a long explanation by giving a short and concise summary.

Analysis of observation data also shows that all the principals used similar styles as a strategy to entice parents into two-way communication. They tended to offer a short question after a long explanation, and this appears to show that they are engaged in two-way communication. This might be a common strategy used by the principals to gain attention as they may have realised that the parents tended to pay less attention when principals used a directing style.

Using one-way communication such as telling is not the best way to gain attention. However, using two-way communication may disrupt the process of explanation. Therefore, the principals may use indirect ways such as 'Ha….' and 'Ya…' to interrupt and control the parents in a strategy to dominate the conversation. Mr. Ali, for example, often allowed Mr. Chandran to interrupt his explanation with a long argument, resulting in the explanation being delayed. The situation may become critical when parents introduce another new topic that may change the direction. Analysis of observation data shows that some principals such as Mr. Law had politely to remind Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni to stay on the current topic to avoid the parents redirecting the discussion onto other issues. The principal was discussing their children's academic performance. However, Mdm. Murni raised the issue of some Muslim teachers discriminating against her child for not wearing a headscarf in school, as shown over page.

Principal	This issue is not only faced in this school but some other schools also face the same problem.
Mdm. Murni	Yeah… some teachers are like that…(pause)
Mr. Chong	Kelantan and Trengganu state even worst!
Mdm. Murni	They can't do that… they are not supposed to force students to wear… you see?
Mr. Chong	No… no they have to wear!
Principal	Well… maybe we can talk about that later… because now we are talking about academic okay… that out off point…. nothing can be done about that.

(Transcription of Observation: Katara Secondary School)

During the short argument between Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni, he appeared to be very defensive and attempting to push his arguments. He interrupted Mdm. Murni's explanation by saying 'No… no they have to wear' in a louder voice, showing that he was trying to deny Mdm. Murni's argument to appear to be in the right. He showed no support and tried to dominate others by his impulsive behaviour. Mr. Chong might be dominant and contentious, as he generally believed that he was right most of the time. He also tried to control Mdm. Murni by using indirect ways to force her to accept suggestions. He set aside the rights of others. His negative body movements, especially facial expressions and a louder voice appeared to indicate that he was powerful and that communication at that moment appeared to be unfriendly, lacking tact and not encouraging. The style may have deterred Mdm. Murni from contributing ideas if the principal, as chairperson, did not control the situation. However, he took the decision to avoid conflict and interrupted in a higher voice to gain their attention before advising them to discuss the issue at the PTA meeting. Interviews with parents and field notes data show that the parents are impressed with the way the principal handled the meeting. They said that the skills shown by the principal in tackling tough situations during the meeting had a positive impact on their perceptions of the school leadership.

Observation data also indicates that all three principals tried to engage in two-way communication throughout their conversations. They always gave

opportunities for the parents to speak when they realised that the parents showed positive insight and were ready to give feedback. Mr. Ali called the parent's name before slowly using his palm to point to the related parents. Mr. Law used the same style and often used eye contact, leaning slightly towards the parent to invite them to speak. Observation data indicate that Mr. Law and Mr. Ali applied similar styles throughout the session as they faced similar situations; they faced two different parents, one actively speaking and often taking advantage of the other's weaknesses to interrupt, for instance Mr. Chong and Mr. Chandran, while the other parent was passive and tended to be tolerant, such as Mdm. Murni and Mr. Ahmad. Therefore, the principals might well have made the right decision when they tried to control the parents by regulating their speech through verbal and non-verbal cues.

However, observation data also shows that Mr. Samy used fewer verbal or non-verbal cues to regulate the first ten minutes of the conversation, which may create misunderstandings among the parents. Mr. Phang recalled that:

> It could have been better if he could direct certain questions to one of us… then it could have been clearer but his questions are all very general. So, it's really up to one of us to say what we want to say.
>
> (Transcription of Interview with CP2)

The comments show that the parents may be confused by the style used by the principal. The problem also reflects that non-verbal communication might be the key element in social interaction. The importance of the non-verbal cues cannot be denied, as they have multiple functions: to repeat, to accent, to complement, to substitute the verbal message and the most important function, to relate to the problem of regulating interaction. People may interpret the message based on verbal and non-verbal cues. Therefore, Mr. Samy may need to use non-verbal cues to regulate interaction appropriately, since his words alone may not convey any sign of who has to respond to his message and when.

5.4 Summary

The current chapter presents a detailed analysis of the observation data. The analysis demonstrates that principals and parents appear to use various styles and approaches as a strategy to control and to influence each other in order to achieve their communication goals. This issue will be discussed further in the discussion chapter.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings that are presented in the preceding chapters. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The discussion begins with an introduction, followed by a discussion of the principals' and parents' communication style and finally a discussion of the principals' communication styles and parents' involvement in school. The main findings will be interpreted, and the discussion will be related to the research framework and relevant literature. The parent participants in the study were selected from the PTA. Therefore, there is potential bias of the sample as the participants might not represent all categories of socioeconomic groups of parents at the three schools.

6.2 Communication Styles

6.2.1 Principals' Communication Styles

The analysis of the principals' observations, interviews and field notes indicate that all three principals presented more than one style; namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive and animated in conversation with the parents. This demonstrates that the principals used a combination of styles that may change during the conversation, depending on the situation. In their interviews the principals explained that the style may change depending on parents' backgrounds, their ability to communicate and the topic of discussion. Analysis of the interview data also appears to show that the use of the different styles has a strong link with behavioural flexibility. Behavioural flexibility is the ability to behave appropriately in different communication contexts. People may try to adjust and adapt styles and language according to the demands of the context to increase understanding.

This involves the ability of the source to read the ability of the audience to understand the message that has been sent. Chen (2009) suggests flexibility is one of the communicative competences. He states that:

> Behavioural flexibility is the ability to be accurate and 'flexible in attending to information' and 'in selecting strategies' in order to achieve personal goals in interaction. It is the ability to select an appropriate behaviour to fit different communication contexts.

> (Chen, 2009, p. 396)

Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) highlighted the importance of flexibility in human communication using Speech Accommodation Theory. Speech Accommodation Theory was first developed by Giles (1973) in the early 1970s to explain how people manage certain facets of interpersonal communication. It suggests that human interaction might be more effective if people are able verbally, para-verbally and non-verbally to adapt to the interaction situation. Therefore, communication scholars believe that verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal flexibility is essential to human communication. Bernstein (2003) referred to the ability of communicators to adjust and adapt their style according to the situation and context as code-switching. Code-switching is the practice of moving between variations of languages in different contexts. Human have learned to code-switch from their daily interactions when they tend subconsciously to change their style of speech, including accent, tempo, types of words or sentences (Bernstein, 2003).

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) indicate that behavioural flexibility is a skill that requires a communicator to adjust and apply different communication styles in different contexts and situations. Gudykunst (2004) states that code-switching also functions to announce specific identities, create certain meanings and facilitate particular interpersonal relationships. He also added that some people attempt to use code-switching especially with local people to create a common stance and to indicate an interest in the people or culture. Berlo (1960) views

behavioural flexibility, adaptability, style-flexing and code-switching as an ability to produce consistent and effective feedback in others by adjusting to the situation in an attempt to reach similarity. He strongly believes that the similarity of an individual's skills, knowledge, attitudes and socioculture is the key to successful communication. This might be achieved more easily when people communicate within their own culture. General understanding, such as sharing the same values, norms and beliefs, may increase the degree of mutual understanding. The process of encoding and decoding may be more accurate as people may communicate and interpret the meaning based on their daily life.

In a modern and highly mobile society, however, similarity of individuals' skills, attitude, knowledge and socioculture is rather hard to achieve, since people may need to interact with other cultures on a daily basis. Communication with people of a different culture is not an easy task as communication involves a complex, multi-layered process (Adler & Gunderson, 2008). Furthermore, Gudykunst (2004) made a significant point when he argued that:

> The important point to keep in mind is that no two individuals have the same life experiences. No two people interpret messages in the same way.

<div align="right">(Gudykunst, 2004, p. 9)</div>

The sent message is never reached by the receiver as intended, even in communication within the same culture. The process of encoding, decoding and interpreting meanings is based on a person's background and differs for each individual. However, through experience, people may try to adjust the way they speak in order to overcome communication difficulties with others. In the Malaysian school context, for example, the principals may have to adapt and adjust their communication style based on their experience in order to accommodate parents of different ethnic origins. Mr. Ali and Mr. Samy, for example, try to facilitate communication with elderly Chinese heritage parents by using Malay pidgin and local Chinese dialects, as they realise that most of them

are familiar with informal language. They also state that the knowledge of other cultures, especially language, is also useful in adjusting their style to make the parents feel comfortable. As Gudykunst (2004) postulates:

> We also must be able to adapt and accommodate our behaviour to strangers if we are going to be successful in our interactions with them.

(Gudykunst, 2004, p. 264)

Gudykunst (2004) states that code-switching is a common tool used to accommodate strangers. Robinson (1972) and Argyle (2007) propose that code-switching might be able to reduce anxiety. Anxiety, according to Gudykunst and Young (1997) and Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), is a general term for several psychological and physiological disorders that may cause fear, uneasiness, tension, apprehension and worry when communicating with others. Therefore, the ability of the principals to adapt to the situation by switching styles has to be seen as an effort to facilitate quick rapport to achieve effective communication.

Organisational and leadership scholars such as Covey (2004), DuBrin (2010) and Lussier and Achua (2010) believe that behaviour flexibility is also part of leadership. The ability of a leader to adapt to the situation may promote good interaction that fosters positive relationships. Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes indicates that the principals' communication styles may be significantly affected by their leadership roles. Tasks and responsibilities as a school leader may shape the way they communicate and convey themselves. Therefore, all three principals presented similar styles.

The results appear to show that the principals are friendly, attentive, open, relaxed and animated. The data may be categorised into directive and supportive through the lens of leadership communication style. Based on Norton's (1978) communicator style, Johnson (2003) categorises open and animated as directive style, and attentive, friendly and relaxed as supportive style. However, Norton

(1983) had concluded that his nine component styles actually reflect a single continuum ranging from a non-directive communicative style to a directive communicative style. The non-directive style refers to the friendly and attentive communicator who tends to encourage, accommodate and acknowledge others. At the other end of the continuum, the directive style shows the dominant and contentious communicator who often talks and takes charge of interactions.

The directive styles are characterised by a leader being talkative and at the heart of the communication. A leader takes charge of telling others what is expected of them, setting rules and procedures, scheduling the work to be done, giving specific guidance, making others in the group understand and maintaining definite standards of performance. The supportive styles, on the other hand, are characterised by a friendly and approachable leader who always shows concern about others' interests and needs. They are also very supportive, helpful, patient, considerate, and treat others as equals (Johnson, 2003; Norton, 1983).

Reece and Brandt (1993) propose a similar concept to categorise leadership communication styles. They emphasise two dimensions of human communication style that are visualised through two vertical continua, namely the dominance and sociability continua. The first continuum begins by low dominance, categorised as a tendency to be supportive and accommodating at one end, and by high dominance people who frequently initiate demands, are more assertive and tend to control others at the other end. The same concept applies to the sociability continuum they defined as the tendency to seek social relationships with others. The continuum is anchored by low sociability and ends with high sociability. People with high sociability usually express their feelings freely, openly and are talkative, whereas those low on the continuum tend to control their feelings and are passive in social relationships.

Based on the characteristics discussed above, all three principals fall into these two main categories of leadership communication styles. The principals may use a directive style when they are trying to explain and tell the parents what

to do and how to do to improve their participation. They are also setting rules and giving guidance how to assist the child's learning at home. At this point, the principals may appear to become dominant when they take charge and control the conversation. However, the styles they use to communicate show that they are verbally, non-verbally and para-verbally friendly, approachable and supportive so they also fulfil the criteria of supportive style.

Observations, interviews and field notes data also indicate that attentive is the most frequent style employed by the principals. This shows that they are not only telling but listening. Analysis of observation data shows that the principals tend to listen and show interest in what the parents saying. They also display empathy and deliberately react in such a way that the other knows that they are being listened to, proving that they are a good listener. Norton (1983) indicates that the attentive style is not only a matter of showing interest in what others are saying, but another form of encouragement to others to participate in the interaction process. Therefore, the willingness of the principals to listen might not only indicate a positive insight that they are willing to share but show encouragement for the parents to make suggestions. Being attentive involves listening to others carefully, so the parents feel valued and appreciated by the principals.

Analysis of observation data reveals that all three principals may benefit from the conversation. The ability of the principals to create a positive environment such as showing support and encouragement, even when faced with communication difficulties with the parents, might have a positive impact. As outsiders, the parents may have fresh views that might be useful to the school. Hendry (1996) points out that:

> The important point is to get an outside view of how the school looks from a parent perspective; does it look inclusive or distancing.

(Hendry, 1996, p. 163)

Therefore, the parents' views are suggested to be an important input for school improvement. However, this has to be associated with the principal's willingness to accept the parents' suggestions and to make change. Analysis of observation and interview data indicates that all the principals are willing to listen and ready to make change, if necessary. The core of every meeting with parents is to discuss the children and school, and this may be seen through Mr. Law's interaction when he accepts Mr. Chong's suggestion to provide the parents with the latest progress of the school.

Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes reveals that all three principals actually face communication difficulties with parents. Even if in the interview and field notes Mr. Law and Mr. Ali appear to deny that they have any problems, their interviews show that actually they do. They admitted that they faced communication difficulties with certain parents, especially those from the lower socioeconomic groups. Mr. Law said that he often faced communication problems with 'fearsome' parents and Mr. Ali also admitted having a similar problem with elderly Chinese heritage parents unable to understand Malay. However, Mr. Law did not experience serious communication problems with them as he was able to speak Chinese.

In the interviews Mr. Law and Mr. Ali also said that they did not face any difficulties with Indian parents, as most of them are able to communicate in the national language or English. However, in the interview Mr. Samy acknowledged that he faced difficulties in communicating with parents, especially from the lower socioeconomic elderly Chinese and Indian heritage group parents. The elderly Chinese heritage parents are mostly unable to understand either Malay or English so he has to use teachers as interpreters to solve their problems. Most elderly Indian heritage parents are able to understand the national language, but they tended to use their mother tongue and so he often faced difficulties in translating the educational jargon into correct Tamil language.

6.2.2 Parents' Communication Styles

Observations of six parents' communication with the principal show that the parents presented at least seven styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, attentive, animated, dominant and contentious. The styles are varied and also can be categorised into three main categories of daily social conversational styles, namely passive, assertive and aggressive (Hermes, 1998; McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2009; Murray, 2009).

Passive style is associated with compliant and submissive behaviour. The individual with a passive style talks little and praises others. Those who adopt this style may often put their personal beliefs aside in order to support others. Mdm. Murni and Mr. Ahmad from Katara and Seri Secondary School, for example, tended to talk less in the group when their counterparts were often speaking. In the interview Mdm. Murni stated that she chose to be attentive and listen more than speak because she found Mr. Chong quite aggressive, as he repeatedly interrupted. She further explained that Mr. Chong always wanted to talk and sometimes interrupted her conversation with the principal and made her withdraw from the conversation to make way for him to talk. A similar problem is faced by Mr. Ahmad in the Seri Secondary School, when he insisted in the interview that he usually had a good conversation with the principal but during this conversation he had had to allow Mr. Chandran to talk, as he found his colleague also interrupted.

Analysis of observation data shows that Mdm. Murni and Mr. Ahmad spent most of the time listening to others. Analysis of the individuals' styles reveals that both parents spent the highest percentage of their time being attentive, compared to three other presented styles, as shown in Table 6.1. They may have talked less, especially Mr. Ahmad who spent most of the time paying attention and listening to others.

Table 6.1

Mr. Ahmad and Mdm. Murni: Percentage of Communicative Style
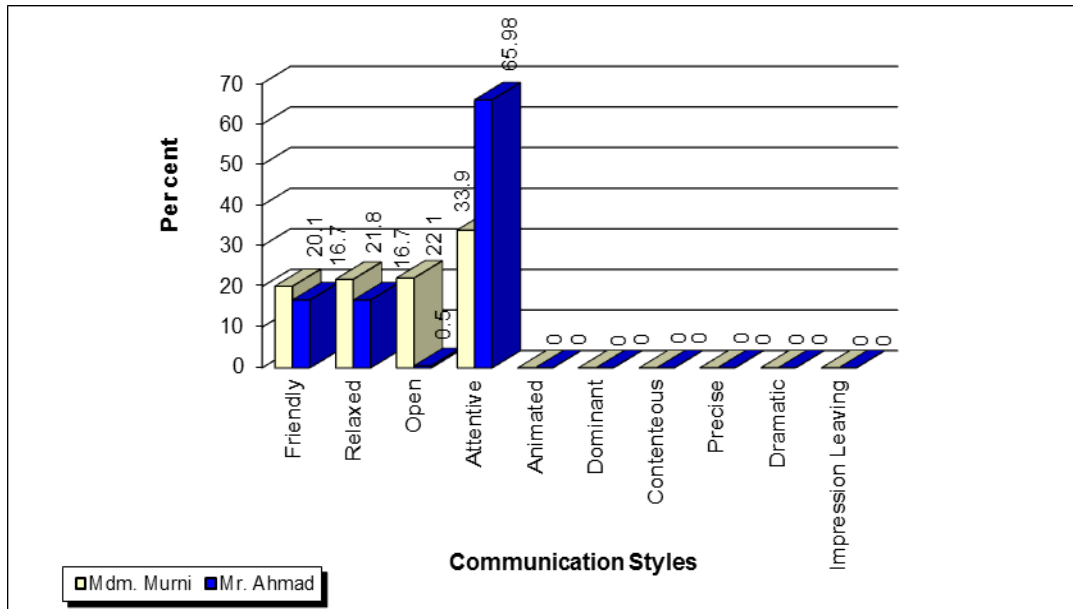
Hermes (1998) and Murray (2009) state that individuals with a passive style try to avoid misunderstanding and conflict. This may be seen in Mdm. Murni and Mr. Ahmad, who show similar characteristics to avoid confrontation and disagreement with their counterparts by frequently nodding their head. Observation data show that both Mdm. Murni and Mr. Ahmad often used nods to show agreement, encouragement and support to others. In fact, Mdm. Murni always smiled and sometimes laughed in conjunction with eye contact with both Mr. Law and Mr. Chong to show her friendliness. McKay, Davis and Fanning (2009) suggest that people with a passive style always smile to show friendliness and to praise others. However, Hermes (1998) argues that people with a passive style never share their true feelings. She said that:

> We don't share our true feelings, wants, and needs, which makes us emotionally dishonest. We may think that our behaviour doesn't cause any harm − after all, we are doing everything possible not to upset anyone − but we're mistaken.
>
> (Hermes, 1998, p. 24)

Hermes' (1998) views of sharing true feeling also reflect Mr. Ahmad's communication style. In conversation he makes less eye contact and seldom smiles or laughs. He also often stares at others when they begin to speak. However, he occasionally nods his head to show encouragement and support. Analysis of observation and field notes data shows that he made less eye contact and always looked down and away throughout the conversation. He also often nodded his head without mutual eye contact. His actions may have had a negative impact. The purpose of his nodding may have been to show encouragement and attention, but using nods without mutual eye contact may have sometimes distracted Mr. Chandran and Mr. Ali. Mr. Chandran tried to use a louder voice and variety of body movements to get his attention. Mr. Ali not only used a higher voice, but frequently used his name to gain his attention.

Mr. Chandran's and Mr. Ali's actions reflected their possible doubt about the extent of Mr. Ahmad's attentiveness, as his physical actions such as eye contact did not show that he paid attention to others. His communication behaviour and style might be seen as not being meaningful, as people normally use nods followed by mutual eye contact to show encouragement. Analysis of his style shows Mr. Ahmad may have been indicating his dissatisfaction and disappointment with Mr. Chandran, who frequently interrupted his conversation with the principal, and in his interview Mr. Ahmad did state that Mr. Chandran's interruptions affected his contribution to the discussion. Mr. Ahmad observed that people who constantly interrupt others are destructive and may be perceived as inconsiderate or rude in Malay culture. Furthermore, in the interview he noted that before he had always had a good conversation with the principal; this suggests that the style that he showed during the conversation may not be his usual way of communication.

However, Mr. Ali and Mr. Chandran may have sensed his dissatisfaction and thus tried to encourage his participation by calling his name. Mr. Chandran may have realised that his interruptions might hurt his counterpart's feelings and tried to prevent them by giving more opportunity to Mr. Ahmad to talk. These

communication behaviours recall Reece and Brandt's (1993) suggestion that a person with low sociability is more reserved and formal in their social relationships. The suggestion is strongly supported by Hermes (1998), Murray (2009), and McKay, Davis and Fanning (2009), who believe that people with a passive communication style are often facially expressionless in response to a message from others.

The opposite of a passive style is an aggressive style. The person with an aggressive style often puts their feelings, rights, and needs first. Murray (2009) states that:

> They may protect their rights at the expense of others and feel a need to come out 'on top' in a conversation at all costs.

(Murray, 2009, p. 274)

According to Murray (2009), an aggressive communication style involves standing up for personal rights and directly expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in a way that is emotionally honest but may violate the rights of others (Hermes, 1998; McKay, Davis & Fanning, 2009). Thus, aggressive communicators are frequently verbally, para-verbally and non-verbally abusive. These characteristics belong to Mr. Chong when he shows aggressiveness during the conversation with Mdm. Murni and Mr. Law in Katara Secondary School.

In the interview, Mr. Chong said that he believed that he was being assertive in the conversation because he wanted to express his feelings about critical issues related to partnerships that had to be solved if the school intended to gain more support. He stated that the time constraints and lack of opportunities to meet the principal formally also encouraged him to take the opportunity to speak his mind. He strongly believed that being assertive was the most effective way of gaining attention.

However, analysis of observation data shows that he is not only assertive, but also aggressive. Analysis of his communication style shows that he presented at least seven styles, including dominant and contentious, categorised by Reece and Brandt (1993) and Norton (1978; 1983) on their continuum as directive communication. Furthermore, he was not a good listener. Observation data revealing that he had only 0.88 per cent attentive style shows that he paid little attention to others. This scenario may be seen especially when Mdm. Murni was speaking. In fact, he occasionally interrupted with a new topic to get attention when the principal paid attention to Mdm. Murni. Analysis of observation data shows that he interrupted the interaction on purpose, as he displayed this same behaviour when the principal next paid attention to Mdm. Murni. Observation data indicates that he not only interrupted six times, but was aggressive in order to appear in the right. He openly expressed negative feelings about travelling by ship to Mdm. Murni, reflecting that he had no concern for others' feelings. As Hermes (1998) points out:

> We don't show concern for the feelings, wants, and needs of others, but we demand that ours be heard and met. We will do almost anything to get what we want, even if it means controlling and manipulating others.

(Hermes, 1998, p. 24)

McKay, Davis and Fanning (2009) and Murray (2009) further explain that someone with an aggressive style is not only verbally but non-verbally and para-verbally criticising and attacking others. Analysis of observation data also indicates that Mr. Chong occasionally spoke in a louder, demanding voice with overbearing gestures. Analysis of his tone of voice also indicates that he never used a soft voice, always maintaining a persistently louder voice to express his feelings, from the beginning to the end of the conversation. Occasionally, he also made piercing eye contact and stared at others, resulting in his counterparts feeling uneasy with his behaviour. Observation data shows that Mdm. Murni, who

sat opposite Mr. Chong, became a target and may have felt uncomfortable, as she glanced at Mr. Law and her child's report card to avoid eye contact with Mr. Chong. Mr. Chong's communication style reflects that style may be significantly influenced by the topic under discussion.

Analysis of observation data indicates that parents who are highly involved with the school's PTA show interest in certain issues related to the PTA. They appeared to dominate the topics of school funding and learning support programmes by speaking frequently and tending to interrupt others during discussion of these topics. They also showed less encouragement by giving others fewer opportunities to speak. Analysis of observation data indicates that some parents tended to control the topic when they felt more knowledgeable than others. They might have felt more confident, especially as the issue was related to their tasks and responsibilities. Mdm. Devaki, for example, dominated the topic and issue of parenting. She started the discussion; in fact, she interrupted and started to talk about the topic before the principal opened the issue for discussion. She tended to speak frequently and take a long time explaining and arguing about the importance of parents in educating children.

Analysis of observation data reveals that some parents such as Mr. Phang, Mdm. Devaki and Mr. Chandran may be also categorised as assertive communicators. Assertive is a style of a person who states their ideas, opinions and feelings without violating the basic rights of others. Reece and Brandt (1993) and Norton (1978; 1983) placed the assertive style at the centre of their continuum. People who adopt this style have both directive and non-directive communication styles, but their actions and expressions fit the spoken words. They might be firm but well-mannered, as they respect themselves and others (Murray, 2009). McKay, Davis and Fanning (2009) and Murray (2009) indicate that a person with an assertive style expresses their feelings in an honest, direct way, but does not allow others take to advantage of them.

223

Assertion is not an easy way to communicate, as it is situated between passive and aggressive. In real world communication, it is actually quite difficult to maintain respect for others' rights when someone stands up strongly for their own. Mr. Chong, for example, claimed that he was being assertive, but analysis of his style shows that his communication characteristics were aggressive. He began a very friendly and relaxed conversation, but his style changed rapidly when the principal started to discuss issues related to his interests. He also became more defensive when arguing, frequently disagreeing and being quick to challenge others.

Brandt (1979) and Norton (1978; 1983) classified as contentious the communication characteristics of a person with a tendency to be argumentative or overtly hostile towards others. In this context, Mr. Chong may have believed that he was advocating for his own rights and needs without realising that he may have hurt his counterparts' feelings. There is no clear line between assertive and aggressive communication, and it also depends on people's interpretation.

Observation data show that parents who are assertive may tend to become aggressive, depending on factors such as the topic and their counterparts' communication behaviour. The way Mr. Chandran communicated with Mr. Ahmad and Mr. Ali in Seri Secondary School, for example, gave a negative impression to his counterpart, Mr. Ahmad, and in the interview Mr. Ahmad indeed acknowledged that he has a problem with Mr. Chandran's always interrupting his interactions with the principal. However, as the principal, Mr. Ali views Mr. Chandran from a different perspective. In the interview he said he believed that Mr. Chandran was very committed as he contributed constructive ideas. Analysis of the parent observation data indicates that these assumptions might be valid, as Mr. Chandran shows a higher score in attentive, relaxed and friendly styles, categorising him as assertive.

Table 6.2

Mr. Chandran's and Mr. Chong's Communication Styles
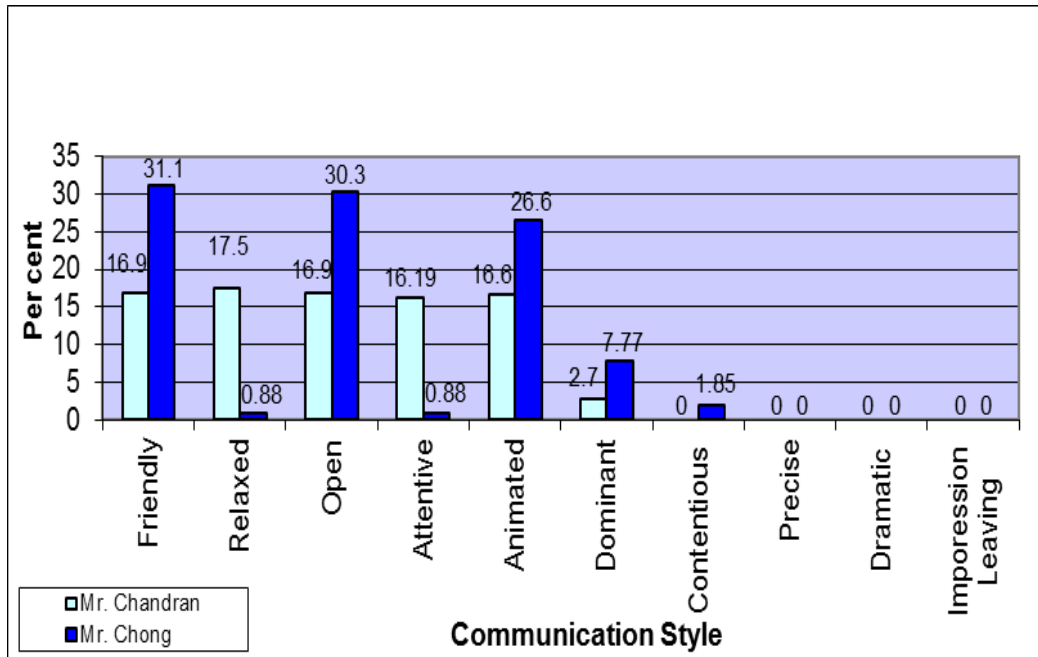
Table 6.2 above shows that Mr. Chandran and Mr. Chong had different ways of speaking. In general, Mr. Chandran had a more consistent style than Mr. Chong. He showed average percentages in the friendly, relaxed, open and attentive styles. He also showed a low percentage in the dominant style and showed no sign of a contentious style. Furthermore, observation data also indicates that Mr. Chandran did not make any challenging statements or employ aggressive and defensive arguing. He was also willing to listen and encouraged others by being willing to lend a hand to help Mr. Ahmad organise a cultural night to boost school funds. Mr. Chandran interrupted less than Mr. Chong. Observation data indicates that he tended to pay attention to others and frequently used nodding to show support. However, he possibly took the opportunity to interrupt when his counterpart hesitated.

The discussion of six parents' conversation with the principals reflects that parents are not limited to a single style. The style may change from time to time from non-directive, such as a friendly and relaxed style, to a directive style such as dominant and contentious. These may be categorised into three main everyday conversation styles, namely passive, assertive and aggressive along a continuum, dependent on the topic under discussion and the feedback from others during the conversation (Brandt, 1979; Norton, 1978; 1983). Analysis of observation data reveals that the parents tended to become passive and talk less when they were less knowledgeable or less interested in the topic, and more when they were interested in the topic. In fact, at times they turned aggressive and defensive when others gave negative feedback to their suggestions.

6.2.3 Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Level and Communication Styles

Analysis of observation data on the three principals' conversation with parents of a different ethnic origin to their own shows that ethnicity apparently does not affect the principals' communication styles. However, ethnicity may intrinsically affect the relationships to some degree. The same ethnicity may promote quick rapport; all the principals acknowledged that they felt comfortable with parents of their own ethnic origin. They stated that with parents of their own ethnic origin it was not only easier to communicate, but that they gained more support. They believed that the full support that comes from parents of the same ethnic heritage group had a strong link with the phenomenon of 'natural tendency'. According to the principals, this is the mutual attraction resulting from sharing a culture. People who share the same culture may have similarity in most aspects of their life. Communication is a symbolic interpretive transactional process of people creating and shared meanings. Therefore, sharing a similar culture such as using the same language and dialect might not only overcome language and cultural barriers but may gain rapport quickly. The degree of lack of prejudice and suspicion between the principals and parents may also encourage mutual understanding and relationships. Sociologists and intercultural scholars such as

Ferrante (2011), Jandt (1995), Kendall (2010) and Plummer and Macionis (2008) indicate that prejudice is a prejudgement or misassumption made about someone. Andersen and Taylor (2008) further explain that:

> The prejudiced person will have negative attitudes about a member of an out-group (any other than one's own) and positive attitudes about someone simply because he or she is in one's in-group (any group one considers one's own).
>
> (Andersen & Taylor, 2008, p. 277)

The statement reflects that people tend to support their own in-group rather than an out-group. Therefore, the principals who intended to obtain support from out-group parents may have to adapt to the parents' culture in order to increase mutual understanding and support. For example, the effort made by the principals to use the local Malay, Chinese and Indian dialects was an attempt to reduce the cultural gap. They believed that using the same language and dialect would lead to an increased sense of belonging. Mr. Ali, for example, tried to use local Chinese dialects with elderly Chinese heritage parents. A similar approach was used by Mr. Samy and Mr. Law when they used the local Malay and Chinese dialects for the purpose of strengthening relationships and to make parents feel at home. The approaches used by the principals showed that ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status may in reality significantly affect the principals' communication style, especially with those of a different ethnic origin.

Sociologists such as Anderson and Taylor (2008) relate the 'natural tendency' referred to by Mr. Ali and Mr. Samy to the concept of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a result of the observation that most people are more comfortable and prefer to be accompanied by people from their own culture, such as sharing similar values and behaving in similar ways. They argue that:

> Any group that sees the world only from its own point of view is engaging in ethnocentrism…. Ethnocentrism creates a strong sense of group solidarity and group superiority, but it also discourages intercultural or inter-group understanding.
>
> (Andersen & Taylor, 2008, p. 67)

The argument reflects on people's tendency to judge each other, based on ethnic, racial, and religious markers, although ethnic prejudice might give to negative implications. Both Mr. Ali and Mr. Samy share this tendency. Anderson and Taylor (2008) also postulated that ethnocentrism can be extreme, as it may lead to prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and racism.

Parents may give more support to a principal of the same ethnic group as they might feel comfortable sharing a culture. Most intercultural scholars believe that people tend to support those of their own ethnic origin because they feel secure in sharing a common culture. Therefore, parents of the same ethnic group may give more support than others as they feel at ease dealing with the principal of the same ethnic group (Gudykunst, 2004; Jandt, 1995; Samovar & Porter, 1994).

In many circumstances, people may try to avoid strangers, especially people from different cultural backgrounds, to avoid anxiety (Gudykunst, 2004; Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Therefore, it is clear that parents of different ethnic backgrounds, especially those with communication difficulties, might keep their distance and try to avoid the principals as they feel unease and anxiety. Parents such as the Chinese heritage hawkers may show a reluctance to become involved as they are unable to communicate well in the national language. Mr. Samy said that 'they have a phobia about coming to school'. Mr. Law even goes so far as to say that he labels those parents as 'fearsome' families as they always try to avoid school due to the language barrier. Furthermore, Gudykunst (2004, p. 9) points out that 'how we transmit and interpret message is influenced by our life experience'. This may reflect that communication with those with a dissimilar life experience and culture is always a risk, as the possibility of creating misunderstanding is considerably higher. Therefore, parents from different ethnic groups, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds may withdraw as they may feel less comfortable than parents from similar ethnic groups.

Ethnicity may affect the principals' assumptions. However, analysis of observation data reveals a contradiction. The data show that none of the principals physically presented any sign of distancing with parents of different ethnic origin. The principals may make certain assumptions about their relationships with the parents, as they may believe that the parents of their own ethnic origin give them more support than others without having definite proof. This may affect their perceptions and relationships with parents. Moran, Harris and Moran (2007) remark that:

> The assumptions are made without realization. Correct assumptions facilitate communication, but incorrect lead to misunderstandings, and miscommunication often results.

> (Moran, Harris & Moran, 2007, p. 83)

Assumptions might be in the form of predictions or presumptions made by the principals without concrete evidence and may affect the relationships with parents. Furthermore, Daft (2007, p. 135) points out that 'assumption can be dangerous because people tend to accept them as 'truth''. Therefore, it is suggested that principals avoid making assumptions about parents as it may create more negative than positive impact and may also affect their relationships.

In the field notes and interviews, all three parents explain that they felt very comfortable with their principal of a different ethnic origin. Mdm. Murni, Mr. Chandran and Mr. Phang, for example, stated that they felt at ease as they were very friendly and approachable. Analysis of the verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal of observations data also reveals that all three parents were welcomed by the principal. Table 6.3 below shows in detail the uses of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal activities with the principal.

Table 6.3

Observation Data on Mdm. Murni, Mr. Chandran and Mr. Phang: Percentage of Verbal, Non-verbal and Para-verbal Communication Elements in the Conversation with Principals
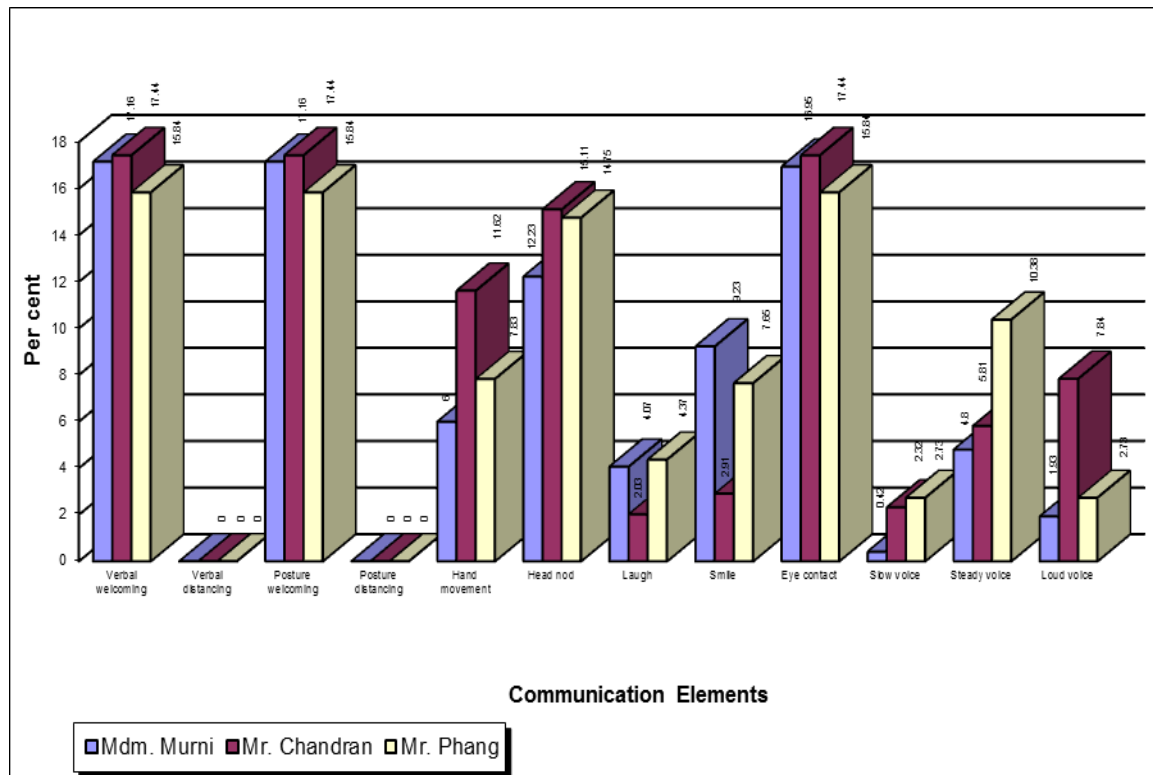
Cross-cultural studies of the kind carried out on facial expressions propose that there are universal patterns of gazing, such as a frequent, mutual eye contact and smile, that are associated with feelings to convey closeness (Bull, 1983). Argyle (1988), Argyle and Cook (1976) and Jandt (1995) found that intimacy has a close relationship with the extent of eye contact, smiling and physical proximity. Gaze also may be associated with attentiveness. For example, Mdm. Murni and Mr. Chandran not only presented a welcome verbally and by their posture, but made good eye contact and often smiled to indicate physically that they were comfortable with the principals and the conversation environment. Mr. Phang had the highest proportion of a steady voice. He had a consistent tempo, showing that he was not nervous and was relaxed. Furthermore, the way he sat and leant

towards the principal indicated that he was interested in the conversation. Bull (1983) and Argyle (1988) suggest that an average tempo and a steady voice indicate emotional stability and freedom from anxiety or nervousness.

Analysis of the main indicators of verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal data reveals that all the principals showed positive utterances, posture, gestures, facial expressions, gaze and tone of voice with the parents. The observation data and field notes also show that principals welcomed parents, showing no signs of distancing from the parents.

Analysis of observation data also indicates that the principals demonstrated a welcoming posture during their greeting and conversation with the parents. For example, during the greeting they stood closer to the parents. Likewise, in the sitting position during the conversation, all the principals chose to be close to the parents. They maintained a personal distance and occasionally leaned forward towards parents when they started talking to show interest (Argyle, 1988; Bull, 1983; Pease & Pease, 2004). In fact, the observation data also shows that Mr. Law tried to move his seat position to be closer to Mdm. Murni when he started the conversation with her with a soft and steady voice. Mr. Samy chose to sit in a closed circle position, side by side with Mr. Phang and Mdm. Devaki at a 'lower handshake' distance to show his closeness and friendliness with the parents. Mr. Ali tended to use his hand to touch Mr. Chandran's shoulder after shaking hands to show his closeness, and he kept no distance with the parents of a different ethnic origin. Argyle (1988), Fast (1994), Jandt (1995), and Pease and Pease (2004) indicate that the use of distance varies between diverse cultures but, in general, close proximity with a soft voice usually indicates closeness and the use of gesture contact such as a brief touch on the shoulder also shows a person enjoys close relationships, and this enhances social influence.

Observation data also shows that the principals used some head nodding in their conversation. This indicates that the principals are comfortable showing

231

interest and agreement (Argyle, 1988). Interviews with parents from a different ethnic origin indicate that the principals do not show any signs of distancing with them. Mdm. Murni, Mr. Chandran and Mr. Phang, at the three different schools, concluded that the principals were good school leaders as they always demonstrated a positive attitude with parents. The principals were not only polite and approachable, but willing to talk to parents regardless of their socioeconomic background.

These comments explicitly reflect that the parents have a very positive perception of the principals, but implicitly this shows that the parents are sensitive to the issue of how school deals with them. How they speak is based on their life experience. They might have had bad experiences when the principal did not treat them equally in the past. In the interviews and field notes, for example, Mr. Chong and Mdm. Murni indicated that they had had communication problems in the past with the principal from Katara Secondary School. Both parents expressed that the principal did not welcome them, verbally or non-verbally, to school by continuing at her work in the presence of parents in her office, and this made them feel uncomfortable and disappointed; they withdrew their support from the school.

This problem occurs in Malaysian schools, but has also become an issue in schools around the world. Previous studies conducted by Bulach, Pickett and Boothe (1998), Georgia-Professional Standard Commission Atlanta United States (1985) and Martin (1990) have proved that some principals are not sincere and sensitive to parents. They have been said frequently to show that they do not welcome parents by showing that they are busy with their work in the presence of visitors, their lack of eye contact during conversation and a reluctance to accept parents' suggestions. This issue is serious as some principals may observe parents as a threat and a source of possible criticism (Gestwicki, 2010). This is particularly true for some school leaders, especially novice school principals, who fear their position may not be accepted by parents. Consequently, they attempt to create a distance from parents by minimising parents' involvement with school.

Evidence in the literature suggests that some principals choose to exclude by adopting one-way communication (Bledinger & Snipes, 1993; Foskett & Lumby, 2003; Robbins & Alvy, 1995; Slaughter & Kuehne, 1998).

The difficulty faced by principals and parents in communicating effectively reflects that a cultural and socioeconomic barrier is still an issue in these three schools. Analysis of interview data with the principals as discussed in Chapter 4 reflects that parents' socioeconomic class might have an effect on principals' communication styles. All three principals acknowledged that they have to use a different style with parents from a different socioeconomic background to their own. They explained that they have to use simple, concise and direct language. Sometimes they also have to be more flexible and try to adopt and adapt to the ways parents speak by accepting their dialects, slang and accent, including using *bahasa Melayu Pasar,* and this may affect their style. Mr. Samy, for example, points out that 'my communication styles might change when speaking to the parents from a different ethnic group as well as socioeconomic level'. The principal added that especially with lower socioeconomic status parents it might change; he has to use *bahasa Melayu Pasar* with Chinese heritage hawkers and labourers to make it possible to communicate. Mr. Ali and Mr. Law use the same approach, but they also mentioned that adjusting body language and rephrasing with a clear direct language might be helpful to close communication gaps that may deter understanding.

Berger (2004) suggests that low-income and minority families are those who may need more help and support from school. They may feel inferior to school personnel and intimidated by the environment. Therefore, the actions taken by the principals to increase understanding through communication flexibility, as well as considering their language deficiency in the relationships, may be considered as an attempt and effort to increase positive attitudes and self-confidence among lower socioeconomic level parents. Gestwicki (2010) views the efforts made by the principal or teacher, such as trying to be attentive and speaking in a way to increase understanding, as an essential part of valuing parents. The initiative may

increase parental support and involvement. Parents may increase their knowledge about school and children's learning and develop some familiarity with the school officials. She further added that:

> Improved interaction skills help parents feel more effective with their children and more effective in the parenting role. Parents perceive their own role as important. Experience in leadership skills and decision making, along with fulfilling social interaction with other adults, all add to parents' positive self-image.

> (Gestwicki, p. 140)

All three principals in the interview explained that they do not face difficulties in communicating with parents from their own ethnic heritage. However, they also acknowledged that they feel uncomfortable using their mother tongue or local ethnic dialects in the school building. Furthermore, the principals in the interview also acknowledged that using their own mother tongue or local dialects, slang and accents may increase the possibility of parents using inappropriate words that can be considered indecent and inappropriate in a polite context. The use of swear words is a way of venting anger or resentment. Some parents in the category, according to the principals, may also use 'bad languages' or 'rude words' such as swearing as a way of speaking. In fact, they might use such words more frequently to show anger and disagreement. The principals believed that swearing has becomes a part of their culture, especially for those lower income families who stay in the resettlement area, resulting in most of the parents using such ways of speaking even in school.

Rogers (2007) points out that school staff might feel uncomfortable speaking to parents who often use 'bad' language, as it is not appropriate for the occasion and place. He states that:

> As school principal it can be frustrating and unsettling to have an angry parent swearing and threatening….

> (Rogers, p. 80)

234

Rogers (2007) added that parents' aggression and being rude in school might psychologically affect principals' communication behaviours and this may indirectly affect their styles. He suggests that the principal may have to communicate in a calm and relaxed way, even when facing an unpleasant situation with aggressive and 'rude' parents. Principals also may need to let the parents 'run out of steam' before tuning into their concerns to continue the meeting (p. 80). Rogers (2007) suggests creating a positive communication environment such as creating a calm and relaxed atmosphere to make it possible to continue communicating with the parents. This might not be a problem for the three principals. All mentioned in interview that they are quite experienced in handling problematic parents. Furthermore, as school leaders, principals are also role models. They might try to avoid conflict by offering parents compassion to create a calm and respectful communication environment. However, bad relationship experiences with the parents might affect their emotions and feelings.

Wood (2010) points out that an individual's emotions have an impact on interpersonal relationships. She adds that:

> Words, thoughts, and emotions affect each other in overlapping ways: What we feel affects how we communicate and how we think about ourselves, others, and our relationships. What we think influences how we feel and communicate. How we communicate shapes how we and our partners think and feel about relationships, ourselves, and each other.
>
> (Wood, p. 311)

The suggestion is that emotions may have a negative impact on an individual's communication. Thus, emotions may influence the ability to send and receive a message successfully. This also indirectly causes misinterpretation or failure to hear that may also affect the principals' communication styles.

Mr. Law explained that some parents from a lower socioeconomic level sometimes unintentionally use a swear word as a way of expressing their feelings, which makes him feel uncomfortable and affects the way he

communicates. He added that 'Some of them are good but their appearance… I mean… their behaviour when they deal with you. Their voice especially… they talk very loud… face and the gesture movements might be annoying and make you feel uncomfortable'. Mr. Law's statement is also supported by Mr. Ali. The principal also states, 'I will be very careful dealing with those angry parents… especially those who are from a low socioeconomic background'. Mr. Ali, from another perspective, believes that lower socioeconomic parents may have language deficiency. Therefore, they may use inappropriate words within the context as they may use a direct translation approach from their mother tongue in their communication with school, in some degree affecting the meaning, which may also have a negative impact on the way he communicates.

The principals in the interview also explained that they do not face similar problems with middle and higher socioeconomic level parents. However, they acknowledged that communicating with the parents is quite challenging and this may affect the way they communicate. They explained that the parents are too demanding as they come to school with complaints reflecting unreasonable expectations. Mr. Law points out that 'normally they will come with a complaint and they will never come to school to say thank you…. How many people will come and say thank you to you... Usually they will come with a lot of complaints or they want us to clarify something… so they will come forward'. Willems, De Maesschalck, Derese and De Meseseneer (2005) worked on 12 research papers and meta-analyses and concluded that individual communication styles varied by social class. They found that individuals from a higher social class have an active communication style. They tend to ask questions, exhibit emotions, feelings and express their own opinion, as well as arguing, more than individuals of a lower social group. As a consequence, individuals from a higher class receive more information than individuals of a lower social class.

The conclusion drawn by Willems et al. (2005) indicates that individuals with interactions with higher classes, including the middle classes, may communicate more information since they might be able to share their experiences. From a

leadership viewpoint, the principals may have to see the presence of middle and higher socioeconomic parents as an opportunity rather than a threat. The principals may have to see the challenges from the parents as opportunities to share experiences to develop good relationships with parents. Many educational scholars such as Angelides, Theophanous and Leigh (2006), Berger (2004) and Epstein (1986; 1995; 2001) conclude that feedback from parents is central to school improvement. Therefore, the principals may have to see the complaints and views from parents of different culture and socioeconomic background as useful resources to design strategies to boost the relationships between school and parents for a school improvement.

Interviews with all three principals also acknowledged that meeting and communicating with parents is central to maintaining a positive approach dealing with children's learning. However, reaching mutual understanding with all parents is not an easy task. Parents are diverse in their sociocultural and economic backgrounds. Therefore, principals try to use different approaches and styles to different parents depending on their socioeconomic background in order to reach a common and mutual understanding based on the issues being discussed. They added they might struggle to communicate in order to comprehend certain parents. They also acknowledged that the use of body language might be helpful to make it possible to communicate and to capture the content of interaction. The use of teachers from the same ethnic origin as the parent also might be useful to reduce misinterpretation. This demonstrates that the concept of similarity for effective communications, as suggested by Berlo (1960), is apparent in the Malaysian multicultural context.

The evidence from observation data is that all three principals show no sign of an uncomfortable and distancing manner during interaction and communication with parents of different ethnic heritage, even if they believed that parents of their own ethnic heritage give them more support than others. Evidence from the interview data with all three principals also clearly indicates that they used different communication styles with parents from different

socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, a conclusion can be drawn that the impact of socioeconomic class on the principals' communication style appears to be greater than that of ethnicity. However, this does not mean that the parents of different sociocultures or ethnicity are unable to communicate effectively with each other. In a multicultural society such as Malaysia, principals are able to overcome difficulties through experience. Both the immigrant Chinese and Indian communities were established in Malaysia during the British colonial rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, some had reached the country previously during the Malacca Empire of the early fifteenth century. The process of assimilation in multicultural societies may gradually lead to the Malaysian culture suggested by Chen and Starosta (1998) as a third culture, where all the different cultures in the country may reach a point of mutual understanding.

On the long journey to reach this point of mutual understanding, the principals as leaders may also realise their position as a role models. To display their prejudice visibly to parents may affect the reputation of their leadership and their school's image. Andersen and Taylor (2008, p. 277) suggest that 'virtually no-one is free of prejudice'. In fact, Gudykunst (2004, p. 135) goes so far as to argue that 'we all are prejudiced to some degree. We also are all racist, sexist, ageists, and so forth to some degree'. Therefore, the principals try to minimise the degree of prejudice or irrational suspicion by presenting positive words, gesture and posture to show a warm welcome in order to maintain their relationships with parents.

The principals might be able to conceal their prejudice through physical appearances. However, their negative assumptions that their own ethnic group would give them more support than others, and stereotyping lower socioeconomic parents as 'troublemakers' without definite evidence, may negatively impact on their relationships. Decisions based on beliefs rather than facts may lead to biased judgements. Therefore, it is suggested that the principals make decisions based on rationality and fact and avoid making assumptions about parents on the basis of socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

6.2.4 Prior Knowledge and Communication Styles

Analysis of field notes and interviews with the principals shows that all three principals indicated that prior knowledge about parents' background and topic of discussion is important in planning any communication with them. Mr. Ali said that the information about parents' background is important as general guidance. In fact, Mr. Law and Mr. Samy go so far as to explain that this information is the key to smooth communication that will encourage good rapport and contribute to effective communication. This is in line with Berlo's (1960) suggestion that knowledge is one of the five important ingredients that apply to the source and receiver for a successful communication. According to Berlo (1960), the more informed about the source's and receiver's background and topic of conversation, the better the ability to communicate. Berlo's (1960) suggestions are supported by most organisational scholars such as Gudykunst (2004), who places great emphasis on the importance of prior knowledge in reducing communication gaps in order to reach personal similarities in communicating with strangers.

The principals described that searching for prior knowledge about parents is an attempt to gather related information to find the most appropriate way to communicate. Gudykunst (2004) points out that prior knowledge is essential to manage uncertainty. He said that:

> Managing our uncertainty requires that we be able to describe strangers' behaviour, select appropriate interpretations of their messages, accurately predict their behaviour, and able to explain their behaviour accurately.

(Gudykunst, 2004, p. 268)

All six parent participants explained that information about the principal's background, especially information about their work experience, is essential as it may provide guidance on how to communicate appropriately and effectively with him.

Some parents such as Mdm. Murni, Mr. Ahmad and Mr. Chandran said that information is also crucial for setting the limits to the conversation in order to communicate in appropriate manner without mentioning certain issues sensitive to the principals. They added that touching on personal issues such as their bad experience with the administration in the past may not only hurt the principal's feelings but affect the relationship.

Berlo (1960) suggests that the more knowledge we gain about the audience, the more effective will be the communication. Gudykunst (2004) explains that prior knowledge of strangers is important because the information may provide direction on how to communicate and how to interpret the messages accurately.

Analysis of parent interview data reveals that prior knowledge is important to manage anxiety. Mr. Chong, Mr. Chandran, Mdm. Murni and Mdm. Devaki stated that the basic information about the principals' background can provide knowledge that may reduce the degree of strangeness. For example, knowledge about backgrounds may provide some information about the principal's ethnicity, age, personality and leadership background that is useful in making predictions and setting expectations concerning how the principal is going to communicate. Mr. Phang and Mr. Chong added that they also often make predictions about teachers' or the principal's behaviour, in particular how they are going to respond to them. The parents asserted that making predictions may reduce their discomfort and increase their confidence to face unfamiliar individuals.

In the interviews and field notes, all three principals revealed that they tended to relate the importance of prior knowledge to fluent communication, but never to anxiety, as suggested by Gudykunst (2004). Gudykunst (2004) suggests that a lack of security makes most people feel anxious and uncertain about meeting strangers. However, interviews with the three principals appeared to show that they felt pleased and delighted to be able to meet parents.

Previous study has proven that power significantly affects a principal's communication style (Johnson, 2003). Principals may express power through communication, so they have to choose an appropriate way to exercise power. Mr. Samy's past communication experience of dealing with the smoking child's parents might result in them feeling offended by the school. In interview, the principal claimed that the parents were rude, aggressive and defensive, despite their acknowledgment that smoking among students is prohibited in Malaysian schools. These behaviours might be associated with a feeling of inferiority, as the parents might feel insecure and powerless in the new situation presented by the school. As Sandra (2001, p. 58) points out, 'some parents feel inferior, helpless, or powerless when dealing with school'. This view is supported by Berger (2004), and Rockwell, Andre and Hawley (2010) who found that some parents felt inferior to the school because they were always being criticised for their children's misbehaviour. Having less education, not understanding educational jargon, feeling intimidated by the school environment and a lack of any invitation from the school may all result in a refusal to become involved.

Lack of communication between school and parents may create a gap, contributing to a feeling of anxiety in parents. Interviews with all the parent participants showed that they may feel the same, as they explained that the main purpose of obtaining prior knowledge was to increase their confidence to face the principal at school. Furthermore, they tended to deal with the school through informal channels, indicating that there is still a distance between the parents and school at all three sites. In the interview and field notes it is apparent that the parents still perceive school as an unfamiliar location and this may also reflect that they do not perceive the school as a part of the community.

6.3 The Principals' Communication Styles and Parents' Involvement

Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes suggests that the principal's communication style may not be the main factor affecting parents' involvement. However, the style used by the principals might be the catalyst to increase

support and involvement for those parents who already have rapport and contact at these three schools. Interviews with the six parents acknowledged that their principal's communication style fulfilled their needs and also expectations of the characteristics of a good school leader. The parents suggested that they felt comfortable with the school as the principals always showed positive attitudes and were willing to work together with parents. The principals also claimed that they had good rapport with parents. The parents had a positive attitude and were committed and willing to work hand in hand with schools. However, analysis of interview data with the principals shows that many parents were reluctant to become involved; all the principals stated that the level of their involvement was average and below expectations. In his interview, Mr. Law acknowledged that most parents, especially 'fearsome' parents, are reluctant to become involved as they are busy. Mr. Samy believed that parents such as hawkers and labourers were unwilling because they may have 'paranoid thoughts' about the school. Mr. Ali, who personally contacted 'hard to reach' parents, was frustrated as only a few turned up for PTA meetings. Although most had been contacted, they remained unwilling, reflecting that there was a distance and that the principal's communication style may not have positively affected their involvement.

The styles, however, might be useful to increase support and involvement from those parents who already had rapport with schools. This is clear from all three principals acknowledging that they faced no problems in communicating and obtaining support from those parents who are always in touch with schools, as they are familiar with each other. Mr. Law, for example, insisted that he did not face difficulties gaining support from the parents and that he informally met them outside school. Interviews with the six parent participants indicated that the way the principals communicated had an impact on their involvement with school. They added that the positive style, such as being friendly, open and attentive, exercised by the principals strengthened their relationship and may increase their commitment, support and involvement. Therefore, the principals may need to establish rapport before trying to influence the parents to become involved. However, to establish a rapport with unfamiliar parents such as 'hard to reach'

parents is not an easy task. A lack of knowledge about school systems and goals may create distance. Furthermore, principals and parents may have different means and goals of communicating that may easily lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

The principals may realise that they may have to take the initiative to bridge the distance by keeping the parents informed of the latest school progress. The conversation between Mr. Law and Mr. Chang in Katara Secondary School, for example, appears to show that the principal acknowledged a mistake made by the school in not providing the parents with the latest progress report, and may have created a barrier and misunderstanding. In some cases, the schools tended to try to appear in the right by labelling the parents as 'troublemakers' to conceal their responsibility. This is clearly the case when all three principals tended to categorise the lower socioeconomic parents negatively.

Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes reveals that the principals and parents had different ways of communicating. The styles presented by the principals, such as directive and supportive styles, are task-oriented and thus limited to the activities and responsibilities in school. The principals' main purpose in communicating with parents was to fulfil their leadership roles in order to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, the styles presented by the principals differed from those of parents, who adopted everyday communication styles shaped by the complex processes of socialisation. They tended to show more complicated ways of speaking in order to achieve their personal communication goals.

Parents used styles as a tool to accomplish their communication goals. Mr. Chong and Mr. Chandran, for example, used a range of styles in the conversation to suggest their ideas and defend them. They started their conversations with persuasive manners to show respect for others and had relaxed body postures and listened well without interrupting. However, they also reacted aggressively and tried to dominate others by interrupting others frequently, using higher voices,

overbearing gestures and postures and not listening well. Analysis of observation data reveals that some parents observed that styles were mechanisms to influence others. Some parents such as Mr. Chong and Mr. Chandran observed that a style was also a way of showing power. They believed that being aggressive was an effective way of defending and forcing others to accept ideas, as they repeatedly used style to influence. This can be seen through the way they communicated; both had similar styles, tending to use a higher voice with overbearing gestures to support their words. They perhaps believed that aggression achieved superiority. In some cases, they tended to ignore relationships to appear in the right in order to achieve their personal communication goals.

However, for the principals to use styles to coerce parents might be seen as inappropriate, as the parents saw their actions as manipulating their position of power to affect change. Furthermore, inappropriate use of power may damage their leadership reputations and relationships. Therefore, the principals appeared to show a positive style such as being friendly, relaxed and open rather than a negative style such as being dominant and contentious, even while being verbally attacked by the parents. Observation data shows that they tended to use a persuasive and diplomatic way to influence, although parents might have seen this as an opportunity to control them.

The different ways of using styles may affect relationships both positively and negatively. The principal might be able to avoid conflict, but the use of style may also affect morale, as the parents may feel powerful and try to dominate the conversation.

Analysis of interview data indicates that the principals only tried to approach two categories of parents. The first category involved the parents already in contact and familiar with the school. The second category involved problematic parents such as 'hard to reach' and 'fearsome' parents. As a result, other parents might be neglected. The parents of both categories might represent

just a small percentage of the entire school's parents. Furthermore, all the principals acknowledged that parents tended to show little interest in participating in school events, indicating that effort may need to be applied to all parents, not just some.

Not all parents who are contacted will react positively, so the effort may have little reward. In the field notes, Mr. Ali explained that he had contacted more than twenty 'hard to reach' parents, but only a few had responded positively, resulting in disappointment and frustration. Mr. Law initiated home visits to reach 'fearsome' parents and indicated that these parents then showed a positive attitude and welcomed them to their home. Their children also showed improvement in their behaviour, attendance and homework. However, the parents were still reluctant to become involved and to stay in touch with the school. Therefore, these efforts might be not a strategic way of approaching parents.

Schools may have to plan a more strategic approach to reach all parents, for instance by establishing telecommunication facilities such as phone and internet connections to inform parents of student absence and discipline problems, and might be able to use the same system to highlight school events, invite parents to meetings, provide positive information and make them aware of curriculum goals and activities.

Schools and parents may have to show that they are sincere in their relations. Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes from the three schools reveals that school and parents may have to be honest in developing the relationships. Figure 6.1 over page shows the factors that might be important to a meaningful partnership in those three schools.

Figure 6.1

Overlapping School−home Communication in Building a Meaningful Partnership in Malaysian Secondary Schools
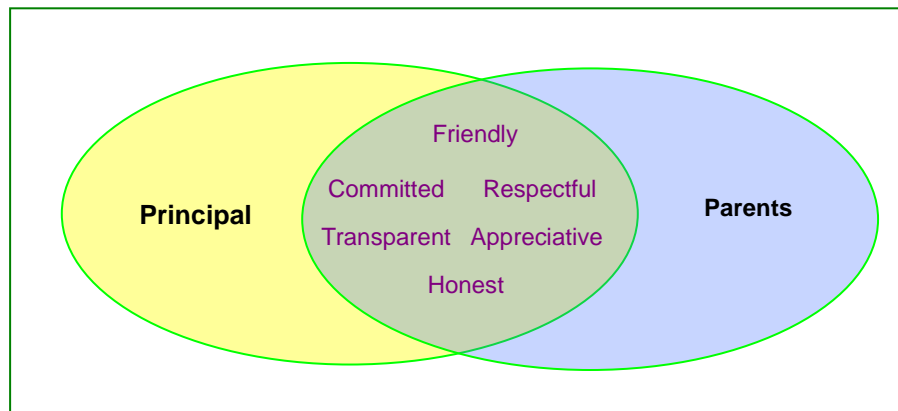
Figure 6.1 shows six communication characteristics suggested by both principals and parents of the three schools as being central to building a truthful partnership. Analysis of the six parents' and three principals' observations, interviews and field notes reveals that these six characteristics, being friendly, honest, respectful, appreciative, committed and transparent, might be able to achieve meaningful partnerships if parents and teachers are sincere, equal and treat each other without prejudice.

However, the findings also show that stereotyping by the principal may affect their relationships. Analysis of the interviews and field notes indicates that all the principals state stereotypically that lower socioeconomic group parents are difficult to deal with and always create misunderstandings with the school. This may be categorised as inappropriate, because not all the lower socioeconomic group parents are problematic, just as not all parents of other socioeconomic groups, such as those of middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds, may be considered as never creating problems for schools. In their interviews, Mr. Samy and Mr. Ali acknowledged that how parents speak to them depended on the purpose of their coming to school. Mr. Samy said that 'sometimes it's depending on the purpose they come to school'. Mr. Ali shared this view and insisted that

'the way parents talk to you is much more dependent on the purpose of their visit to school'. The statements indicate that the problem in the three secondary schools is not created by parents of the lower socioeconomic group alone. Other parents, such as those from the middle and upper socioeconomic groups, may also create problems. The principals' statements show that the attitude and the degree of anger might be the reason behind the parents creating a problem in the school. Mr. Ali's and Mr. Samy's view reflects that the parents' socioeconomic level might not the main factor influencing how they communicate. Furthermore, Mr. Law postulates that:

> Talking to the low socioeconomic parents is not a problem, but sometimes we have to struggle to make them understand. Actually, talking to uneducated parent is much easier compared to educated parents. Educated parents are quite demanding. They often come with a lot of complaints that are sometimes beyond our expectations.

> (Transcription of interview with P1)

These three views show that all the principals made contradictory statements about the lower socioeconomic parents. All three principals in interview said that the lower socioeconomic parents always created problems and were rude. On the other hand, they also stated that the ways parents communicated depended on why they came to school. The contradiction demonstrates that the principals are inconsistent and that personal views may easily lead them to stereotyping. Stereotyping may give rise to negative implications when the principals give the wrong judgements and perceptions about individuals or group membership (Adler & Gunderson, 2008; Jandt, 1995; Lumby with Coleman, 2007).

The principals might have made inaccurate assumptions, as research evidence shows that the lower socioeconomic group parents have a positive perception of their involvement with school (Berger, 2004). The study conducted by Stevenson, Chen and Uttal (1990) examined relationships between school,

and Black, White and Hispanic lower socioeconomic parents and suggested that lower socioeconomic group parents might be more likely to become involved with their child's homework completion, as they perceived homework to be a means of improving their children's learning to a greater extent than middle and upper class parents. A study conducted by Jordan and Plank (2000) also indicated that the lower socioeconomic group parents wanted to become involved with school programmes. They found that parents were more likely to attend a school-sponsored programme on post-secondary educational opportunities and financial aid to help their children to make course selection decisions and career plans, even if the schools had made less effort to encourage them to become involved. Schools may reinforce negative perceptions as they may not only stereotype lower socioeconomic group parents as 'troublemakers', but tend to reduce their involvement by giving less attention and invitation (Berger, 2004; Gestwicki, 2010; Jordan & Plank, 2000).

Schools may not facilitate the involvement of lower-income parents as much as more advantaged or affluent parents, and may see lower socioeconomic group parents as deficient, highlighting their problems rather than their strengths. Schools tend to believe that the problems of lower socioeconomic group parents in dealing with school are the fault of the parents, and not that the school may be contributing by stereotyping. That some parents in this category may show less involvement due to work demands and communication difficulties does not mean that they are neglecting their children's education. Berger (2004) argues that:

> Families with two parents working and single parents may have difficulty being involved in day time activities, but this does not mean that they don't care… .Most parents care about their children's progress in school irrespective of their background and want their children to do well. The benefits from parent involvement that most middle-class parents receive cannot be closed to low-income and minority parents. The initiative of involvement by parents must come from the school; the school must outreach home.

(Berger, 2004, pp. 311−313)

248

It cannot be denied that some lower socioeconomic group parents, such as the Chinese heritage hawkers, rubber tappers, farmers and labourers seen by the principals, might be less likely to take advantage of opportunities for involvement. However, the lack of school initiatives for an effective approach to encouraging them to become involved may create a distance. Thus, it is suggested that principals avoid stereotyping as they may make wrong judgements or perceptions about the parents, giving negative results in their efforts to strengthen the relationships with parents.

It is also suggested that parents are more open-minded and avoid defensive behaviour, as the three principals' interview data reveal evidence showing that parents are quite defensive about their children. Interviews with the principals such as Mr. Law and Mr. Samy show that some 'fearsome' parents and angry parents become aggressive and hostile when called in by the principals to discuss their children's misbehaviour in school. In some cases, the parents become hostile; this has a strong link with social relationships that may cause conflict. A study conducted by Johnson (2003) has proven that power has a significant impact on a principal's communication style. In some cases, the principal may become dominant and superior when they exercise power over others (Fennell, 1999). There is no universally accepted guide to communicating with parents. Therefore, communication knowledge and interpersonal skills are needed to make appropriate decisions about communication.

6.4 Summary

The study of the three principals' communication experiences with parents has demonstrated that principals and parents have different styles and approaches in order to achieve the goals of communication. The three principals presented a similar pattern of styles and are directive and supportive in their leadership roles. However, the parents used a wider range of styles in order to influence and convince the principals. They presented styles such as being friendly, relaxed and attentive to persuade the principal, but the style was changeable from assertive to

aggressive when they displayed more defensive behaviour. The change of styles might also be a self-defence strategy in order to achieve personal communication goals.

The parents' communication styles may be strongly influenced by their attitude toward the topic. Most parents who showed interest in a topic also talked often and tended to take charge of the situation. They directed the conversation, based on personal issues and interests. However, the parents also tended to be passive when the issues were beyond their knowledge. Therefore, the parents' communication style was affected by knowledge, as it was not inflexible and changed between one and another along the continuum, depending on the topic of interest and the response from others.

Knowledge of communication provides ideas for the principals and parents to communicate. However, to achieve effective communication the principal and parents may have to share a common understanding, perhaps only to be achieved through prior knowledge about the topic and the individual. All the principals and parents in the study acknowledged that prior knowledge about parents' and principal's background and the topic of discussion is central in their communication. The effort made by both principals and parents to obtain prior knowledge about the topic and each other's backgrounds is also an attempt to reach a common understanding. This effort also shows that both principals and parents have made a positive attempt to develop a relationship.

The study has also revealed that the principal's and parents' ethnicity are not observed to affect their communication styles. They demonstrated warmth and welcome to each other. The postures, gestures and facial expressions of both principals and parents have proven that ethnicity does not affect their physical communication styles. However, underlying this they still have prejudiced attitudes to the out-group, and the principals in the interviews acknowledged not only felt more comfortable talking to those of their own ethnic origin but that they gained more support from thsee parents, indicating that ethnicity still affects their

250

relationships despite a possible long history of relationship and familiarity.

The principals may realise that physically showing prejudice may have a negative impact on their effort to build relationships with the parents. Furthermore, the principals may also realise their responsibility as a role model. Therefore, concealing their prejudiced attitude through positive physical appearances might be the best way to avoid the distancing that can affect relationships.

All three principals in the observations, field notes and interviews explained that they communicated the school mission and vision to all organisational members, including parents, to make them clear about the goals and how to achieve them. They managed the school by walking about, showing that they were visible and approachable. The principals claimed that they always listened, respected and appreciated parents and this has been confirmed by the parents in the interviews and field notes when they also indicated that the principals were very encouraging and supportive. Analysis of observation data also reveals that being attentive is the highest ranking style adopted by the principals during conversation with parents. Mr. Law, Mr. Ali and Mr. Samy indicated 32.19, 29.90 and 32.50 per cent of attentive styles, showing that they have a tendency to listen to others carefully, fulfilling the criteria for being effective leaders as these practices may lead to organisational success (Bolman & Dale, 2003). It is suggested that an effective school leader is a principal able to create a positive organisational climate through the satisfaction of organisational members (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 2004; DuBrin, 2010; Lussier & Achua, 2010; Northouse, 2010). This study of the three principals has revealed that they have shown a positive attempt to develop good relationships.

The students, teachers and parents may be proud of their schools In the interviews and field notes the parents acknowledged that the schools' physical environment and organisational climate have a great impact on their perception of the school leadership. In the interviews they articulated that a good physical

environment not only gives a positive perception, but promotes parental support and involvement. This assertion reflects that school leadership may affect parental support and involvement in these three schools. The ability of the principal to create a positive school physical environment and organisational climate becomes a key criterion for the parents to judge the school in relation to their involvement.

The attempts of the three principals to initiate relationships through informal channels such as telephone calls, home visits and quick meetings with the parents during a school event or while they are sending or waiting for the child before or after school hours indicates that they have shown a positive effort to bring the parents closer to the school. However, to achieve their full support and partnership the principals may have to adopt a more systematic programme; their recent efforts are limited to certain targeted parents such as those who always appear to send and fetch their children from the school. The parents are basically already in contact with the school. Thus, it is suggested that principals initiate a comprehensive programme that can reach all parents, including the perceived 'fearsome' and 'hard to reach'.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusion of the study. It begins by presenting answers to the research questions, followed by a discussion of the research framework and methodology issues. Next is a brief summary that highlights a synthesis and evaluation of the major findings of the study, drawing connections with the literature and research, the implications to the field and practices of both school leadership and communication in relation to parental involvement. Some suggestions for future research and final remarks conclude the chapter.

7.2 Answers to the Research Questions

The focus of this section is to provide explicit answers to the research questions of the study. The answers are presented according to sub-questions that follow from the two main research questions.

1. How do principals perceive their communication with parents?

    i.   What communication style(s) do principals use with parents?

The principals presented almost the same pattern of styles in communication with parents. Analysis of observations, interviews and field notes reveals that the three principals used friendly, relaxed, open, attentive and animated styles with parents. The styles presented by the principals were significantly shaped by their leadership roles in school.

    ii.   Does principals' prior knowledge about parents' background affect

principals' communication style with parents?

The principals in the interviews and field notes acknowledged that parents' background and the topic of discussion are important for smooth communication. They also strongly believed that prior knowledge is important for building good rapport with the parents.

iii. What role do principals perceive that their communication style plays in influencing parents' involvement in school?

Analysis of the principals' interview data and field notes revealed that all three principals acknowledged that they felt their communication style played a vital role in influencing parents to become involved with the school. They believed the way they spoke reflected their leadership and image of the school. Therefore, they often used clear and direct, straightforward language for communication and an inclusive approach. All three principals believed that informal, face-to-face two-way communication was the most effective channel to encourage parents to become involved with school learning activities.

iv. Does parents' ethnicity impact on principals' communication styles?

Analysis of observation data shows that parents' ethnicity does not affect the principals' communication styles. There is no sign of distancing between principal and parents during their conversation. All three principals, however, believed that parents from their own ethnic origin gave them more support than parents from a different ethnic heritage. The findings showed that the principals may have some prejudice in relation to parents from a different ethnic origin, but that this does not affect their communication. Analysis of interview data reveals that all the principals used different styles with higher, middle and lower socioeconomic level parents, indicating that the socioeconomic background of parents has an impact on principals' communication styles.

2. How do parents perceive their communication with principal?

    i.   What communication style(s) do parents use with the principal?

The styles presented by all six parents were varied, as they used style to enforce power in order to influence the principal. They presented at least seven styles, namely friendly, relaxed, open, animated, attentive, dominant and contentious during their conversation with the principals.

    ii.   What role do parents perceive that their communication style plays in influencing principals and their involvement in school?

Analysis of interview data and field notes shows that all six parents acknowledged that a friendly, open, relaxed and attentive way of speaking has a positive impact on building rapport in order to develop good relationships with the school. The parents also indicated that they prefer informal interaction with the principal because they might feel more able to express themselves, and as a result many problems with the school have been solved.

    iii. Does parents' prior knowledge about the principal affect their communication styles with the principal?

All six parents agreed that knowledge of the principal's background is important and useful in their interaction with principals. They believed the information is used not only as guidance on how to communicate, but to overcome anxiety. They also said that prior knowledge about the principal is also crucial to set their expectations for school.

    iv. Does the principals' ethnicity impact on parents' communication styles?

Analysis of observations data indicates that principals' ethnicity does not affect parents' communication styles. There was no sign of distancing or an uncomfortable manner during their interaction. Analysis of interview data with

parents also reveals that all six parents said that they felt very comfortable with the principal, even if they were from a different ethnic heritage.

7.3 The Implications of the Study

7.3.1 Implications for School Leadership

Principals' communication styles are perceived by respondents significantly to affect parental support and involvement with school. All the parent participants insisted that the way the principal communicates and interacts affects their judgement about the school and their attitudes to other parents. Therefore, principals have to use appropriate styles to gain more support and involvement.

The findings also indicate that informal meetings with parents encourage their involvement. Therefore, the principals and teachers may need to initiate more informal interactions such as face-to-face or positive phone calls to obtain feedback and highlight school events, invite parents to meetings, provide positive information, inform parents of report cards and make them aware of school goals and activities. This might also appear to be an appropriate way of reaching parents, as both parents and principals are busy and lack the time to meet officially. Furthermore, the parents may feel free from the pressures of interacting formally with school officials.

The findings also indicate that ethnicity does not affect parental support and involvement. All the parents in the study show a positive relationship and style with the principal. There are no traces of distancing during their conversations. The parents appear to show that they are comfortable with principals of different ethnic origin. However, all three principals also believe that the parents of their own ethnic heritage tend to give them more support. Further, they also tend to label the lower socioeconomic group parents as 'troublemakers' without definite evidence. Therefore, it is suggested that principals are more sensitive to local cultures, norms and religious beliefs. They may have to increase their knowledge about local communities, for instance by trying to comprehend

and respect the parents' culture, thinking in a positive manner and trying to avoid prejudice and negative stereotyping about the parents, to bridge the cultural gap.

7.3.2 Implications for Parental Involvement in Malaysian Secondary Schools

The findings reveal that the parents presented at least seven styles during the conversation with the principal, namely being friendly, relaxed, open, attentive, animated, dominant and contentious. These may be categorised into three major styles; passive, assertive and aggressive. The styles presented by the parents in the conversation are varied, as they used the styles as a tool to achieve their communication goals. Observations and interviews data show that the parents are persuasive and tend to be passive at the beginning of the conversation. However, the styles may change rapidly from passive to aggressive, depending on the topic of interest and feedback from their counterparts.

All six parents started the conversation by paying attention to the principal. Everyone in the meeting took turns to speak without excessive interruption from others. The conversations went on smoothly as the principals were able to control the situation by giving everybody an opportunity to speak. However, some parents at times suddenly changed their style from passive to assertive when they began to show interest in the topic. They tended to speak often and make more interruptions when the topic discussed related to them. They verbally showed aggressiveness at times, with more defensive behaviours when they had negative feedback from others. They tended to use a loud voice to control the situation and to speak continuously to gain attention and to avoid interruptions. The situation can be clearly seen in two schools when one of the parents argued aggressively and tried to control the situation by speaking continuously to show disagreement with the decision. The attempt, however, was successfully controlled by the principal without hurting the parent's feelings. The non-verbal cues he used such as switching attention to another parent and using eye contact followed by nodding to allow other to speak successfully overcame the problem.

Parents with an aggressive style may put principals in a difficult position, as they could use their power to control the situation leading to dissatisfaction and conflict that might affect relationships. Therefore, it is suggested the parents present appropriate styles such as the assertive style to allow individuals to state their opinions and feelings and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others. The style would provide a comfortable environment for both principals and parents to speak their minds. The combination of directive and supportive communication styles such as being friendly, relaxed, attentive, open, precise and animated may encourage a positive relationship, as most parents in the interviews strongly believed that speaking in an aggressive manner may create misunderstanding and conflict.

However, the findings also reveal that some parents are not self-aware of their own communication styles. Mr. Chong, for example, argued in the interview that he was being assertive, but the observation data clearly indicate that he is aggressive. He not only frequently showed defensive behaviour, but also tried to control others. Some parents may lack knowledge about their own communication style. Furthermore, style has a strong connection with individuals' attitudes and behaviour concerning the issue being discussed. Observation data clearly show that some parents were only interested and willing to talk when the issues related to them personally.

The communication behaviour and style reflect that parents' relationships with school are individual. Their aim is to fulfil the individual's personal agenda. Schools, however, see the relationship in a broader sense and expect parents to give full, long-term support. Interview and field notes from all three principals show that they repeatedly said that they need full, continuous support, meaning not limited to financial and moral support but including their direct involvement such as time and strength to engage with the school's supported learning activities. Schools may have difficulty in reaching all parents as, in these three schools, some are busy and highly mobile. Furthermore, cultural differences in the acceptability of interacting with school officials may become barriers.

However, the study suggests that all three principals have good communication skills such as attentiveness, good body language, a warm tone of voice and clear articulation that might be helpful tools to enhance more parental support through the parents in the PTA and those already in contact with the school.

Epstein (2001) suggests that teachers need good communication skills to work collaboratively with parents. Therefore, the principals might be able to use their communication styles to influence parents with whom they are in touch to expand and enhance a relationship with other parents. For example, the principal can empower existing parents to create new arenas for influence. Empowerment also may create a meaningful and motivational role for these parents. Mr. Samy, for example, acknowledges that his good relationships with parents with whom he is currently in contact develops his relationships with other parents, as they become a model and a medium to inspire other parents to become involved. This is also acknowledged by parents; Mr. Chong, Mdm. Murni and Mr. Chandran in the interview and field notes also explain that good relationships with the principal encourage them to lend a hand in helping the school to reach out other parents.

The principals may need to make a special effort by using the informal language, *bahasa Melayu Pasar*, as an alternative language to communicate with parents who are unable to understand Malay or English. Berger (2004, p. 219) suggests that 'specialized language gets in the way of communication' and shows that the ability of the school administrators and teachers to adapt and understand local languages such as dialects is vital and this is also acknowledged by all three principals when they state that it may improve relationships with parents.

Some parents, especially elderly Chinese and Indian heritage parents, might feel excluded and emotionally distraught as they are unable to communicate well in Malay or English. All three principals acknowledge that they understand *bahasa Melayu Pasar*. Therefore, use of informal language with these parents might not be a problem. In fact, it might bridge the distance between school and parents as they might be able to interact without communication

barriers. Schools are disallowed this informal language at formal school events, but the principal might be able to use it at informal meetings. Mr. Ali, for example, acknowledged that its use with certain elderly Chinese and Indian heritage parents made them feel proud to be appreciated by the school. His assertion is in line with the view suggested by Berger (2004), Epstein (2001) and Gestwicki (2010), that using the parents' language and way of speaking is also a way of maintaining their culture that may encourage respect, trust and support.

Interviews with the principals and parents also revealed that friendly, honest, transparent, appreciative, committed and respectful communication might be the means to a successful partnership. However, this can only be achieved through an understanding of the concepts of involvement and partnerships. The school and the PTA might be the means and resource to improve this knowledge, but it will also need full support from parents to be successful in the mission to improve parental involvement and support. Therefore, parents may need to react positively by allocating time and being willing to collaborate with school to ensure greater consistency between parents and school goals.

7.4. Contribution of the Work

This is the first major in-depth study linking school leaders' communication styles with parental involvement in Malaysia. The study makes an empirical, theoretical and methodological contribution to enriching understanding, as outlined below.

7.4.1 Empirical Contribution

This study involved three principals and six parents from three different schools. These principals and parents might benefit from the evidence and outcomes of the study. They may be able to use the outcomes as a guide for a communication strategy towards creating better relationships for school improvement.

They may also be able to use the outcomes as a means of reflecting on their communication styles. Some positive styles such as relaxed, friendly and open were displayed by all principal and parent participants in the study, and may

be considered as a strength, and a valuable asset in bridging the communication and cultural gap between school and parents. Through this study they also may be able to see their weaknesses. For example, two weaknesses that may be traced through this study are the principals' stereotyping and labelling lower socioeconomic parents as 'troublemakers' in school and the parents' aggression and tendency to show interest primarily in topics related only to them. These may have a negative impact on relationships, and the principals and parents in these three schools may together have to find a way to understand each other to achieve a better relationship and involvement.

Whilst the results from the study may not be generalisable to other school organisations, the evidence from literature and the research study is that most schools worldwide face similar problems with parents. Thus, the evidence also might prove useful to school leaders and policy makers around the world. The study provides insight into the nature of school leadership and parental involvement, useful for designing a strategic plan for parental involvement at school level, even if it is not the solution to all school−home relationship issues. Policy makers could use the study's experiences communication with parents when designing or revising communication guidelines for school leaders.

The study also has the potential to enhance the development of leadership training programmes by its focus on communication as a fundamental aspect. For example, the evidence might be useful not only for policy makers in the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, but others planning a training pedagogy for leader preparation and in-service training for school leaders elsewhere. Evidence from the literature suggests that one reason for poor preparation of leaders is the lack of emphasis on acquiring interpersonal skills for communicating about parental involvement.

This lack of knowledge about communication, including leaders' interpersonal skills, has long been discussed by educational researchers such as Bulach, Pickett and Boothe (1998), Caspe and Lopez, (2006) and Lawrence

(2003), who find that such skills are critical. Most principals lack communication knowledge and lead a school by experience (Bush & Jackson, 2002). Irmsher (1996), following the study compiled by Osterman (1993), suggested that 'school leaders who focus on communicating their own "rightness" become isolated and ineffectual' (p. 2). The study illustrates in detail how principals and parents communicate, including the use of various communication modes such as verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal, how they create and interpret meaning, and how they respond to the meaning. This is useful in providing information on the reality of how principal and parents build a relationship in school and may contribute to the implementation of new school and ministry-level policy and practice.

7.4.2 Theoretical Contribution

The study makes a contribution to theory in four key areas. It suggests that the potential for principals to achieve involvement of parents through interpersonal communication skills is more limited than previous theory suggests. It extends the theory of the different ways in which parents and principals use communication styles. It gives greater importance to prior knowledge in achieving successful communication than previous studies. Finally, it challenges previous theory that suggests that those from different ethnic backgrounds will not be able to communicate with each other effectively.

Previous studies linked a principal's communication styles to teachers' job satisfaction and focused on large-scale studies. They were limited by providing numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and generally provide fewer in-depth accounts of participants' perception. Such numeric accounts will not necessarily reflect the way people feel about the 'real world' use of styles of communication and interaction. Therefore, most of the studies highlighted in the literature of the preceding chapters have recommended that additional research would be needed to explore in depth how a leader communicates in relation to motivating staff.

Small in scale, the present study has fulfilled this recommendation by using

a small sample size to understand in depth in what way principals communicate with parents in relation to their involvement in school learning activities, and how parents react to their style. The major findings of the study indicate that communication styles are not the main factor that influences parental involvement, but might be a catalyst to influence those parents who already have contact with school. The findings suggest that style is not an effective tool with which to initiate rapport with parents. However, it might be a useful and powerful tool to persuade parents to continue and deepen a relationship with school once it has been struck up. This study reveals some contradictions between the theory in the literature and the findings of survey research in the field. The findings conclude that positive styles are a powerful tool for a school to use to contact and develop a relationship with parents. Pawlas and Meyers (1989) and Reppa et al. (2010), for example, draw a broad conclusion suggesting that using a creative way of communicating, such as phone calls and email, is an effective way to reach parents. However, this study clearly shows that using positive styles to reach certain parents such as 'hard to reach' parents have less impact. One principal claimed that telephoning parents had little effect.

Many scholars have suggested that effective communication with parents might increase parent involvement. However, the findings of this study are that it is not an easy task to achieve effective communication with parents. Principals and parents may come from diverse culture and socioeconomic backgrounds. The complexity of the interrelationship of ethnicity, language and socioeconomic class of parents may contribute to a communication gap between principal and parents. Finally, the evidence also indicates that there are limitations to what principals can achieve in involving parents with school. In recent times, schools have become more complex. Parents are increasingly diverse. They are not diverse only in sociocultural backgrounds but may have different attitudes towards and perceptions of the school. Furthermore, there are no accepted universal guidelines for communication with parents and the responsibility of principals to parents is bounded by rules and policies. Therefore, the relationship with parents is entirely dependent on the ability of principal and, in all cases,

bounded.

One theoretical contribution of the study lies in its attempt to illustrate in depth how principals and parents communicate in school. As school leaders, all three principals in the study have displayed a consistent way of dealing and speaking with parents: they feel confident in their role. Furthermore, they hold personal and positional power to influence. Parents, on the other hand, may feel powerless and intimidated by school officials and the whole environment and might try to balance their power by using a wider range of styles. This can be seen in some parents such as Mr. Chong and Mr. Chandran, as discussed in Chapter 6, who displayed verbal aggressiveness in attempting to influence others. The styles they used might change dramatically, from a persuasive to an aggressive way of speaking, depending on the extent of their knowledge and interest in the topic under discussion. In general, both principal and parent participants might observe style in a different way. Principals might use style as a tool to increase and maintain their leadership reputation in order to enhance a good relationship with parents, but parents might see it as a tool to balance the power differentials and also to demonstrate superiority and boost their influence.

The pattern of interaction theoretically reflects that both principal and parent participants might have a similar perception of style as a powerful tool to achieve communication goals. However, there are contrasting approaches in order either to influence or to achieve goals. The principal may have to consider and take into account the issue of power relations in communication with parents. The principal of each of the three schools in the study, however, acts as a positive role model: all use a friendly, open and relaxed way of communicating, even if they occasionally have been verbally challenged by the parents.

The findings of the study also indicate that prior knowledge about the principal and parents is equally important and central to building relationships. Prior knowledge may provide basic information that shapes principals' and parents' perceptions towards school. However, at a deeper level, the principal and parents display contrasting usage. The principals use prior knowledge about

parents to show their leadership ability, such as by using the information to address communication problems in order to increase mutual understanding and also as a strategy to strengthen relationships. However, parents use prior knowledge as a mechanism to reduce anxiety and to increase their self-confidence in communicating with the school principal.

Most previous studies of communicator styles investigated the relationship between the leader's communication styles and staff's job satisfaction, and mainly focused on how the leader communicated with staff. The main source of data was based on the staff's perception of their leader's communication styles. However, the present study is focused on an in-depth study of the relationship between a school leader and parents' involvement with school. The focus is on both principals' and parents' communication styles, and the data collected are on-site observations and interviews with both principal and parent participants to act as a cross-checking mechanism to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

The findings of the study were that the principals and parents of different ethnic origins from the three different schools were able to communicate well. They were able to comprehend each other, and this challenges the previous theory suggested by Berlo (1960) that only those from the same culture are able to communicate effectively. This was not the case for those principals and parents who were involved in the study. In the context of Malaysian multicultural society, the process of assimilation that has taken place for more than half a century might positively affect their relationships. The results also reflect that culture might be not a barrier in a modern society, as people of different ethnicity might be able to learn from each other's culture in order to communicate and to comprehend.

7.4.3 Methodological Contribution

Previous research indicates that a study of communication styles conducted by quantitative methods resulted in there being no established conceptual definitions or empirical indicators of communicative style to be adapted for qualitative study

as a theoretical framework. Therefore, the quantitative theoretical framework established by Brandt's (1979), and Norton's (1978; 1983) conceptual definitions and empirical indicators of communicative style have been adapted as a theoretical framework in the hope that it may contribute to the establishment of further similar research in qualitative studies.

Methodologically, the research procedure used in this study might be useful to others in providing a contemporary means of interpreting communication data. Along with the establishment of a theoretical framework, the researcher developed a tool to measure communicator styles. A multimodal observation worksheet for coding conversation data was developed in table form and permitted code-deployment and integration of verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal data for exploring the principal and parent's communication styles. The study also introduced systematic triangulation of communication data by using a table to triangulate observation, interview and field notes data. It is hoped that this may provide a basic approach and systematic way of exploring similar communicator style in future qualitative studies.

The study also presents how the in-depth exploration and integration of various fieldwork data may reveal the reality of how principals communicate with parents in school. Interviews with both principals and parents to find out about their own and their counterparts' communication styles recorded that there are no communication issues or problems between principal and parents. However, in-depth analysis of observation data and the integration of interview and field notes data revealed different insights and the reality of their communication world.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This study sought to confirm that a principal's communication style significantly affects parents' involvement in three Malaysian secondary schools. All parent participants acknowledged in the interview and field notes that their support and involvement with school are somewhat dependent on how the principal communicates, even if they recognised that involvement is in part their

responsibility. They added that a principal with a friendly and open style may increase their support and involvement, as they found a principal with this style to be not only approachable but transparent and honest in building a relationship.

The findings may benefit only the schools directly involved in this study as the small sample size limits generalisation to schools elsewhere, so a similar study with a larger sample is suggested for further research. Selection of parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds and schools would be well served, as may not only reveal other issues, themes and factors related to the school−home communication, but the findings might be applicable to a larger population. Nevertheless, readers may relate the findings of this study to their own context.

Having experienced the research process and analysed and interpreted the data, the researcher believes that the both qualitative and quantitative data are equally important in exploring this area. Qualitative data may go below the surface, and in-depth data may provide theoretical concepts for a survey to confirm a predetermined set of theoretical concepts. Mixed methods approaches might be appropriate as these might furnish more reliable explanation, but would require considerable effort and resources compared to a single approach. However, such a powerful approach might reveal a comprehensive and holistic view of the understanding of the nature of the issues under investigation through triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2009). It is suggested that future research considers the various approaches available to enrich these recent findings.

The findings of the study are limited to the relationships between the principal's communication styles and parents' involvement in secondary schools. They might be extended if comparison could be made with other types of schools to see how their school leaders' communicate with parents. Therefore, it is also suggested that future study considers and conducts a similar study in elementary, boarding and private schools in Malaysia or elsewhere to investigate the pattern of the school leaders' communications with parents in relation to their involvement

with school.

The study does not focus on training as a factor affecting the principal's communication styles. Future research is suggested to explore principals' training in order to see the relationship between their training and their communication styles.

7.6 Final Remarks

The completion of the study reflects that every single individual, especially the principals and the parents directly involved as participants, gave their cooperation and commitment to support the study. This demonstrates that both parents and schools wish to see the issue of parental involvement addressed. This can be clearly seen when principals and parents were invited to participate in the study; all the principals and some of the parents were eager to participate, showing their pleasure that someone was interested in understanding their perspective on the subject of parental involvement.

Some parents may have little idea how to become effectively involved. That principals might also have a lack of knowledge and resource to support their involvement might be rooted in poorly prepared teachers; as Bush and Jackson (2002, p. 418) state, 'there is still an (often unwritten) assumption that good teachers can become effective managers and leaders without specific preparation'. The tasks and responsibilities of principal and teacher are dissimilar. Teachers deserve to be equipped with specific training and up-to-date information to realise their potential to lead effectively. Furthermore, a lack of in-service training may be a barrier to better parent involvement. Interviews with principals indicated that all three apparently doubted their knowledge of the concept of involvement and partnership and also had different ways of interpreting the concepts. The principals may benefit from education on both.

A lack of knowledge may have a strong link to a lack of exposure; Chavkin and Williams (1988) and Epstein (1983) reported that teachers and principals

thought that their preparation in parental involvement was inadequate. Epstein (1983) and Becker and Epstein (1982) remarked that the absence of initial training may lead teachers and principals to form negative stereotypes about parents. Therefore, the study also suggests that a more systematic and integrated approach to parental involvement preparation would further improve the performance of the school teacher and principal. The ability of the school to work effectively with parents is vital to school improvement. Teachers and administrators, especially principals, deserve to be fully equipped from time to time with updated knowledge, especially in school−home communication and partnership, in order to enhance a meaningful relationship with parents.

References

ABD. RAZAK, AHMAD ZABIDI., & MOHD. NOR, MARIANI. 2007. Model Hubungan Sekolah dan Komuniti bagi Peningkatan Proses Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran: Satu Cadangan. *Masalah Pendidikan,* 30(1), 127−135.

ADLER, N. J., & GUNDERSON, A. 2008. *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour.* 5th ed. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing.

ADLER, R. B., & ELMHORST, J. M. 1996. *Communicating at Work Principles and Practices for Business and Professional.* 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

ADDI-RACCAH, A., & AINHOREN, R. 2009. School Governance and Teachers' Attitudes to Parents' Involvement in Schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 25(6), 805−813.

ANDERSEN, M. L., & TAYLOR, H. F. 2008. *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

ANDRADE, A. D. 2009. Interpretative Research Aiming at Theory Building: Adopting and Adapting the Case Study Design. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(1), 42−60.

ANGELIDES, P., THEOPHANOUS, P., & LEIGH, J. 2006. Understanding Teacher−Parent Relationships for Improving Pre-primary Schools in Cyprus. *Educational Review*, 58(3), 303−316.

ARGYLE, M. & COOK, M. 1976. *Gaze and Mutual Gaze*. London: Cambridge University Press.

ARGYLE, M. 1988. *Bodily Communication*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

ARGYLE, M. 2007. *Social Interaction*. New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

ARONSON, J. Z. 1996. How Schools Can Recruit Hard to Reach Parents. *Educational Leadership*, 53(7), 58−60.

ARLESTIG, H. 2007. Principals' Communication Inside Schools. A Contribution to School Improvement?. *Educational Forum*, 71(3), 262−273.

ARREDONDO, L. 2000. *Communicating Effectively*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

AUSTIN, J. L. 1962. *How To Do Things With Works.* 2nd ed. URMSOM, J. O., & SBISA, M. eds. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

BALDRY, A., & THIBAULT, P. J. 2006. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis: A Multimodal Toolkit and Course Book with Associated On-line Course.* London: Equinox Publishing Ltd.

BALES, R. 1970. *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior*. New York, NY: Rinehart & Winston.

BARRETT, D. J. 2006. *Leadership Communication*. International ed. Singapore: McGraw-Hill.

BASS, B. M., & RYTERBAND, E. C. 1979. *Organizational Psychology*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.

BASSEY, M. 1999. *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

BECHER, R. M. 1984. *Parents Involvement: A Review for Research and Principles of Successful Practice.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.

BECHER, H. J., & EPSTEIN, J. L. 1982. Parent Involvement: A Survey of Teacher Practices. *Elementary School Journal*, 83(2), p. 85−102.

BELL, L., & BUSH, T. 2002. The Policy Context. *In*: BUSH, T., & BELL, L. eds. *The Principles and Practice of Educational Management*. London: Sage Publications. pp. 3−14.

BELLE, D. 1999. *The After-School Lives: Alone and with Others White Parents Work.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

BENNETT, J. C., & OLNEY, R. J. 1986. Executive Priorities for Effective Communication in an Information Society. *Journal of Business Communication,* 23(2), 13−22.

BENSMAN, D. 2000. *Building School-Family Partnership in a South Bronx Classroom*. New York: NCREST.

BERGER, E. H. 1983. *Beyond the Classroom: Parents as Partners in Education*. St. Louis: Thomas & Manning.

BERGER, E. H. 2004. *Parents as Partners in Education: Families and School Working Together.* 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

BERGER, P., & Luckmann, T. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

BERLA, N. 1991. Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level. *The ERIC Review*, 1(3), 16−20.

BERLO, K. D. 1960. *The Process of Communication.* New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.

BERNSTEIN, B. 2003. *Class, Codes and Control, Volume 1: Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

BLENDINGER, J., & SNIPES, G. 1993. *In Search of Theory of Parent Involvement for School Administrator.* [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: EA 026099.

BLUMBERG, A., & GREENFIELD, W. 1980. *The Effective Principal Perspectives on School Leadership.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

BOGDAN, R. C., & BIKLEN, S. K. 1982. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

BOLMAN, L. G., & DALE, T. E. 2003. *Reforming Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership.* 3rd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

BOWDITCH, J. L., BUONO, A. F., & STEWART, M. M. 2008. *A Primer on Organizational Behavior.* 7th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

BRANDT, D. R. 1979. On Linking Social Performance with Social Competence: Some Relations between Communicative Style and Attributions of Interpersonal Attractiveness and Effectiveness. *Human Communication Research*, 5(3), 223−237.

BROWN, G., & YULE, G. 1983. *Discourse Analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BROWN, L. 1961. *Communicating Facts and Ideas in Business.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.

BRYANT, J., & MIRON, D. 2007. Historical Contexts and Trends in Developing of Communication. *In:* WHALEY, B. B., & SAMTER, W. eds. *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. pp. 449−480.

BULACH, C., PICKETT, W., & BOOTHE, D. 1998. *Mistakes Educational Leaders Make*. Oregon. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: EA 029123.

BULL, P. 1983. *Body Movement and Interpersonal Communication*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

BURNS, N., & Grove, S. K. 2005. *The Practice of Nursing Research: Conduct, Critique and Utilization.* 5th ed. St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders.

BUSH, T., & JACKSON, D. 2002. A Preparation for School Leadership: International Perspectives. *Educational Management and Administration*, 30(4), 417−429.

CASPE, M., & LOPEZ, E. 2006. *Lesson From Family Strengthening Interventions: Learning From Evidence-Based Practice*. Cambrigde, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Graduate School of Education.

CARTIER, F. A., & HARWOOD, K. A. 1953. On Definition of Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 3(2), 71−755.

CHAMPBELL, E., CORBALLY, E., &. NYSTRAND, R. 1983. *Introduction to Education Administration*. 6th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

CHAVKIN, N. F. 1993. Families and Schools. *In:* CHAVKIN, N. F. ed. *Families and Schools in Pluralistic Society*. Albany: State University of New York Press. pp. 1−17.

CHAVKIN, N. F., & WILLIAMS, D. L. Jr. 1988. Critical Issues in Teacher Training for Parents Involvement. *Educational Horizons*, 66(2), 87−89.

CHAVKIN, N. F., & WILLIAMS, D. L. Jr. 1989. Low Income Parents' Attitudes toward Parent Involvement in Education. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare,* 6(3), 17−28.

CHAVKIN, N. F., & WILLIAMS, D. L. Jr. 1987. Enhancing Parent Involvement: Guidelines for Access to an Important Resource for School Administrators. *Education and Urban Society*, 19(2), 164−184.

CHEN, GUO-MING. 2009. Intercultural Effectiveness. *In:* SAMOVAR, L. A., PORTER, R. E., & McDANIEL, E. R. eds. *Intercultural Communication: A Reader.*12th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. pp. 393−401.

CHEN, GUO-MING., & STAROSTA, W. J. 1998. *Foundations of Intercultural Communication.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

CHERIN, D. A. 1999. Organizational Engagement and Managing Moments of Maximum Leverage: New Roles for Social Workers in Organizations. *Journal of Administration in Social Work*, 23(3 & 4), 29−46.

COHEN, L., MANION, L., & MORRISON, K. 2000. *Research Methods in Education*. 5th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.

COLEMAN, P., COLLINGE, J., & SEIFERT, T. 1993. Seeking the Levers of Change: Participants Attitudes and School Improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* 4(1), 59−83.

COMSTOCK, J. & HIGGINS, G. 1997. Appropriate Relational Messages in Direct Selling Interaction: Should Salespeople Adapt to Buyers' Communicator Style?. *The Journal of Business Communication,* 34(4), 401−418.

COVEY, S. 2004. *The 8th Habit*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

CRESWELL, J. W. 2007. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

CRESWELL, J. W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mix Methods Approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

CRESWELL, J. W., & MILLER, D. L. 2000. Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theories into Practice*, 39(3), 124−131.

CROW, G. M., MATTHEWS, L. J., & McCLEARY, L. E. 1996. *Leadership: A Relevant and Realistic Role for Principals*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

CROZIER, G., & DAVIES, J. 2007. Hard to Reach Parents or Hard to Reach School? A Discussion of Home−School Relations, with Particular Reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani Parents. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(3), 295−313.

CROZIER, G. 2006. Is It Case of 'We Know When We're Not Wanted'? The Parents' Perspective on Parent−Teacher Roles and Relationships. *Educational Research*, 41(3), 315−328.

DAFT, R. L. 2007. *The Leadership Experience*. 4th ed. Mason, OH: South-Western, Thomson Higher Education.

DANCE, F. E. 1970. The 'Concept' of Communication. *Journal of Communication,* 20(2), 201−210.

DANCE, F. E., & LARSON, C. E. 1976. *The Function of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

DARLINGTON, Y., & SCOTT, D. 2002. *Qualitative Research in Practice Stories from the Field.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

DAVID, M., & SUTTON, C. D. 2004. *Social Research: The Basic.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

DAVIES, D. 1988. Hard to Reach Parents in the Three Countries: Perspectives on How Schools Relate to Low Status Families. The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA. April 5−9.

DECKER, L. E., & DECKER, V. A. 1988. *Home/ School/Community Involvement.* American Association of School Administrators. Arlington, Virginia: American Association of School Administrators.

DENZIN, N. K. 1978. *The Research Act: Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods.* McGraw-Hill: New York.

DENZIN, N. K., & LINCOLN, Y. S. eds. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

DENZIN, N. K., & LINCOLN, Y. S. eds. 2008. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry.* 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.

DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS MALAYSIA. 2009. *Malaysia: Data Penting 2009.* Putrajaya: Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia.

DESLANDES, R. 2000. *Direction of Influence between Parenting Style and Parental Involvement in School Practices, and Students' Autonomy: A Short Longitudinal Design.* The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA, April 24−28.

DESLANDES, R. 2003. *Evolution of Parenting and Parent Involvement in Schooling Practices and Canadian Adolescents' Autonomy over a Three Year Span.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.ernape.net/articles/2003/Deslandes.pdf (Accessed: 28 Feb. 2010).

DEXTER, R., BERUBE, W., & SUZANNE YOUNG. 2006. Communication, Theories in Organizations. [Online] Available at: http://www.sage-ereference.com/edleadership/Article_n106.html (Accessed: 26 Feb 2010).

DIMMOCK, C., & WALKER, A. 2005. *Educational Leadership: Culture and Diversity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

DOMINA, T. 2005. Levelling the Home Advantage: Assessing the Effectiveness of Parental Involvement in Elementary School.' *Sociology of Education*, 78(3), 233−249.

DONAHUE, R., & PROSSER, M. H. 1997. *Diplomatic Discourse: International Conflict at the United Nation*. Greenwich: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

DONALD, G. E. 1992. Syntactic and Pragmatic Codes in Communication. *Communication Theory 2*, 2(1), 1−23.

DRIEBE, N. M., & COCHRAN, M. M. 1996. *Barriers to Parent Involvement in Head Start Programs.* Paper Presented at the Third Head Start National Research Conference, Washington, DC. Jun 20−23.

DuBRIN, A. J. 2010. *Leadership: Research, Findings, Practice and Skills.* 6th ed. Mason, OH: South Western College Publications.

EMERY, E., AULT, H. & AGEE, K. 1973. *Introduction to Mass Communication*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company.

EPSTEIN, J. L. 1986. Parents Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement. *Elementary School Journal*, 86(3), 277−294.

EPSTEIN, J. L. 1983. *Effects on parents of Teacher Practices of Involvement.* Johns Hopkins University. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 237500.

EPSTEIN, J. L. 1995. School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701−712.

EPSTEIN, J. L. 2001. *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators, and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

EPSTEIN, J. L., & SANDERS, M. G. 2002. Family, School, and Community Parnerships. *In:* BORNSTEIN, M. H., ed. *Handbook of Parenting, Volume 5., Practical Issues in Parenting*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers. pp. 407−438.

EPSTEIN, J. L., SANDERS, M. G., SHELDON, S. B., SIMON, B. S., SALINAS, K. C., JANSORN, N. R, VAN VOORHIS, F. L., MARTIN, C. S., THOMAS, B. G., GREENFIELD, M. D., HUTCHINS, D. J., & WILLIAMS, K. J. 2009. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

EVERARD, K. B., MORRIS, G., & WILSON, A. 2004. *Effective School Management.* 4th ed. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

FARRELL, M. 1999. *Key Issues for Primary Schools*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

FAST, J. 1994. *Body Language in the Workplace*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

FENNELL, H. A. 1999. Power in the Principalship: Four Women's Experiences. *Journal of Educational Administration,* 37(1), 23−49.

FERRANTE, J. C. 2011. *Sociology: A Global Perspective.* 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

FLEMING, P. 2000. *The Art of Middle Management in Secondary School: A Guide to Effective Subject and Team Leadership*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

FLICK, U. 1998. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oak: Sage Publications, Inc.

FOSKETT, N., & LUMBY, J. 2003. *Leading and Managing Education: International Dimensions.* London: Sage Publications.

FOX, M., & RANDELL, S. 2002. Ethical Issues for Educational Psychologist Engaged in Research. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 19(1), 61−69.

GALVIN, M. K., & WILKINSON, C.A. 2006. *The Communication Process: Impersonal and Interpersonal*. Cary, NC: Roxbury Publishing.

GEE, J. P. 1996. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourse*. 2nd ed. London: Taylor & Francis.

GEE, J. P. 1999. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. London: Routledge.

GEORGAKOPOULOU, A., & GOUTSOS, D. 2004. *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

GEORGE, P., & KENNETH, M. 1989. *The Principal and Communication.* Elementary Principal Report Series Number 3. Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 315913.

GEORGIA PROFFESIONAL STANDARD OF COMMISSION. 1985. *The Principalship in Georgia: Teachers' Perceptions*. Atlanta. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 269875.

GERGEN, K. J. 1985. The Social Constructionist Movement in Modem Psychology. *American Psychologist,* 40(3), 266−275.

GESTWICKI, C. 2010. *Home, School and Community Relations*. 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

GILES, H. 1973. Accent Mobility: A model and Some Data. *Anthropological Linguistics,* 15(2), 87−105.

GILES, H., COUPLAND, J., & COUPLAND, N. eds. 1991. *Contexts of Accommodation: Developments in Applied Sociolinguistics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

GOLDLUST, J., & RICHMOND, A. H. 1974. A Multivariate Model of Immigrant Adaptation. *International Migration Review*, 8(Summer), 193−225.

GREENE, P. K., & TICHENOR, M. S. 2003. Parents and Schools: No Stopping the Involvement. *Childhood Education*, 79(4), 242−243.

GREER, S. 1962. *The Emerging City: Myth and Reality*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

GRIFFITH, J. 2000. Principal Leadership of Parent Involvement. *Journal of Educational Administration,* 39 (2), 162−186.

GRIFFITH, M. 1998. *Educational Research for Social Justice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

GRONICK, W. S., BENJET, C., KUROWSKI, C.O., & APOSTOLERIS, N. H. 1997. Predictors of Parent Involvement in Children's Schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 89(3), 538−548.

GUDYKUNST, W. B. 2004. *Bridging Differences: effective Intergroup Communication.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

GUDYKUNST, W. B., & Young, Y. K. 1997. Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

GUDYKUNST, W.B., TING-TOOMEY, S., & CHUA, E. 1988. *Culture and Interpersonal Communication.* Newbury Park: Sage Publications, Inc.

GURR, D., DRYSDALE, L., & MULFORD, B. 2006. Models of Successful Principal Leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 26(4), 371−395.

HALL, E. T. 1990. *Understanding Cultural Differences: German, French and Americans.* London: Intercultural Press.

HALLIDAY, M. A. K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic.* London: Edward Arnold.

HALSEY, P. 2005. Parent Involvement in Junior High School: A Failure to Communicate. *American Secondary Education*, 34(1), 57−70.

HARGIE, O., DICKSON, D., & TOURISH, D. 1999. *Communication in Management.* Hampshire: Gower Publishing Ltd.

HARRIS, A., & GOODALL, J. 2008. Do Parents Know They Matter? Engaging All Parents in Learning. *Educational Research*, 50(3), 277−289.

HART, L. 1993. *The Winning Family: Increasing Self-esteem in Your Children and Yourself.* California: Celestial Arts.

HENDERSON, A. T. 1987. *The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement.* Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

HENDERSON, A. T., MAPP, K. L., JOHNSON, V.R., & DAVIES, D. 2007. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The essential guide to family−school partnerships.* New York, NY: The New Press.

HENDRY, M. E. 1996. *Parent−School Collaborative: Feminist Organizational Structures and School Leadership.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

HENTSCHKE, C. G., & CALDWELL, B. J. 2005. Entrepreneurial Leadership. *In:* DAVIES, B. ed. *The Essentials of School Leadership.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 145−159.

HERMES, S. L. 1998. *Assertiveness: Practical Skills for Positive Communication.* Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing.

HILL, N. E., & CRAFT, S. A. 2003. Parent−School Involvement and School Performance: Mediated Pathways among Socioeconomically Comparable African American and Euro−American Families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 74−83.

HILL, N. E., & TYSON, D. F. 2009. Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement. *Development Psychology*, 45(3), 740−763.

HOBEN, J. B. 1954. English Communication Colgate Re-examined. *Journal of Communication,* 4(3), 76−86.

HOFSTEDE, G., & HOFSTEDE, G, J. 2005. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. 2nd ed. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Book Company Europe.

HOOVER-DEMSEY, K. V., & WALKER, M. T. 2002. *Family−School Communication*. [online]. Available at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/family-school/school%20reports/HooverDempsey_Walker.pdf (Accessed: 25 Oct 2008).

HOY, W. K., & MISKEL, C. G. 2004. *Educational Administration: Theory, Research and Practice*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

HUI. Z., & AKIBA, M. 2009. School Expectation for Parental Involvement and Student Mathematics Achievement: A Comparative Study of Middle Schools in the US and South Korea. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 39(3), 411−428.

HUDSON, J., & REA, D. 1996. *Teachers' Perspectives of Women in the Partnership: A Current Perspective*.[Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 403225.

HUNTSINGER, C. S., & JOSE, P. E. 2009. Parental Involvement in Children's Schooling: Different Meanings in Different Cultures. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(4), 398−410.

HUSEMAN, R. C., LAHIFF, J. M., & PENROSE, J. M. 1988. *Business Communication: Strategies and Skills.* 3rd ed. Chicago: The Dryden Press.

IRMSHER, K. 1996. *Communication Skills*. ERIC Digest No: 102. ERIC Clearing House on Educational Management Eugene OR. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 390114.

IVANCEVICH, J. M. & MATTESON, M. T. 1999. *Organizational Behavior and Management.* New York: Irwin McGraw-Hill.

JANDT, F. E. 1995. *Intercultural Communication: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

JOHNSON, P. E. 2003. Conflict and the School Leader: Expert or Novice. *Journal of Research for Educational Leaders*, 1(3), 28−45.

JOHNSTONE, B. 2002. *Discourse Analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

JORDAN, W. J., & PLANK, S. B. 2000 Talent Loss among High-Achievement Poor Student. *In:* M. G. Sanders. ed. *Schooling Students Placed at Risk: Research, Policy, and Practice in the Education of Poor and Minority Adolescents*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 65−82.

KAHN, R. L., & CANNEL, C. S. 1957. *The Dynamics of Interviewing: Theory, Technique and Cases*. New York, NY: Chapman & Hall.

KART, E., & LAZARSFELD, P. 1955. *Personal Influence*. New York: The Free Press.

KATARA SECONDARY SCHOOL. 2009. Kurikulum. [Online]. Available at Http://smketari.webs.com/kurikulum.html. (Accessed: 8 Oct 2009).

KELLY-LAINE, K. 1988. Parents as Partners in Schooling: The Current State of Affairs. *Children Education*, 74(6), 342−343.

KENDALL, D. 2010. *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*. 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

KIMMEL, A. J. 1988. *Ethics and Value in Applied Social Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, Inc.

Klein, H. K., & Myers, M. D. 1999. A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information System. *Management Information Systems Quarterly*, 23(1), 67−94.

KLINKER, J. F. 2006. Principalship. [Online]. Available at:<http://www.sage-reference.com/edleadership /Article_n456.html> (Accessed: 26 Feb 2010).

KRESS, G., & VAN LEEUWEEN, T. 1996. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge Publications.

KRESS, G., & VAN LEEUWEEN, T. 2001. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Oxford University Press.

KROGH, G., ICHIJO, K., & NONAKA, I. 2000. *Enabling Knowledge Creation: How to Unlock the Mystery of Tacit Knowledge Release the Power of Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

KUMAR, R. 1996. *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*. London: Sage Publications.

KVALE, S. 1996. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

LANGER, S. K. 1957. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the New Symbolism of Reason, Write and Art.* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

LARSON, M. L. 1998 *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-aanguage Equivalence.* 2nd ed. New York, NY: University Press of America.

LASSWELL, H. D. 1948. The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. *In:* BRYSON, L. ed. *The Communication of Ideas: A Series of Addresses.* New York, NY: Harper & Row. pp. 37−51.

LAUMANN, E. O. 1973. *Bonds of Pluralism: The Form and Substance of Urban Social Networks.* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

LAW, S. A., & GLOVER, D. 2000. *Educational Leadership and Learning: Practice, Policy and Research.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT, S. 2003.*The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn From Each Other*. New York, NY: Random House.

LEARY, T. 1957. *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality.* New York, NY: Ronald.

LEVIN, B. 1982. Public Involvement in Public Education: Do We Have It? Do We Want It?. *Canadian Journal of Education.* 7(4), 1−13.

LIEBERMAN, M., YALOM, I., & MILES, M. 1973. *Encounter Groups: First Facts*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

LIMERICK, B., LIMERICK, T. B., & GRACE, M. 1996. The Politics of Interviewing: Power Relations and Accepting the Gift. *Qualitative Study in Education*, 9(4), 449−460.

LIN, N. 1973. *The Study of Human Communications*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

LINCOLN, Y. S., & GUBA, E. G. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

LINDLE, J. C. 2006. Community Relations. [Online]. Available at:
http://www.sagereference.com/edleadership/Article_n110.html (Accessed:
26 Feb 2010).

LIONTOS, L. B. 1992. At-Risk Families and Schools Becoming Partners.
Available at: http://eric.uoregon.edu/pdf/bookd/atriskfs.pdf. (Accessed: 20
Oct 2011)

LIPHAM, J. M., & FRANKE, D. C. 1996. Nonverbal Behavior of Administrators.
Educational Administration Quarterly, 2(2), 101−109.

LITTLEJOHN, S. W. 2002. *Theories of Human Communication.* 7th ed. Belmont,
CA: Wadsworth.

LOMBANA, J. H. 1983. Home−School Partnership: Guidelines and Strategies of
Educators. New York, NY: Grune and Stratton, Inc.

LUMBY, J. 2001. *Managing Further Education Learning Enterprise.* London:
Sage Publications, Inc.

LUMBY, J. with COLEMAN, M. 2007. *Leadership and Diversity: Challenging
Theory and Practice in Education.* London: Sage Publication Ltd.

LUSSIER, R. N., & ACHUA, C. F. 2010. *Leadership: Theory, Application and
Skill Development.* 4th ed. Mason, OH: South-Western College
Publications.

LUSTIG, M. W., & KOESTER, J. 1996. *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal
Communication across Cultures.* 2nd ed. New York, NY: Harper Collins
Publishers, Inc.

LUTS, F. W., & MERZ, C. 1992. The Politics of School/Community Relations.
New York, NY: Teacher College Press, Columbia University.

MARSH, I., & KEATING, M. 2009. *Sociology: Making Sense of Society.* 4th ed.
Harlow: Pearson Longman.

MARSHALL, C., & ROSSMAN, G. B. 2006. *Designing Qualitative Research.*
4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

MANN, R., GIBBARD, G., & HARTMAN, J. 1967. *Interpersonal Styles and Group
Development.* New York, NY: John Wiley.

MARTIN, J. L. 1990. *Superintendents and Unsuccessful Principals: A Limited
Study in Oregon State.* [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number
ED 316937.

MASON, J. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications.

MAXWELL, J. A. 2005 *Qualitative Research Design: An Introductive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

MAY, T. 1997. *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. 2nd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press.

McCALLISTER, L. 1997. *I Wish I'd Said That: How to Talk Your Way out of Trouble and into Success*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

McKAY, M., DAVIS, M., & FANNING, P. 2009. *Messages: The Communication Skills Book.* 3rd ed. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

McKAY, M. M., ATKINS, M. S., BROWN, C., & LYNN, C. J. 2003. Inner-City African American Parental Involvement in Children's Schooling: Racial Socialization and Social Support from the Parent Community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1–2), 107–114.

McKENNE, M., & WILLEMS, J. D. 1998 The Challenge Facing Parent Councils in Canada. *Childhood Education*, 74(6), 378–382.

McMILLAN, D. J. 2005. Close Encounters: Issue in Pre-School Parental Involvement in Northern Ireland. *Child Care in Practice*, 11(2), 119–134.

McQUAIL, D. 1994. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction.* 3rd ed. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

MD. LAZIM, NORZALINDA. 2004. *Faktor-faktor Yang Mempengaruhi Penglibatan Ibu Bapa dalam Aktiviti PIBG di Sekolah Menengah Akademik Luar Bandar di Jitra, Kedah*. Kertas Projek Sarjana Muda. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

MILLER, G. R. 1966. On Defining Communication: Another Stab. *Journal of Communication*, 16(2), 88–98.

MILLES, M. B., & HUBERMAN, A. M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

MINTZBERG, H. 1973. *The Nature of Managerial Work*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA. 1997. *Education Act 1996*. Kuala Lumpur: International Law Book Series.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA. 2001. *Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas Bil. 5/2001.* Putrajaya: Ministry of Education.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA. 2006a. Kajian Penglibatan PIBG di Sekolah Rendah*. In: Ringkasan Esekutif Kajian-Kajian Bahagian Parancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan 2000−2004.* Putrajaya: Documentation Centre, Educational Planning and Research Division. pp. 92−96.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA. 2006b. *The Master Plan for Education Development 2006−2010.* Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Negara.

MOHD. DOM, ALIMUDDIN 2006. *Himpunan Rencana dan Kertas Perbincangan untuk Mesyuarat, Seminar dan Persidangan.* Putrajaya: Jemaah Nazir Sekolah, KPM.

MONTADA, L. 1998. *Ethical Issues in Communicating with Participants.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.gerechtigkeitsforchung.de/berichte/beri115.pdf (Accessed: 11 July 2009)

MOORE, D. R. 1992. The Case for Parent and Community Involvement. *In:* Hess, G. A. Jr. ed. *Empowering Teachers and Parents: School Restructuring Through the Eyes of Anthropologists.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey. pp. 131−155.

MOORHEAD, G., & GRIFFIN, W. 1995. *Organizational Behavior: Managing People and Organizations.* 4th ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Houghton Mifflin Company.

MOOS, L. & HUBER, S. 2007. School Leadership, School Effectiveness and School improvement: Democratic and Integrative Leadership*. In:* TOWNSEND, T. ed. *International Handbook of School Effectiveness and Improvement: Review, Reflection and Reframing.* Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 579−595.

MORAN, R. T., HARRIS, P. R., & MORAN. S. V. 2007*. Managing Cultural Difference: Global Leadership Strategies for the 21st Century.* 7th ed. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier.

MORRIS, C. W. 1955. Signs, Language and Behavior. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

MORTIMORE, P., SAMMONS, P., STOLL, L., LEWIS, D., & ECOB, R. 1988. *School Matters.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

MUIJS, D. 2011. Leadership and Organisational Performance: From Research to Prescription?. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 25(1), 45–60.

MUMBY, D. K. 2001. Power and Politics. *In:* JABLIN, F. M., & PUTNAM, L. L. eds. *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 585–623.

MURRAY, N. T. 2009. *Foundation of Aural Rehabilitation: Children, Adults, and Their Family Members.* 3rd ed. Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Cengage Learning.

NIR. A. E., & AMI. T. B. 2005. School–Parent Relationship in the Era of School-based Management: Harmony or Conflict?. *Leadership and Policy in School.* 4(1), 55–72.

NORRIS, S. 2002. The Implication of Visual Research for Discourse Analysis: Transcription Beyond Language. *Visual Communication*, 1(1), 97–121.

NORRIS, S. 2004. *Analysing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework*. New York, NY: Routledge.

NORTHOUSE, P. G. 2010. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

NORTON, R. W., & BRENDERS, D. 1996. *Communications and Consequences: Law of Interaction.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

NORTON, R. W. 1978. Foundation of a Communicator Construct. *Human Communication Research,* 4(2), 99–112.

NORTON, R. W. 1983. *Communication Style: Theory, Applications and Measure*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

NORTON, R. W. 1980. The Illusion of Systematic Distortion. *Human Communication Research*, 7(1), 88–96.

O'TOOLE, M. 1994 *The Language of Displayed Art*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

OGDEN, C. K., & RICHARDS, I. A. 1946. *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. 8th ed. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World.

OLIVER, P. 2003. *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

OPPENHEIM, A. N. 1992. *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement.* New ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing.

OPPENHEIM, A. N. 2001. *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement* . 2nd ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing.

OSTERMAN, K. F. 1993. Communication Skills: A Key to Caring, Collaboration, and Change. Houston. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 363973

PALTRIDGE, B. 2006. *Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum International Publishing.

PANG, I-WAH. 2004. School−Family−Community Partnership in Hong Kong: Perspectives and Challenges.' *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 3(2), 109−125.

PANG, I-WAH, & WATKINS, D. 2000. Towards a Psychological Model of Teacher−Parent Communication in Hong Kong Primary Schools. *Educational Studies*, 26(2), 141−163.

PATTON, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods.* 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

PAWLAS, G., & MEYERS, K. 1989. The Principal and Communication. Elementary Principal. Series no. 3. Bloomington. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 315913.

PAYNE, E. J. 1996. *Communicator Style: A Study of Human Resource Managers*. The Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Council on Education Administration. Savannah. November 10−12.

PAYNE, M. 2005. *Modern Social Work Theory*. 3rd ed. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

PEASE, A., & PEASE, B. 2004. *The Definitive Book of Body Language: How to Read Others' Thoughts by Their Gesture*. London: Orion Books Ltd.

PEIRCE, C. S. 1966. *Selected Writings.* New ed. WIENER, P.P. ed. Minneola, NY: Dover Publications Inc.

PLUMMER, K., & MACIONIS, J. J. 2008. *Sociology: A Global Introduction.* 4th ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

POMERANTZ, E. M., GROLNICK, W. S., & PRICE. C. E. 2005. The Role of Parents in How Children Approach Achievement: A Dynamic Process Perspective. *In:* ELLIOT, A. J., & DWECK. C. S. eds. *Handbook of Competence and Motivation.* New York: The Guilford Publications. pp. 229−278.

POULOU, M., & MATSAGOURAS, E. 2007. School−Family Relations: Greek Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, 1(0), 83−89.

PUNCH, F. 2005. *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approach.* 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

PUNCH, M. 1998. Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research. *In:* DENZIN, N. K., & LINCOLN, Y. S. eds. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 156−184.

RANSON, S., MARTIN. J., & VINCENT, C. 2004. Storming Parents, Schools and Communicative Inaction. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 25(3), 259−274.

RAYNES, B. L. 2001. Predicting difficult employees: The Relationship between Vocational Interests, Self-esteem, and Problem Communication Styles. *Applied Human Resource Management Research*, 6(1), 33−66.

REECE, B. L., & BRANDT, R. 1993. *Effective Human Relations in Organizations.* 5th ed. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co.

REEVE, D. B. 2008. *Reframing Teacher Leadership to Improve your School.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

REPPA, A. A., BOTSARO, E. M., KAUNENOU., & PSYCHARIS, S. 2010. School Leadership Innovations and Creativity: The Case of Communication between School and Parents. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences.* 2(2), 2207−2211.

REYES, P., & HOYLE, D. 1992. Teachers' Satisfaction with Principals' Communication. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85(3), 163−168.

RICHES, C. 1994. Communication. *In:* BUSH, T., & BURHAM, J. W. eds. *The Principles of Educational Management.* Essex: Longman Group Ltd. pp. 245−264.

RICHMOND, V.P., McCROSKEY, J. C. & DAVIS, L. M. (1982). Individual Differences Among Employees, Management Communication Style, and Employee Satisfaction: Replication and Extention. *Human Communication Research*, 8(2), 170−188.

RIDMOND, V. P., & McCROSKEY, J. C. 1979. Management Communication Style, Tolerance for Disagreement, and Innovativeness as Predictors of Employee Satisfaction: A comparison of Single-Factor, Two-Factor, and Multi-Factor Approaches. *In:* Nimmo. D. ed. C*ommunication Yearbook 3*. New Brunswick, NJ: Tansaction Publishers. pp. 369−373.

ROBBINS, P. & ALVY, H. B. 1995. *The Principle's Companion: Strategies and Hint to Make the Job Easier*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

ROBBINS, S. P. 2003. *Organizational Behavior*. 10th ed. Englewood Cliffs. NJ: Practice-Hall.

ROBINSON, W. 1972. *Language and Social Behavior*. Baltimore: Penguin Education.

ROBSON, C. 2002. *Real World Research*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

ROCKWELL, R. E., ANDRE, L. C., & HAWLEY, M. K. 2010. *Families and Educators as Partners.* 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

ROGERS, B. 2007. Behaviour Management: A Whole-school Approach. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

ROSENGREN, K. E. 1999. *Communication: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

RUBIN, H. J., & RUBIN, I. S. 2005. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

RUESCH, J. 1967. Clinical Science and Communication Theory. *In:* MATSON, F. W., & MONTAGU, A. eds. The Human Dialogue: Perspective on Communication. New York: The Free Press. pp. 51−70.

SAGIE, A. 1996. Effects of Leader's Communication Style and Participative Goal Setting on Performance and Attitudes. *Human Performance*, 9(1), 51−64.

SAMOVAR, A. S., & PORTER, R. E. 1994. *Intercultural Communication: A Reader,* 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc.

SANDERS, M. 2008. How Parent Liaisons Can Help Bridge the Home−School Gap. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101(5), 287−299.

SANDERS, M. G., & EPSTEIN, J. L. 1998. International Perspective on School−Family Community Partnerships. *Childhood Education*, 74(6), 342−394.

SANDERS, M. G., & HARVEY, A. 2002. Beyond the School Walls: A Case Study of Principal Leadership for School−Community Collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, 104(7), 1345−1368.

SANDRA, P. D. 2001. *Seven Essentials for Character Discipline: Elementary Classroom Management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

SANFORD, A. C., HUNT, G. T., & BRACEY, H. J. 1987 *Communication Behavior in Organizations*. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

SANG, MIN LEE., KUSHER, J., & SEONG, HO CHO. 2007. Effect of Parent's Gender, Child's Gender, and Parental Involvement on the academic Achievement of Adolescents in Single Parent families. *Sex Roles,* 56(3−4), 149−157.

SCHACHTER, S. 1951. Deviation Rejection and Communication. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 46(2), 190−207.

SCHEYVENS, R., NOWAK, B., & SCHEYVENS, H. 2003. Ethical Issues. *In:* SCHEYVENS, R., & STOREY, D. eds. *Development Fieldwork: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 139−166.

SCHIFFRIN, D. 1994. *Approaches to Discourse: Language as Social Interaction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

SCHIRATO, T., & YELL, S. 2000. *Communication and Culture: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

SCHNEIDER, B. 1993. Parents, Their Children, and Schools: An Introduction. *In:* SCHNEIDER, B., & COLEMAN, J. S. eds. *Parents, Their Children and Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. pp. 1−12.

SCHRAMM, W. L. 1954. How Communication Works. *In:* SCHRAMM, W.L. ed. *The Process and Effects of Communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. pp. 3−26.

SCHUTZ, W. F. 1958. *A Three-Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

SCOLLON, R. 1998. *Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction: A Study of News Discourse.* London: Longman.

SCOLLON, R., & WONG SCOLLON, S. 2001. *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publications.

SCOLLON, R., & WONG SCOLLON, S. 2003. *Discourse in Place: Language in Material World.* London: Routledge Publications.

SCOTT, D. 1997. Ethical Issues in Practice Research: A Case Study. *Australian Social Work*, 50(4), 41–45.

SEALE, C. 1999a. *The Quality of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

SEALE, C. 1999b. Quality in Qualitative Research. *Quarterly Inquiry*, 5(4), 456–478.

SEARLE, J. R. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SEIDMAN, I. 1998. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences.* 2nd ed. New York, NY: Teachers College.

SEIDMAN, I. 2006. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences,* 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College.

SERI SECONDARY SCHOOL. 2007. *Majalah Semarak Edisi 37.* Bentong: Tenggara Network Publications.

SHANNON, C., & WEAVER, W. 1949. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

SIMON, B. S. 2004. High School Outreach and Family Involvement. *Social Psychology of Education,* 7(2), 185–209.

SLAUGHTER, D. T., & KUEHNE, V. S. 1988. Improving Black Education: Perspective on Parent Involvement. *Urban League Review,* 11(1–2), 59–75.

SNYDER, J., & EBMEIER, H. 1992. Empirical Linkages among Principal Behaviours and intermediate Outcomes: Implications for Principal evaluation. *Peabody Journal of Education,* 68(1), 75–107.

SOOMIN, SOHN & WANG, X. C. 2006. Immigrant Parents' Involvement in American School: Perspectives from Korean Mothers. *Early Childhood Educational Journal*, 34(2), 125−132.

SPINKS, N., & WELLS, B. 1995. Quality Communication: A key to Quality Leadership. *Training for Quality*. 3(2), 14−19.

SPITZBERG, B. H., & CUPACH. W. R. 1984. *Interpersonal Communication Competence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

STAKE, R. E. 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

STAKE, R. E. 2008. Case Studies. *In:* DENZIN, N.K., & LINCOLN, Y.S. eds. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. pp. 119−150.

STENBACKA, C. 2001. Qualitative Research Requires Quality Concepts of its Own. *Management Decision,* 39(7), 551−555.

STEVENS, S. S. 1950. Introduction: A Definition of Communication. *Journal of Acoustical Society of America*, 22(6), 680−690.

STEVENSON, H. W., CHEN, C., & UTTAL, D. H. 1990. Beliefs and Achievement: A Study of Black, White, and Hispanic Children. *Child Development*, 62(2), 508−523.

STRAUSS, A. L., & CORBIN, J. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

STREET, P. 1998. Home−School Cooperation at the Secondary Level in the United Kingdom: The Successful Schools Project. *Childhood Education*, 74(6), 359−362.

SULAIMAN, HAMIDAH., ABDULLAH, SITI SALINA., & YUSOP, FARRAH DINA. 2004. Peranan Ibu Bapa dan Guru dalam Membantu Pelajar-pelajar yang Menghadapi Masalah Pencapaian Akademik. *Masalah Pendidikan*, 27(0), 75−86.

SYPHER, H. E. 1980. Illusory Correction in Communication Research. *Human Communication Research,* 7(1), 83−87.

TALLEY, M. A., & RICHMOND, V. P. 1980. The Relationship between Psychological Gender Orientation and Communicator Style. *Human Communication Research*, 6(4), 326−339.

TANJONG SECONDARY SCHOOL. 2009. *Prospektus Tahunan.* Series Number SMKM.TM/03/01/10. Tanjong Malim: Tanjong Secondary School.

TANNEN, D. 1984. *Conversation Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

TANNEN, D. 1989. *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TILLMAN, L. C. 2006. Parental Involvement. In *Encyclopedia of Educational Leadership and Administration*. [Online] Available at :<http://www.sage-ereference.com/edleadership/ Article_n417.html> (Accessed: 26 Feb 2010).

TRUMBULL, E., DIAZ-MEZA, R., HASAN, A., & ROTHSTEIN-FISCH, C. 2001. *A Five Year Report of   the Bridging Cultures Project.* San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

TURNEY, K., & KAO, G. 2009. Barriers to School Involvement: Are Immigrant Parents is Advantage?. *The Journal of Educational Research,* 102 (4), 257−271.

UCCELLI, P., HEMPHILL, L., PAN, B. A., & SNOW, C. E. 2003. Conversing with Toddlers about the Nonpresent: Precursors to Narrative Development in Two Genres. *In:* BALTER, L., & TAMIS, L. C. eds. *Child Psychology: A Handbook of Contemporary Issues.* 2nd ed. New York, NY: CRC Press. pp. 215−237.

VAN LEEUWEEN, T. 1999. *Speech, Music, Sound*. London: Macmillan Press.

VILLAS-BOAS, A. 1998. The Effect of Parental Involvement in Homework on Student Achievement in Portugal and Luxembourg. *Childhood Education*, 74(6), 367−371.

WALKER, A., & CAVANAGH, D. 1994. *Report on the National School's Project in the NT Darwin.* NTDE.

WALSHAM, G. 2006. Doing Interpretive Research. European Journal of Information Systems. 15(3), 320−330.

WATTS, M., & EBBUTT, D. 1987. More than the Sum of the Parts: Research Method in Group Interviewing. *British Educational Research Journal*, 13(1), 25−34.

WEE, BENG NEO. 1999. *Perceptions of Primary School's Headmasters and Teachers towards the Concepts, Importance and Practice of School and Family Partnerships,* unpublished PhD Thesis. University Putra Malaysia.

WEST, R., & TURNER, L. H. 2009. *Understanding Interpersonal Communication: Making Choices in Changing Times*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

WILLEMS, S., De MAESSCHALCK, S., DEVEUGELE, M., DERESE, A., & De MAESENEER, J. 2005. Socio-Economic Status of the Patient and Doctor−Patient Communication: Does It Make A Difference? *Patient Education and Counselling*. 56(2), 139−146.

WILLIAM. R. 1966. *Communication.* Revised ed. London: Chatto & Windus.

WILLIAMS, D. L., & STALLWORTH, J. T. 1982. *A survey of Educators Regarding Parent Involvement in Education: Implications for Teacher Training*. Austin, Texas. [Online]. Available: ERIC Document Series Number: ED 220448.

WILLIAMS, J. 2002. Professional Leadership in Schools: Effective Middle Management and Subject Leadership. London: Kogan Page.

WILLIAMSON, R., & BLACKBURN, B. R. 2009. *The Principalship from A to Z.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

WITHERSPOON, P. D. 1996. *Communicating Leadership: An Organizational Perspective*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

WITTGENSTEIN, L. 1958. *Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher.

WOFFORD, J. C., GERLOFF, E. A., & CUMMINS, R. C. 1977. *Organizational Communication: The Keystone to Managerial Effectiveness.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

WOLCOTT, H. F. 1988. Ethnography Research in Education. *In:* JAEGER, R.M. ed. *Complementary Methods or Research in Art Education*. Washington, DC: *America Education Research Association.* pp. 187−206.

WOLFENDALE, S. 1983. Parental Participation in Children's Development and Education. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publisher.

WOOD, J. T. 2010. Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters. 6th ed. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

WOOD, J. T. 2007. Communication Mosaics: An introduction to the Field of Communication. 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co, Inc.

YIN, R. K. 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

YIN, R. K. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

YOUNG, YUN KIM. 1977. Communication Patterns of Foreign Immigrants in the Process of Acculturation. *Human Communication Research*, 4(1), 66−67.

YUKL, G. 2002. *Leadership in Organizations*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

APPENDICES

University of Southampton
School of Education

Parents of Students Needed As Participant

A graduate student at University of Southampton United Kingdom is conducting a research study about principals' communication styles and parents' involvement in school. You are invited to participate.

Approximately one hour of your valuable time is needed

Benefits

**An opportunity to have an impact on school–home relations
A chance to discuss with the school principal your child's learning progress and parents' involvement in the school**

Return this flyer to school with your child with your name and contact number if you are interested. The principal or researcher will contact you. You may also contact the principal or researcher directly with any inquiries. If you volunteer, more information about the project will be provided

Name:Mobile phone:

Contact numbers

School :   Researcher :

Please return flyer by

_____/ _____/2009

Thank You

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton
School of Education

University of Southampton
Southampton, United Kingdom

Participant Information Sheet
(Parents)

Research Title

Principal's Leadership Communication Style and Parents
Involvement in School

Researcher

Eng Lee, Wee

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please read this information carefully before you decide whether to participate in this research. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear, or if you would like more information about this study.

About the researcher

I am a postgraduate student from the School of Education, Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Science, University of Southampton, United Kingdom. I am conducting this research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This research is sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to be involved with this research. If you do decide to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What is the research about?

This research is investigating the way principals speak with parents in Malaysian Public Secondary Schools. The aim is to understand how principals speak to parents to encourage them to support school learning activities. In general, this research intends to answers these questions;

1. in what ways do school principals talk to parents.

2. do the ways the principals talks to parents affect parents' involvements with school?

The findings of this study will be useful not only for the school administrators to plan their communication with parents but also for training divisions to plan their training programmes for school administrators.

Why I have been Chosen?

This research is focused on 3 secondary school principals and parents. If you have been asked to participate in this study it is because you are the parent of a student in one of the three schools.

What will happen to me if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be involved in 2 types of research activities. They are observation and interview. The researcher will ask your consent to be observed and interviewed. You will be informed at least two weeks before the observation and interview session takes place. Observation and interview will take place from June until the end of August 2009.

Parents

A conversation with the principal will be recorded. The conversation may concern topics as listed below;

*   School−home programme and your child's learning progress.

*   The role of parents in supporting school improvement;

- Any suggestions concerning how to improve school−home communications or parent−teacher relations.

The researcher will also interview you after the conversation with the principal. In this interview session, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding your view on:

- the way you spoke to the principal during your conversation.

- the way the principal spoke to you.

- your feelings about involvement in school activities after having a conversation with the principal.

The researcher will ask for your permission to audio tape record both conversation and interview for research purposes.

Will my participation be confidential?

All information that you provide will be strictly confidential and no individuals will be identifiable in any reports or publications. No information collected will be shown to anyone apart from the University of Southampton research team. Your word may be quoted anonymously in the thesis.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You will be taking part in this study as a volunteer. There are no individual benefits in taking part in this research but a benefit to others perhaps, particularly in respect of adding to current knowledge about the school management.

What happen if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and you are free to withdraw at any time.

What if something goes wrong and where I can get more information?

The research will abide by the ethical guidance of the University of Southampton. If there is any problem with the research please felt free to contact the Head of School at the School of Education University of Southampton on the contact number or address given as below;

Prof. Jacky Lumby

Address : School of Education.
University of Southampton,
Highfield, Southampton.
SO17 1BJ.
United Kingdom.
Email : jlumby@soton.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

The Ministry of Education Malaysia is funding this research, and it is being undertaken by the researcher as mentioned above. The project has received ethical approval from the University of Southampton.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

This research will take place over approximately 3−4 years, after which the results will be written up in a thesis. The information will also be presented at academic conferences.

Thank you for participating.

University of Southampton
Southampton, United Kingdom

Participant Information Sheet
(Principals)

Research Title

**Principal's Leadership Communication Style and Parents
Involvement in School**

Researcher

Eng Lee, Wee

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please read this information carefully before you decide whether to participate in this research. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear, or if you would like more information about this study.

About the researcher

I am a postgraduate student from the School of Education, Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Science, University of Southampton, United Kingdom. I am conducting this research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This research is sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to be involved with this research. If you do

decide to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What is the research about?

Thisresearch is investigating the way principals speak with parents in Malaysian Public Secondary Schools. The aim is to understand how principals speak to parents to encourage them to support school learning activities. In general, this research intends to answers these questions;

1. in what ways do school principals talk to parents.

2. do the ways the principals talks to parents affect parents' involvements with school?

The findings of this study will be useful not only for the school administrators to plan their communication with parents but also for training divisions to plan their training programmes for school administrators.

Why I have been Chosen?

This research is focused on 3 secondary school principals and parents. If you have been asked to participate in this study it is because you are the parent of a student in one of the three schools.

What will happen to me if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be involved in 2 types of research activities. They are observation and interview. The researcher will ask your consent to be observed and interviewed. You will be informed at least two weeks before the observation and interview session takes place. Observation and interview will take place from June until the end of August 2009.

Principal

A conversation with parents will be recorded. The conversation may concern topics as listed below;

- School−home programme and their child's learning progress.

- The role of parents in supporting school improvement;

- Any suggestions concerning how to improve school−home communications or parent−teacher relations.
- Parents' feedback about their involvement in school and encouragement for the parent to become involved in school learning activities.

The researcher will also interview you after the conversation with the principal. In this interview session, you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding your view on:

- the way you spoke to the principal during your conversation.

- the way the principal spoke to you.

- your feelings about involvement in school activities after your conversation with the principal.

The researcher will ask for your permission to audio tape record both conversation and interview for research purposes.

Will my participation be confidential?

All information that you provide will be strictly confidential and no individuals will be identifiable in any reports or publications. No information collected will be shown to anyone apart from the University of Southampton research team. Your word may be quoted anonymously in the thesis.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

You will be taking part in this study as a volunteer. There are no individual benefits in taking part in this research but a benefit to others perhaps, particularly in respect of adding to current knowledge about the school management.

What happen if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and you are free to withdraw at any time.

What if something goes wrong and where I can get more information?

The research will abide by the ethical guidance of the University of Southampton. If there is any problem with the research please felt free to contact the Head of School at the School of Education University of Southampton on the contact number or address given as below;

Prof. Jacky Lumby

Address :   School of Education.
                   University of Southampton,
                   Highfield, Southampton.
                   SO17 1BJ.
                   United Kingdom.

Email   : jlumby@soton.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

The Ministry of Education Malaysia is funding this research, and it is being undertaken by the researcher as mentioned above. The project has received ethical approval from the University of Southampton.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

This research will take place over approximately 3−4 years, after which the results will be written up in a thesis. The information will also be presented at academic conferences.

Thank you for participating.

Appendix 4

Voluntary Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton
School of Education

Voluntary Consent Form

I have read and understand the information on the participant information sheet, and I consent to participate in an interview and observation. I understand that my conversation with the principal will be video recorded and the interview with the researcher will be audio taped. I understand that the information will be used for educational purposes such as reports and educational articles. I also understand that my responses are confidential, and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a sign copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name   _____   Signature   _____

Phone number   _____   Date   _____

E-mail address   _____

I certify that I have explained to the above participant the nature, purpose and the potential benefits of participating in this study.

Researcher's signature   _____

Date   _____

Appendix 5

Interview Question for Principal

<div align="center">

Interview Questions
For
Principals

</div>

 Explain protocol – Obtain consent

A. Background

Note: The questions in italics are possible additional prompts.

 First, I would like to get to know you a little. Please tell me briefly about your career as an educator.

How many years have you been a teacher?
How long have you been a principal?
How many years have you been a principal in this school?
Have you attended any training since you became a principal?

B. Principal's communication styles and parents involvement in school

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your communication style in relation to parents' involvement in school. I would like you to think about how your communication with parents affects their involvement in school.

Please tell me briefly about parents' involvement in this school.

1. How often do you have a chance to meet parents?

   How do you usually meet parents?
   What is the main purpose of meeting you?

2. What do you usually do in preparation before you meet parents?

   If you do make preparations, may I know why you choose to do that?

3. Where do you normally speak to parents?

   Why do you choose that place?

4. I am interested in your approach, your manner and your style of speaking with parents?

   Could you give me some specific examples?
   Why do you choose this communication style?
   How do parents respond to your communication style?

5. Does your communication style change in any way with parents of a different ethnic group to you?

   How do parents usually speak to you?
   Do you face any difficulties in speaking to parents?
   If any, could you give me some specific example of the difficulties that you face?
   How do you try to solve these difficulties?

6. As a school leader, do you communicate with parents to encourage them to become involved in school learning activities?

   Can you give me some specific examples?

7. This school is a multi-ethnic secondary school. Therefore, the students as well as the parents are from a range of ethnic groups, such as Malays, Chinese and Indians. From your experiences as a principal in this school, are there any differences in the involvement of different groups?

   Can you give me some specific examples?

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your training

8. What kind of training have you attended? Did it cover leadership communication?

   Do you think that leadership communication is important in your career as a school principal?

9. Have any training programmes that you have attended been helpful for you in developing your skills to build a relationship with parents? Why?

Interview Question for Parents

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton
School of Education

Interview Questions
For
Parents

Explain protocol − Obtain consent

A. Background

Note: The questions in italics are possible additional prompts.

First, I would like to get to know you a little. Please tell me briefly about yourself e.g. Where do you live, where are you working.

Where do you live?
Where kind of work do you do?
How many children do you have in this school?
Why did you send your children to this school?
How often do you come to the school?

B. Principal's Communication Styles

I would like you to think about your conversation with the principal and how it affects your involvement in school learning activities.

1. Please tell me briefly about your conversation with the principal.

    What were the main topics of discussion?
    Did you understand the content of the discussion?

2. Could you explain further the manner or the way in which the principal spoke to you with some specific examples?

3. How comfortable were you with the discussion?

   Could you explain further with some examples?

4. What did you want to get out of the communication with the principal?

   Can you give me some specific example?

5. What are the languages that you usually use to speak to the principal? For example Malay, English, Chinese, Tamil or do you mix all those languages such as '*bahasa Melayu Pasar'*.

   Why do you prefer to use this language?
   Did you face any language difficulties during your conversation with principal?
   Could you give me some specific examples?

6. Do you understand the conversation with the principal?

   Why?
   What did you do, when you did not understand the principal?
   What did the principal do to make you understand?

7. How would you describe the principal as a communicator in relation to maintaining a relationship between the school and parents in this school?

   Why do you say that?

8. Do you think your meeting with principal will have a positive effect on your child's learning progress?

   Can you give me some specific examples of what way your meeting with principal will benefit your child's learning?