

## CURRICULUM FOR HOMES - A STUDY OF A SCHOOL LETTER

Jayne Keogh

### ABSTRACT

Language, in the form of talk and printed materials, is the main medium through which parents and teachers meet and their relationships are constructed. Parent-teacher contact language enables participants to present versions of their institutional selves and their worlds to each other. These worlds are not neutral, but reflect social ideologies as well as commonsense 'practical' concerns. This paper analyses a letter sent from an independent secondary school in Queensland to parents of attending students immediately prior to the commencement of the winter vacation. Textual features which construct the public image of the school, and position the readers in relation to the author-as-institutional-agent will be discussed. Versions of parenthood, studenthood/childhood and the school are evidenced within the text by the use of competing moral categorizations and stories. The analysis provides a method that could be applied in observing the positioning of school personnel, parents and students in other texts which mediate the relations between "home" and "school".

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Texts construct and reflect the world of which they are a part. Dorothy Smith (1991) in her chapter : The Active Text - A Textual Analysis of the Social Relations of Public Textual Discourse (In Texts, Facts and Femininity - Exploring the Relations of Ruling) suggests that social

organization is textually mediated.

" ...Texts are situated in and structure social relations in which people are actively at work. Texts enter into and order courses of action and relations among individuals. The texts themselves have a material presence and are produced in an economic and social process which is part of a political economy. Textually mediated discourse is a distinctive feature of contemporary society existing as socially organized communicative and interpretive practices intersecting with and structuring people's everyday worlds. ... " (p.162-163).

Language, in the form of talk and printed materials, is the main medium through which parents and teachers meet and their relationships are constructed. Parent-teacher contact language enables participants to present versions of their institutional selves and their worlds to each other. These worlds are not neutral, but reflect social ideologies - in

effect, parent-teacher contact language becomes the means by which the public or official faces of the home and school are presented to each other. Within texts, it seems that parents and teachers create and reflect oppositionals which evidence their views regarding morally acceptable versus unacceptable versions of themselves and their worlds or realities (Silverman,1987), thus demonstrating their ideologies.

Schools need to attract and retain a clientele in order to exist. Without parental demand and support, schools would have no students and so would cease to be, or would attract fewer students, thus obtaining fewer funds, allowing for fewer state resources, and so on, creating a spiral of economic disadvantage. A "positive public image", that is, the promise of a particular kind of future, is therefore needed. Advantageous images of particular aspects of schools as being acceptable (in contrast to aspects of "other schools" as being "unacceptable") are constructed during parent-teacher talk and in printed materials originating from the schools perhaps, in part, to "sell" their positive features. This may be particularly important in the private school system, where parents are required to pay fees. However, this is perhaps also a factor within the public system in Queensland, where parents are allowed, in theory, freedom of choice in the selection of state schools for their children. Thus it is that factors relating to the market economy may be embedded within school texts.

Simultaneously with presenting public images reflecting acceptable versus unacceptable social identities, ideologies and market values, language is the mode through which relationships between participants in talk, and writers and readers of written texts are constructed and evidenced. Power is of fundamental importance in the constitution of relationships. Talk and print evidence certain textual strategies and devices evidencing power relationships. Parent-teacher talk and printed texts are sites where inter-institutional power relationships between homes and schools are, in effect, constructed and negotiated.

This paper examines features of the printed text contained in a letter sent to parents from an independent, coeducational secondary school in Brisbane, and analyses aspects of this text which may contribute to the school's public image and marketability. In addition, this paper discusses devices evidenced within the text that contribute towards the construction of power between the author-as-school-agent and the potential readers of the letter, thereby positioning both the parents-as-readers and the students-as-(potential but unacknowledged) readers in institutional terms. In analysing this letter, I am concerned with answering the questions :

- \* What is the text about?
- and
- \* How does the text work?

The ostensible topic of this text was the students, who were constituted in ways that supported the author-as-school-representative's version of childhood (Jenks, cited in Baker & Freebody, 1987). That is, the versions of childhood/studenthood presented to the readers within this text were constructed according to the author-as-school-agent's agenda, and alternative constructions were excluded or silenced. In offering accounts of the nature of childhood (that is, in offering a certain version of childhood as being "natural"), and in suggesting to parents ways of relating to their children/students, the author of the letter offers a "moral version" of herself-as-school-representative, and constructs institutional versions of acceptable versus unacceptable parents and children/students, making use of a number of oppositional moral categorizations for this purpose. (Jayyusi, 1984)

In this paper I will analyse the text in its entirety by describing the "order of events" in the form of a summary of the sequence of topics dealt with in the letter. I will also discuss the major categories of descriptions as they were constructed through print within the text, describing how they were assembled, and how they frequently appeared to be

set up as oppositionals within the text. That is, competing moral categories and stories were presented which catered for a multiplicity of readers, and allowed for the text to be read in different ways, although containing a clear message for all. I will conclude this paper by summarizing the letter's most prominent categories, oppositionals, and textual narratives, and the ways in which they were assembled within the text.

This letter was sent home to the parents of students attending the school immediately prior to the commencement of the winter vacation. Its main theme consists of a prescription regarding "how to do holidays" directed ostensibly at the parents. Within the letter, moral versions and accounts of childhood are constructed, as are versions of parenthood/adulthood. The author of the letter presents herself as guardian of the moral order for

whom the school stands in opposition to the textually constructed cultural "other", constituting a version of herself as this institution's agent or representative. She creates a hierarchy of responsibility and power, consisting of herself as giver of advice to parents as subordinates who are made or held responsible for the management of their children. Her directions regarding "good" parenting involve the imposition of the school's moral order into the home; that is, she positions the parents as ancillary teachers for the period of the vacation - "in loco pedagogis" in effect.

Although the letter was addressed ostensibly to the parents ("...Dear Parents..."), it is of interest to consider the effect textual constructions and categorizations might have on students who were perhaps anticipated as also reading this text, or receiving its contents at second hand. Versions of acceptable and unacceptable childhood, parenthood, and the teacher-as-institutional-agent might well have been constructed for the benefit of such students.

PARAGRAPH 1 :

June 23, 1992

Dear Parents

Thank you for supporting your son or daughter through a very challenging and rewarding term. It is most pleasing to note the special efforts of those parents who have taken the time to attend the many sporting and cultural events of the term, and who have, at the same time, remained steadfast in their commitment to the standards and expectations we have at \_\_\_\_\_ College.

Regarding the "order of events", paragraph one of this letter firstly positions the readers as being acceptable parents, in that they are thanked for being supportive. A version of acceptable parenthood is then constructed as "...those parents who have taken the time to attend ... sporting and cultural events of the term, and ... have ... remained steadfast in their commitment to the standards and expectations we have representative of the school team.

PARAGRAPH 2 :

At times, children are quite capable of manipulating others in order to have things their own way. On such occasions, it is sometimes easier to give in and thereby have a quiet life, rather than insist on standards which can, at times, create conflict between you and your son or daughter. I commend those parents who, on such occasions, do not succumb to the pressure of their children.

Paragraph two commences with the construction of the nature of children as being "...capable of manipulating others in order to have things their own way...". An account of the normality of the difficulty of being a good parent as opposed to the ease of giving in and having a "quiet life", thereby being (by implication) a bad parent is expounded. A good parent-child relationship is suggested as being one identified by conflict caused by parents "...not succumb [ing] to the pressure of their children...". Good parents are commended. The paradox of a good parent-child relationship being associated with conflict, and a bad parent-child relationship being associated with harmony is a theme which is thereby constructed in this letter. (This is a feature which has also been evidenced in a number of parent-teacher interviews I have analysed previously).

PARAGRAPH 3 :

We consider our relationship with you to be a partnership in all aspects of your son's or daughter's growth. Should you need our support or assistance in this, we will be only too happy to cooperate.

Paragraph three introduces the constitution of a good parent-teacher (home-school) relationship as being a partnership. The sequencing of the construction of the acceptable parent-teacher relationship as being harmonious is in direct contrast with the construction of the acceptable parent-child relationship as being one associated with conflict specified in the previous paragraph. Although the parent-teacher relationship is constructed as being a partnership, the author suggests that this may be an asymmetrical partnership in that she offers the school's assistance or help, and states that "...we will be only too happy to cooperate..." in aspects of their children's "growth" according to the school's construction of acceptable parenting. Once again, the teacher uses the first person pronoun "we" as signifying her position as school (institutional) representative.

PARAGRAPH 4 :

As we close this term and look forward to a refreshing start to term three, I would ask that you support me in addressing a number of matters so that, at the commencement of the new term, your son or daughter has a positive start.

Paragraph four reiterates the issue of the writer's need for parental support in order to maintain the moral order of the school during the holiday period, so that "...at the commencement of the new term, your son or daughter has a positive start ...". The request for parental support in

this paragraph is juxtaposed with the school's offer of support for the parents in the immediately preceding paragraph. Support from either source is suggested as being necessary for the continued maintenance of the moral order of the school from within the home situation. The home, that is, the family is asked to continue the moral work of the school. Once again, the parents are positioned as being "in loco pedagogis" by the text.

It is noteworthy that the author uses the first person singular pronouns "I" and "me" in paragraph four for the first time. At this point the author has established her version of herself as school agent/representative sufficiently in the earlier sections of the letter, so she can now dispense with the use of the institutional team by the use of the first person plural (we) as a power technique. The author uses the first person singular for the remainder of the letter, apart from one exception in the first sentence of paragraph six when writing of "...shoes uses nouns such as the name of the school (paragraph six, sentence two), "the staff" (paragraph nine, sentence two), and "the College" (paragraph nine, sentence two) instead of personal pronouns, in a technique possibly designed to depersonalise the agency of the teacher-as-author as the direct initiator or receptor of suggested actions. Similarly, the noun "parents"

is substituted in paragraphs six and nine for the pronoun "you".

#### PARAGRAPH 5 :

Firstly, as a matter of immediacy, could I ask that you look to a review of the state of your son's or daughter's uniform. You would aware by now, of the recent checks on some aspects of the dress code, such as socks and shoes. It has been brought to my notice that some students are persuading parents to allow them to purchase non-regulation shoes and also to purchase socks which are too small for them. Please discuss this issue with your son or daughter and insist on their maintaining the standards required of them at \_\_\_\_\_ College. You should note that the preferred regulation shoe is :

Clarks Danmont (black) for boys  
Clarks Mid-term (brown) for girls

These shoes are available at Mathers stores locally and in the city.

Paragraph five is introduced as a priority, the topic being described as "signifiers of the moral order of the school, symbolised by the school uniform, specifically socks and shoes. Once again, students are constructed as those who would undermine the moral order by "... persuading parents to allow them to purchase non-regulation shoes and also to purchase socks which are too small for them ...". This conspiracy theory regarding childhood is a continuation of the discourse regarding children as being manipulative which was introduced earlier in paragraph two. Bad parents

are implied as being those who allow themselves to be so persuaded.

A managerial parent-child relationship is suggested by the author in this paragraph, by her use of bureaucratic discourse ( " ... could I ask that you look to a review of the state of your son's or daughter's uniform ..." and " ... please discuss this issue with your son or daughter ..." - my italics ). The parents seem to be constituted in terms of a middle management position by the author with her use of such professional/academic language.. The use of pronouns "their" and "them" ( " ... insist on their maintaining the standards required of them ..." - my italics) when writing of the students is noteworthy. Just who is responsible for maintaining standards is not clear - is it the parents who need to maintain vigilance, or is it the students who are ultimately responsible for their actions? This ambiguity of responsibility may well be for the benefit of the students themselves who might be unacknowledged readers of this letter, or perhaps it is a device for parents who fail to ensure continuation "... of the standards required at [the school] ...", redirecting responsibility from them and reassigning it to the children, thus maintaining an acceptable moral version of the parents-as-readers. The use of the passive case results in ambiguity, and the paradoxical use of the adjectival description "preferred regulation" in relation to the school shoe creates a lack of agency. These textual devices may also be a way of shifting or softening moral responsibilities from the parents-as-readers of this letter towards the students. However, the fact of the letter being sent does assign responsibility. It is a reminder to parents not to be improperly persuaded by their children. Parents may or may not have intended to be vigilant over the holidays. The letter is, therefore, delicately implicative.

Paragraphs six, seven and nine go on to detail aspects of student dress and/or appearances signifying the moral order that may be susceptible to being undermined by the students/children. Parents are directed to maintain their surveillance regarding this concern.

#### PARAGRAPH 6 :

You should be aware that there is another style of Clarks shoes in the boys shoes called "Docs" which are available, but which we do not support as a

regulation shoe. This shoe is a trend at the moment and is a reflection of mediocre standards accepted by some but certainly not accepted by \_\_\_\_\_ College. If you are unable to purchase the regulation Clarks shoe, you should first seek approval from the Head of School for an alternative style. It is disappointing to be told by the shop assistants at Mathers that some parents are allowing their son or daughter to purchase the incorrect shoe. I know that, as a parent, you are committed to the standards of the College and I look forward to your continued support in this regard.

Paragraph six details "Docs" as a design which is not supported as a regulation shoe. This type of shoe is specified as being "... a trend at the moment ..." and, as such "... is a reflection of mediocre standards accepted by some but certainly not accepted ..." by the school. Trendiness or fashion is equated with "mediocre" and "unacceptable standards" in this text. All transient trends are thus, perhaps, implied as being vulgar in the author-as-institutional-agent's view. Who the "some" are is not immediately obvious - this term may denote either some parents or some students. Such ambiguity once again allows responsibility for unacceptable student behaviour to be redirected away from the particular parent-as-reader of this letter.

In the fourth sentence of this paragraph, "some parents" are again presented as "... allowing their son or daughter to purchase the incorrect shoe ...". Perhaps this sentence also serves as an implied warning to "other" (that is, unacceptable) parents. The author views such parenting as "disappointing". That this type of parental behaviour does, in fact, happen has been confirmed, according to the writer, by "... some shop assistants ...". (Institutional surveillance is, hereby, suggested by the author as extending beyond the "school family" and into the broader community. By implication there are also some shop assistants who are properly aware of the school's standards; that is, there are proper and improper shop assistants). The reader here appears to be positioned or repositioned as not being one of the bad parents, according to the final sentence of this paragraph ("... I know that, as a parent, you are committed to the standards of the College ..."), and it seems that the reader's continued support is here assumed. The reader is herein positioned as a good, although perhaps not always sufficiently diligent parent, according to the school version of acceptable parenthood as constituted in this text. The text is here almost in future perfect tense - if you as parent haven't succumbed, you will have been a very good parent. If you read yourself into this letter as one who won't or wouldn't succumb, you will be or continue to be a good parent. Indeed, good parenting is difficult given such manipulative children.

#### PARAGRAPH 7 :

Other areas of concern with regard to the dress code are :

- \* Socks which are too short. Students must buy socks which are long enough to be worn directly under the knee and held with garters if necessary.
- \* Jumpers which are ill-fitting because they are too big.
- \* Hats : some hats are in need of replacing. Your son or daughter may have been asked to do so over the holiday break.

Paragraph seven gives precise details regarding "... areas of concern with regard to the dress code ..." in an indented, tabulated form, so the eye

is immediately drawn to these items. The areas are, specifically, " ... socks which are too short ... ", " ... jumpers which are ill fitting because they are too big ...", and " ... some hats [which] are in need of replacing ...". It appears, then, that the author has in mind a perfect size as being acceptable, and therefore indicative of the acceptance of the moral order of the school. Anything else is to be viewed as exemplifying

the "mediocre standards" mentioned earlier.

PARAGRAPH 8 :

Secondly, could I ask that you review with your son or daughter, the Code of Behaviour as a document which sets out some sensible rules and guidelines for their care, welfare and safety. The staff will continue to address this with the students, but it is important that parents show students, through their adherence to standards, that they support the College in this same endeavour. It is, in fact, this very aspect of the College, which encouraged many of you to select it as the educational institution which would enhance the personal and social development of your son or daughter. [My italics]. You would also be aware that \_\_\_\_\_ College students have an outstanding reputation for their dignified and gracious behaviour which sets them apart from so many other young people.

Paragraph eight is noteworthy because not only does it include the fundamental "essence" of the writer's view of acceptable parenthood, but it appears, at first glance, to have been placed out of sequence. In the preceding paragraphs five, six and seven, and in the immediately following paragraph (nine), the author has been and continues to address the topic of student appearance and dress. Paragraph eight, however, switches to the topic of behaviour. Perhaps that this paragraph is placed here indicates that the writer views unacceptable appearances as being the outward signs of unacceptable behaviour or character. (History is redolent with such views of poor behaviour being linked with unacceptable dress - for example, the dress code which specified that denim jeans were unacceptable for entrance to certain nightclubs).

The author places behaviour as second in importance in her level of priorities specified within the letter, and uses bureaucratic/managerial discourse that is reminiscent of the world of business for prescriptive parental practices here ( " ... Secondly, could I ask that you review with your son or daughter, the Code of Behaviour ... "). The Code of Behaviour is described as " ... a document which sets out some sensible rules and guidelines for their [the students'] care, welfare and safety ...". Thus school behaviour agenda are presented as being "sensible", and justified in terms of their being in the best interests of the students. Couched in such terms, therefore, it would be difficult for any "sensible" and caring parent to disagree with them. Parents are assured that " ... the staff will continue to address this with the students ...". Given that students will continue to be told about acceptable behaviour, students could find

their parents lacking if their parents don't measure up to the school's standards. Add to this that students may well see or be told about this letter. Parents are directed to demonstrate that they are, indeed, good parents in that they should " ... show students, through their adherence to standards, that they support the College in this same endeavour ...". It is at this point in the paragraph (sentence three) that the author ceases being prescriptive, but directly constructs her view of acceptable College parents and students, in contrast to unacceptable "other" parents and students who haven't opted to send their children to the school, or fully accept the school's expectations regarding standards of behaviour. The writer suggests that " ... it is, in fact, this very aspect of the College [adherence to standards], which encouraged you to select it as the educational institution which would enhance the personal and social development of your son or daughter ..." (my italics). Thus it is that adherence to school standards, as signified by insisting that their children present themselves in the required manner, is suggested as being crucial to becoming or remaining an acceptable College parent. This sentence implicitly serves to construct oppositional categories of "many" (that is, acceptable) parents who actively concur with school based prescriptions regarding good parenting practices, in contrast to "some" (other) parents who don't concur with school agenda and are, therefore, bad/unacceptable parents. In this way an "in" group of parents is created within the text as opposed to an "out" group. Thus spaces are provided for reading oneself in as a good or a bad parent.

Similarly, the following sentence in paragraph eight (sentence four) constructs an "in" group of students as opposed to an "out" group ( " ... you [the good parent readers] would also be aware that ... [ or, if not , you should be aware that] ... College students have an outstanding reputation for their dignified and gracious behaviour which sets them apart from so many other young people ..." ). College students are, therefore, constituted as being set apart from other young people. Perhaps this is why trendiness, a typical youth characteristic, is viewed with such abhorrence by the writer earlier in the text, as being indicative of mediocre standards - that is, as indicative of the "other", therefore unacceptable young people who, by implication, lack the dignity and grace that identifies College students.

Sentence four in paragraph eight, just discussed, is probably the section of the letter that embodies the crux of the author's constitution of acceptable parents and students as those who are set apart by their maintenance and adherence to the " ... sensible [school] rules and guidelines ...", created in the best interests of the students, despite the temptation to take the easier course and give in to manipulative students. Thus an elite parental membership category is constructed within the text, and expected to work in partnership with the author of the letter as-representative-of-the-school.

PARAGRAPH 9 :

Finally, I would ask that you be particularly careful in your choice of a hairdresser over the holiday period. It is my experience that many students choose a hairdresser they know is not familiar with the standards required at \_\_\_\_\_ College and think that, because the holiday period is a reasonably long one, they have time to allow a "non-regulation" haircut to grow out. I urge you not to accept this reasoning from your son or daughter.

Paragraph nine reverts to becoming directive and prescriptive regarding another signifier of the school's moral order, namely that of " ... a choice of hairdresser over the holiday period ... ". Once again, "many students" are constituted as those who will deliberately try to oppose the system ( " ... it is my experience that many students choose a hairdresser they know is not familiar with the standards required at [the school] ... "), and parents are urged " ... not to accept this reasoning from your son or daughter ... ". Thus it is that the student conspiracy theory and the need to maintain parental vigilance is continued to be emphasised within this text.

PARAGRAPH 10 :

My warmest wishes go with you all during the holiday break and I look forward to renewing and further strengthening our partnership in Term Three.

Yours sincerely

DEAN OF THE COLLEGE

The final paragraph (paragraph ten) is reminiscent of a Christmas card, completing the letter with a token statement of politeness : " ... my warmest wishes go with all of you during the holiday break ... ", and the author " ... looks forward to renewing and strengthening our partnership in term three ... ". Within this final paragraph the author uses the inclusive adjective "all" for the first time in relation to the readers. The term here seems to apply to all readers who may or may not be associated with differing categories constructed or implied within the text , even though a number of oppositionals were created in terms of acceptable or unacceptable characteristics associated with being members of these

groups. The conclusion appears, therefore, to be directed universally towards all readers, stitching the readings together, bringing all back into the fold.

The author, whose name and position at the school is printed beneath her signature, concludes with " ...Yours sincerely, ... ".

Within this text the author-as-school-agent has constructed oppositional versions of acceptable ("College") and unacceptable ("other") parents and children/students. Acceptable parents are constituted as those who are vigilant and in control (with the school's help) of their children, whereas unacceptable parents are those who will "give in" to their children, and who don't adhere or support school specified standards, or are not vigilant enough. Acceptable students are those who are compliant, tidy, well-dressed, traditional, dignified and gracious, according to school specified criteria. In contrast, "other" students are constituted as being manipulative, slovenly, trendy, flighty, out of control and mediocre. Within the text adjectives of quantity (some, most, many) become adjectives of quality (other). In this way the author has constructed world views of "our" (elitist) school in opposition to "other" (public?) schools, perhaps along social class lines of ruling versus working class schools (Connell et al., 1982)

Readers are expected to read themselves into, and, literally, "buy into" the world view prescribed by this author-as-school-representative, in order to obtain enhanced life chances and choices for their children. "College" standards are symbolized by dress and appearance. Indeed, as specified in Paragraph eight, " ... it is, in fact, this very aspect of the College which encouraged you to select it as the educational institution which would enhance the personal and social development of your son or daughter

Bourdieu (1991) has discussed the linkage between the cultural and material marketplace in which the schools figure ( Language and Symbolic Power). The author of the letter-as-school-agent markets the school as being one which will produce "winners", if readers are prepared to adhere to the hegemonic order of the "College", whereas non compliance will, by implication, produce "losers". So it is that this text works by constructing the public face of the school as being marketable/desirable, in terms of its potential to enhance the life chances and choices of its student clientele, as long as the clientele/readers of the text are prepared to adhere to the author-as-school-agent's prescriptive practices as specified within this letter. The parent-teacher relationship constructed within this text is, therefore, asymmetrical in that readers are expected to follow the author-as-school-agent's prescriptions in order to remain acceptable, thereby becoming "winners" not "losers".

Throughout this letter, various themes or narratives , linked to western socio-cultural ideologies, are evidenced. The tone of the letter is almost biblical at times, the vocabulary and phraseology being used reminiscent of the pulpit. The pleasure that the author expresses concerning parents who have ' ... remained steadfast in their commitment to the standards and expectations we have at ...[the] College ...' is couched in very fundamentalist terms. Similarly, her commendation of ' ...those parents who ... do not succumb to the pressure of their children ...'. The "story" or construction of childhood within this letter seems to reflect the

biblical theme of "original sin", and parents are invoked to maintain their vigilance. It appears to be a case of "spare the rod and spoil the child". Looked at from this perspective, the battleground scenario of adult-child relationships as presented in this letter is naturalized. Such conflict is inevitable for the future good of the students if viewed from within this perspective.

A second story is related to the detail concerning what might perhaps be regarded by some as trivia. It is obvious that the author views details of dress, appearance and behaviour of fundamental importance - they are

symbolic of the maintenance of the moral order of the school, signifying "...adherence to standards ...". Parents are invoked to "... show students ... that they support the College in this same endeavour ...". It is implied that students will try to undermine this moral order unless all adults continue with their surveillance. The intergenerational conflict story is, thereby, continued by emphasis on such detail regarding dress, appearance and behaviour. It is implied that the result of not maintaining vigilance would, (inevitably) result in student/child dominated anarchy. Indeed, unsupervised students would no longer be "set apart", but would descend to the level of "... so many other young people ...". (Perhaps the adage "...take care of the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.." is applicable here). Bourdieu (1991) would view excess of diligence to trivia as an obsession of the "petty bourgeoisie". By emphasising such details within the text, the author is perhaps positioning her readers as being part of this aspiring middle class, who may well be purchasing a means of upward mobility for their children by sending them to this particular private school. Thus it is that it is suggested that potential membership of the elite class would be enhanced through the adherence to details of dress, appearance and behaviour as specified by the author within this letter.

Finally, when considering this letter, a word regarding gender. The author is meticulous in her use of non sexist language, superficially indicating a non gender bias. However, I feel that there is an undertone of sexism in that, although the author ostensibly addresses this letter to all parents, she is in fact addressing mothers. Surely this letter implies that someone, probably the mother, needs to be at home full time during the holiday period in order to maintain the surveillance? Who will be there to check that students buy the "preferred regulation" shoes, or will accompany the students to the hairdresser? Such activities are traditionally viewed as being maternal roles. There is no acknowledgement within this letter that students may well have both parents who are working full time. Parents (probably mothers) appear to be expected to take time away from work and have school holidays too in order to become acceptable in this author-as-school-agent's terms. Perhaps it is not too far fetched to view messages contained in this letter as being, in fact, directed at mothers rather than parents. This is a "ruling class story" in that the families/parents being addressed appear to need to conform to traditional

parental roles in order to act effectively, according to the author. Perhaps, indeed, it is mothers who are constituted as being "in loco pedagogis" during the holidays within this text. This letter might be interpreted as being a reminder to mothers regarding the necessity and ways of maintaining the College's standards in order to "do holidays" correctly, and continue to set their children apart from "other young people"!

Within this paper various textual practices have been identified which constructed the public image of the school, and positioned the readers in relation to the author-as-institutional agent. Moral versions of parenthood, studenthood/childhood and the school were evidenced within this text by the use of competing moral categorizations and stories. This text might well mediate family practices as prescribed by the author-as-school-agent, thereby creating a school based curriculum for homes. This analysis provides a method that could be applied in observing the positioning of school personnel, parents and students in other texts which mediate the relations between "home" and "school".

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#### APPENDIX 1

(The school letter as sent home, in its entirety)

June 23, 1992

Dear Parents

Thank you for supporting your son or daughter through a very challenging and rewarding term. It is most pleasing to note the special efforts of those parents who have taken the time to attend the many sporting and cultural events of the term, and who have, at the same time, remained steadfast in their commitment to the standards and expectations we have at \_\_\_\_\_ College.

At times, children are quite capable of manipulating others in order to have things their own way. On such occasions, it is sometimes much easier to give in and thereby have a quiet life, rather than insist on standards which can, at times, create conflict between you and your son or daughter. I commend those parents who, on such occasions, do not succumb to the pressure of their children.

We consider our relationship with you to be a partnership in all aspects of your son's or daughter's growth. Should you need our support or assistance in this, we will be only too happy to co-operate.

As we close this term and look toward a refreshing start to term three, I would ask that you support me in addressing a number of matters so that, at the commencement of the new term, your son or daughter has a positive start.

Firstly, as a matter of immediacy, could I ask that you look to a review of your son's or daughter's uniform. You would be aware by now, of the recent checks on some aspects of the dress code, such as socks and shoes. It has been brought to my notice that some students are persuading their parents to allow them to purchase non-regulation shoes and also to purchase socks which are too small for them. Please discuss this issue with your son or daughter and insist on their maintaining the standards required of them at \_\_\_\_\_ College. You should note that the preferred regulation shoe is :

Clarks Danmont (black) for boys  
Clarks Mid-term (brown) for girls

These shoes are available at Mathers stores locally and in the city. You should now be aware that there is another style of Clarks shoes in the boys shoes called "Docs" which are available, but which we do not support as a regulation shoe. This shoe is a trend at the moment and is a reflection of mediocre standards accepted by some but certainly not accepted by \_\_\_\_\_ College. If you are unable to purchase the regulation Clarks shoe, you should first seek approval from the Head of School for an alternative style. It is disappointing to be told by the shop assistants at Mathers that some parents are allowing their son or daughter to purchase the incorrect shoe. I know that, as a parent, you are committed to the standards of the College and I look forward to your continued support in this regard.

Other areas of concern with regard to the dress code are:

\* Socks which are too short. Students must buy socks which are long enough to be worn directly under the knee and held with garters if necessary.

\* Jumpers which are ill-fitting because they are too big.

\* Hats : some hats are in need of replacing. Your son or daughter may have been asked to do so over the holiday break.

Secondly, could I ask that you review with your son or daughter, the Code of Behaviour which sets out some sensible rules and guidelines for their care, welfare and safety. The staff will continue to address this with the students but it is always important that parents show students, through their adherence to standards, that they support the College in this same

endeavour. It is, in fact, this very aspect of the College, which encouraged many of you to select it as the educational institution which would enhance the personal and social development of your son or daughter. You would also be aware that \_\_\_\_\_ College students have an outstanding reputation for their dignified and gracious behaviour which sets them apart from so many other young people.

Finally, I would ask that you be particularly careful in your choice of a hairdresser over the holiday period. It is my experience that many students choose a hairdresser they know is not familiar with the standards required at \_\_\_\_\_ College and think that, because the holiday period is a reasonably lengthy one, they have time to allow a "non-regulation" haircut to grow out. I urge you not to accept this reasoning from your son or daughter.

My warmest wishes go with all of you during the holiday break and I look forward to renewing and further strengthening our partnership in Term Three.

Yours sincerely

DEAN OF THE ACADEMY