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# Tutor and Teacher Timescapes: Lessons from a Home-School Partnership

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## Abstract

*A partnership project was developed in which parents volunteered to support teachers in training years 1-3 children in computer skills at a primary school in a small, low socio-economic community. This article identifies the ways teachers and the 'tutors' (as the volunteers were called) understood the value of the project. 'Being a teacher' and 'being a volunteer' were structured by different forms of social engagement, which in turn influenced the ways individuals were able to work with each other in collaborative processes. We argue that the discursive practices encoded in home-school-community partnership rhetoric represent ruling-class ways of organising and networking that may be incompatible with those of people from low socio-economic backgrounds. When such volunteers work in schools their attendance may be sporadic and short-term whereas teachers would like 'reliable' ongoing commitment. This mismatch wrought of teachers' and volunteers' differing everyday realities needs to be understood before useful models for partnerships in disadvantaged communities may be realised.*

## Introduction

Because home, school and community represent the major overlapping spheres of influence in children's education and development, researchers and practitioners call

for them to collaborate to create better educational programs for students (Epstein 1995). However, often unquestioned assumptions are made about families which take no account of differing family types, of major social changes affecting families, or of home environments in which children are developing and learning. Such assumptions underlie pedagogical discourse, which through its broad, regulatory properties re-inscribes particular forms of order, ideology and identity beyond the specific knowledges it seeks to develop (Berstein 2000, cited in Sawchuk 2003). One of these assumptions, we suggest, is the notion that the temporalities and time frames that structure some parent's lives can be interpolated unproblematically with the structures of school times.

Partnerships with student's families have tended to be initiated by schools when they have a need for 'help' or when they feel parents do not have an adequate grasp of how their children are being taught (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie 1995). The terms and conditions of such partnerships are planned, decided upon and instituted without any significant parental input. Parental involvement in school is limited to the giving and receiving of information and 'working-class' parents feel excluded from decision-making about school management and organisation, and about matters that affected them personally and financially (Hanafin & Lynch 2002). Particularly, parents from 'low-income' neighbourhoods feel and are treated as 'less' valuable than professionals and Fine (1993, p. 684) asserts that 'questions of power, authority and control must be addressed head-on within debates about parental involvement in public schools'.

One contemporary context in which partnerships are being forged is in the development of technological infrastructure and training in computer literacy in schools (Draus 2002). Such initiatives are often thwarted by school conditions in 'low socio-economic' communities. Their families are less likely to own computers (Riel, Schwarz & Hitt 2002) or to perceive any need or use for computers (Ovington 2001). Schools possess inadequate resources to fund initiatives and train teachers, and particularly, there is low parental involvement in school activities (Arnaud 1999). These digital divide issues were evident in Indy Estate<sup>1</sup> a low-employment, under-served suburb on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area in south-east Queensland where researchers were working with a local community centre (henceforward the Centre) to help them implement computer training programs for the community (Coco, Goos & Kostogriz 2004, 2003). During our work there we initiated contact with the local primary school (henceforward the School). The resulting collaboration, known as the Computer Learning Project (henceforward the Project), involved parents, teachers and researchers in teaching computer skills to years 1-3 students.

Partnership programs also tend to be overwhelmingly peopled by women, whether they participate as parental volunteers, teachers or project coordinators (Cairney et al. 1995). Clearly then, there are asymmetries in educating practices along class and gender lines which may reproduce oppressive relations and thwart the very goals they hope to achieve. As it happens, all participants in the Project were women. (Though one male contributed part of the literature review used in this paper he was not part of the social relations that affected the outcomes of this project). We were conscious of our differing realities, the time we were able to spend on the Project, the goals we hoped to achieve and our reasons for being involved. As the Project progressed, parents changed their initial commitments, reducing the times they came to classes and eventually ceasing attendance all together before the formally hoped-for 'end' to the Project. Such behaviour was at odds with teachers' and researchers' hopes/expectations and presented us with a challenge to better understand (and work with) parents' life situations and the priorities that governed their decision-making.

We begin with a brief description of materialist feminist ontological and epistemological assumptions upon which the research and analysis is based. Specific concepts and uses of time are mobilised in dominant/subordinate power relations (Adam 1990). We outline Adam's timescape model, which we use as a means of identifying and analysing the different notions and uses of time that affected the Project. Following the theoretical framework we describe the participants, the sites of data collection and our approach to discourse analysis. Finally, we make some observations about parents' and teachers' ways of valorising and using time and suggest some implications for the formation of home-school partnerships.

## **Conceptual Framework**

From a materialist feminist perspective, people's everyday actions and interactions encode relations of power and dominance (Hennessey 1993, Smith 1987). Such relations may be mobilised along gender, ethnic and/or class lines. Feminists pay particular attention to hegemonic knowledges and how these are deployed to ensure other kinds of realities do not gain social legitimacy. Such knowledges, structures and processes come to be taken-for-granted as 'cultural common sense' (Hennessey 1993, p. 76) and are often invisible to everyday consciousness, particularly to women who do not articulate a feminist political stance (Smith 1987). Smith refers to these mechanisms as the 'relations of ruling' and indicates that social researchers may be positioned in the ruling classes who, through their everyday research practices, set the modes and means of communication and decide what values, relevances and priorities will be recognised as producing legitimate knowledge. It may be then that some women reproduce relations of ruling in their interactions with other women.

In traditional sociological literature, terms such as 'working-class' (Warren 2003, Hanafin & Lynch 2002, p. 35), middle-class (Warren 2003), 'low-income neighbourhoods' (Fine 1993, p. 682) or 'socio-economically disadvantaged families' (Cairney et al. 1995, p. 30) are used variously to refer to structured relations of inequality. Ideas about what constitutes class are highly contested in contemporary sociology as theorists try to re-theorise connections between occupation, power, wealth, education, family background and culture (McGregor 2001). We adopt White's (2000, p.236) re-conceptualisation of class as 'a recurrent pattern of polymorphous, situated and value charged discursive strategies in the study of changing effects of the relations of production'. This allows us to draw connections between the situations of the people involved in the Project and those of participants in partnership programs reported by researchers/participants in other locations/situations.

One taken-for-granted cultural practice enshrined in ruling class ideology is a particular way of conceptualising time. There are, both historically and culturally, different ways of understanding and using time (Adam 1990, Donaldson 1996) but in western culture, time has been commodified and equated with monetary value. In a capitalist society time is money, but materialist feminists ask 'whose time?' and 'whose money?' and 'whose time and money counts as socially valuable?' Adam (2000, pp. 135-137) proposes a multi-dimensional model of time, a 'timescape' perspective, which may be used to examine the deployment of time to serve capitalist and patriarchal ends. Below, we outline her model, highlighting those concepts that form the categories for our analysis of women's participation in the Project.

Adam identifies three aspects of time perception:

- i) 4 Ts - time frames, temporality, tempo and timing;
- ii) wpast, present and future time; and
- iii) rhythm. Time frames refer to the frames in which social activity is conducted. A distinction is made between natural time, for example the cosmic time of cycles of the seasons or the embodied kind like the cycles of reproduction, and clock time which takes the form of calendar time in which years and minutes structure the frame of reference (Donaldson 1996). Donaldson extends the idea of natural time delineating the experience of process time which involves weaving activities together as well as waiting, for example in the time passed feeding a baby. However, clock time – abstract linear time, divided into measurable units – has increasingly colonised the structures of our working and private lives.

Temporality is the time in things like growing old which is unidirectional and irreversible. The speed and intensity of actions are referenced by tempo. Timing and synchronisation are those aspects of time that are integral to managing interaction.

The more individual lives are fragmented into multiple and unpredictable tasks separated in time and space, the more time consuming it is to synchronise activities (Adam 2003).

Past, present and future refer to the notion that when people make decisions and act in the present they draw, consciously or unconsciously, on their previous experiences and consider desired future consequences and goals. Rhythm refers to when events begin and end, happen at the same time, pause or transit from one state to another 'or are repeated to create a pattern or rhythm' (Adam 2000, p. 136). This dimension is important because it alerts us to the fact that multiple demands on people's time, whether for natural processes and/or clock measured events, can create even or very syncopated rhythms of life (Coco et al. 2004).

Time use and deployment is stratified along class and gender lines (Warren 2003). Though middle-class people may work long hours, they tend to have more control over the organisation of time due to flexibilities in their working days, over breaks and over where their work is conducted, whereas working-class people experience more disrupted time due to the imperatives of casual labour and work away from home (Warren 2003). Working-class people report more problems with shift work than do middle-class people. Such patterns affect the quality of leisure time. Leisure time that is irregular or scattered is not easily synchronised with other family members or friends and is therefore less likely to be experienced fully as quality leisure time (Garhammer 1998, cited in Warren 2003). Women, however, still spend two to two and a half times more time on unpaid work in the home compared with men (Baxter 2005). Working women, more than non-working women and men generally, are subject to stressful and time-consuming contingencies that affect their decisions and actions, for example, shifting patterns of work, job (in)security, the potential for promotion, moving home, managing family resources, supporting schoolwork, and being involved in school or care groups (McKie, Bowlby & Gregory 2002).

Put another way people with the most power have more control over the distribution and use of clock time (Freund & McGuire 1991). The accompanying economic perception of time as money serves the interests of the ruling classes through their control and regulation of the economy and the labour market (Postone 1993). Power relations are also reproduced discursively through the ritual process of waiting (Adam 1990). Working class persons and unemployed people from the middle classes spend more time waiting (and losing income) than those in the ruling classes (Donaldson 1996).

While teaching children to use computers at school is conducted during 'work' time for teachers and therefore governed by work time rules, it may not be similarly

experienced by volunteers who are unemployed. For the tutors, their time teaching the children computer skills was 'volunteer' time. In the interests of taking parents and their roles in children's schooling seriously, we ask whether it is equitable to assume, require or expect that they organise their volunteer activity according to the same priorities and principles as teachers conduct their work.

## **Participants and sites**

(A), the primary author and project officer at the Centre, and Fran the Deputy Principal of the School initiated collaborations suggesting that computer skills trainees from the Centre could work with year 1-3 school teachers to help children learn basic computer skills. Ethical clearances were obtained for the Project, both from our University and from the Education authorities in Queensland. The Indy Estate principal agreed to allow the research to proceed. The data we use here were not all gathered during the time of the Project. The primary author had collected ethnographic data as part of her research at the Centre during the 6 months prior to initiation of the Project. These data were recorded in lengthy field notes, audiotapes and transcriptions of taped interviews. This material furnishes some of the information used to write the interpretations we offer in this paper.

Three Centre trainees, Lexy, Kirsten and Janet volunteered for the Project. They were unemployed mothers, aged between 25 and 35, whose main source of income was the Parenting Payment<sup>2</sup>. They were in the process of advancing their education beyond secondary schooling and were learning to use the Microsoft Office software. Lexy, Kirsten and Janet sporadically undertook short-term contracts (a few weeks in duration) doing semi-skilled labour, mostly data input and telemarketing. Their social networks were limited (Coco, Goos & Kostogriz 2004) and extended to family and relationships with their MSWord trainer who used her contacts to help them with pursuing job opportunities. These combined characteristics, low income, semi-skilled labour, limited social networks, sole parenthood and predominant involvement in childcare would place them in the traditionally identified working-class and low-socio-economic categories (McGregor 2001). Lexy, Kirsten and Janet all had children attending the School.

The School accommodated about 450 students and was located two blocks away from the Community Centre and within walking distance. Five teachers who taught in years 1-3 classrooms participated. They did not live in Indy Estate and some did not have child-rearing responsibilities. As professionals they could be seen as part of the middle/ruling classes by virtue of their income, their wider social networks evidenced by their participation in professional associations and wider professional development, and the relative standing of their work in education (McGregor 2001).

There were three researchers: (A) the primary author, (M) the secondary author, and (L) the second supervisory officer. None of the researchers lived in Indy Estate and their social positing could be labelled similarly to the teachers as located in the middle/ruling classes. Researchers travelled from the University, roughly half an hour's drive away, to work at the Indy Estate Community Centre during the first half of the year, and to meet with teachers and tutors (as the parental volunteers came to be called) at the Indy Estate Primary School during the second half of the year. There were social and economic differences between women in the Project, the researchers, the teachers and the tutors, along lines that traditionally might have been characterised as working and middle class.

In negotiating the terms of the Project we tried to ensure that tutors had maximum say in the ways they wished to participate and that the process was open to change and renegotiation. We discussed the timing and regularity of meetings and timetabling. Fran had prepared a timetable with classes, times and names of teachers who wanted to be involved. Tutors chose the number and duration of sessions and the days on which they were prepared to work with the students. There was no pressure to make fixed commitments to a length of time in the school (though weekly regularity was taken-for-granted) and all tutors chose their children's classes as their first priority. In terms of duration, researchers indicated that the Project could last for as long as the tutors were able to participate but we hoped to continue until the end of the school term in early December. It was agreed unanimously that a team meeting once a month would be sufficient for keeping stakeholders connected, monitoring progress and problem solving. Tutors would begin working in classrooms in July, following the mid-year school holidays in Queensland, Australia.

### **Data collection and discourse analysis**

Feminist research focuses on where women are actually located in the relations of production and re-production and the ways their worlds are configured; the separation of fact and bias is not at issue (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002). This approach indicates points of departure from the traditional sociological canon (Smith 1987, p. 47) in that women may be located as both the 'ruled' and the 'ruling'. Following Hennessey (1991), we take a realist position that forms of reality can be apprehended even if this knowledge is partial and open to further elaboration. Such knowledge becomes meaningful because of the ways discursive practices articulate with mechanisms of the wider ideological apparatus.

If discourse is understood as ideology in practice (Hennessey 1993) then the way to locate aspects of unequal operations of power is to examine material social effects. We employ a Foucauldian discourse analysis which interrogates texts, not just

language, but the texts of people's actions (Gubrium & Holstein 2000); the texts of interview transcripts, of explanations and decision-making in social interactions, of the division of labour – for example between attending a course and doing volunteering work, or of the exertion of power – for example in resisting/transgressing expected (or tacitly agreed upon) commitments to working in classrooms. The aim is to render visible the ways the ideological conception and deployment of time as it played out in the lives of tutors and teachers in the duration of the Project potentially encodes and reproduces relations of ruling. The analysis does not look particularly at the content of participants' answers to interview questions but at the ways participants used language to convey particular time-use related messages about aspects of the partnership that they valued, devalued and/or prioritised.

We evaluated the success of the Project by conducting semi-structured interviews with the five teachers and three tutors towards the end of the Project in November. A research assistant was employed to do this work. Tutors and teachers were asked similar questions which sought to gain an understanding of why volunteers and teachers participated, how successful they thought the Project had been and what improvements they would make if the Project was to be continued. Other information recorded included the tutors' previous training, teachers' levels of qualification, and experiences and attitudes about the relative advantages and disadvantages of using technology in teaching. Interviews were confidential, recorded anonymously and later transcribed verbatim.

For the sake of brevity we report here only on the tutor-teacher relationship but note that in terms of a full discussion of the timescapes that affected this collaboration a full triangulated understanding of all stakeholders' timescapes is necessary. Since it is the middle-class view that is the norm, we concentrate here on elucidating the situations of the tutors and include particular aspects of their life situations that affected their participation in the Project.

### **Timeliness<sup>3</sup> – A Dance for Partnerships**

When tutors altered the times they spent in classes, researchers were able to explore the conditions in their day-to-day lives that affected their decisions. At monthly Project meetings tutors revealed why they made adjustments to their original commitments. Members of the Project team could make timely changes to original plans but this was not an option for teachers. In this section we use Adam's multi-dimensional model: 4Ts, past, present and future and rhythms to explore the time-related issues in the partnership.

#### **4Ts**

While all stakeholders in the Project agreed on the timing of events such as meetings and classroom sessions, other events in tutors' lives disrupted the synchronicities agreed upon at the beginning of the Project. This meant they sometimes missed times they had committed to being in classes. Initially, a regular tempo was set for attendance at class computer sessions, however, this tempo slowed and eventually ceased before the anticipated end of the Project in December. Janet stopped working in classrooms about half way through the Project due to the demands of her new job. Lexy's tempo varied and increasingly diminished. Lexy and Kirsten ceased training children in computer skills in November when a free, two-day training workshop coincided with the only remaining days that they had for visiting classrooms. As the tutor's explained, the accumulation of clashes between class sessions and other life events eventually meant there were no times left for which they could be available. The temporality of the Project then was affected by unpredicted natural and calendar determined events that occurred in the tutors' lives.

Talking about Lexy's attendance in the times she had promised, Ms D said, 'three days a week she has something to do – some family business she can't come those [other] days, she comes maybe 2 or 1 day. It's not exactly 3 days every week'. Mrs D seems vague about the demands on Lexy's time outside the classroom. Lexy's ability to work at the times originally agreed upon was significantly influenced by the unpredictable availability of paid work and her need to address health and caring issues. (Her grandfather became seriously ill and died the day before our final meeting with the tutors. During the Project she was supporting kin and helping with transport to the hospital about three quarters of an hour's drive away).

Teachers and tutors worked with different time frame configurations. Teachers prioritised and created slots in their diarised work time that were reserved for their participation in the process. As one would expect, they wanted someone to help them with teaching children computer skills. For most teachers this was conducted during group work sessions and gave them more time to work with other groups. Ms B's scenario was similar to all but one of the other teachers when she said:

Fran knew I was finding it difficult to integrate computers into the classroom environment and also we had just – I did my 'minimum standards'<sup>4</sup> on Apple [computers] ... I probably could sit there and go through it myself and spend lots of time troubleshooting and whatever. But for myself I just really needed somebody who was IBM trained to work with the kids.

Ms B, like the other teachers, was pressed for time and needed help with a task in which she had not, to this point, had time to update her skills. Personally, industrial

and natural times were kept as separate as possible – a situation that is more easily managed from the middle-class position because people are able to ‘buy’ time (Warren 2003, Adam 2004). Institutionally, class times could not be re-synchronised (without significant disruption to classes) with new calls on the tutors’ attention. Tutors were not locked into a day-to-day institutional context – but nevertheless needed to respond to other inflexible bureaucratically determined imperatives. For them, the relationships between industrial and natural times had to be continually negotiated. Health, caring responsibilities and training activities, for which they mostly had to ‘make’ rather than ‘buy’ time due to their financial situations, took priority over their scheduled class times to teach children computer skills.

### **Past, Present and Future**

When planning the Project, tutors were thinking about the foreseeable future. However, their decisions were conditional. When work or free training opportunities (which could not be predicted ahead of time) became available, their options did not include passing up work or choosing another program at a more suitable time. Firstly, financial circumstances precluded such decisions and, as they explained to us, such opportunities were rare in their community and needed to be seized upon when they became available. Ms B’s words are illustrative of teachers’ hopes and expectations: ‘at least once a week the kids would have somebody that could work with them in a group situation. There would be four kids going out at a time and we’d share the four computers’. Teachers were attempting to meet an immediate need. However, Ms B’s aside, ‘and I also had a parent come but that fell through too see’, reveals a situation generally experienced at the School that, in the past, parents had not responded to requests for help in the classroom so teachers seized on this opportunity when it was presented.

As recipients of welfare, the tutors were also subject to other unpredictable processes that affected their time management. For example, Janet had been unable to attend the second Project team meeting because of a dental appointment. Due to her access to free health services through the welfare system she would have been placed on a waiting list and been given an appointment time. She would have been quite at liberty to change this appointment but this would mean that she would be subject to a further waiting period. Past, present and uncertain future times were particularly salient in Janet’s decision-making as they were in a different way for Lexy as she dealt with her grandfather’s illness. Thus, even though working-class women and middle-class women may prioritise healthcare similarly, neither has control over the emergent symptoms of illness, but middle-class women can afford to negotiate such things as times for appointments with professionals and the use of childcare facilities to meet immediate needs (Warren 2003) in ways that are not readily available to working-class women dependent on welfare payments.

### **Rhythms**

During our participant observations at the Centre, we noted that the tutors were constantly surveying opportunities for employment or new training programs, applying for positions and expecting or anticipating calls to work, activities reminiscent of McKie, Gregory and Bowlby's (2002) observations. During our time at Indy Estate, Lexy attended several job interviews, mainly for teacher assistant jobs. She and Kirsten were offered piecemeal work at a moment's notice, which they readily accepted. This meant that some non-paying activities, such as working on the Project needed to cease for the duration of the paid work and childcare and transport to and from school had to be arranged differently. In three areas of their lives, welfare, healthcare and employment, working-class women were subject to the demands of social institutions that forced them to spend a lot of their time waiting, responding to imperatives and repeatedly restructuring their weekly schedules to maximize 'opportunities' that arose.

Tutors referred to time from the 'start' of the Project and what students had learned, both attitudinally and in terms of skills, during their time with them. Janet shared the views of other tutors when she said:

When [the Project] started a lot [of children] didn't know even to move the mouse. Some of them were really scared that it was going to bite them. ... some of them didn't realise if you take it [the mouse] off the mat it's not going to work. They had it over here [off the mat] and say 'oh it's broken'. Just simple things they got to know that they wouldn't have had ...

Teachers' talk evidenced a wish or hope for regularity in and continuity of face-to-face work between tutors and students. Mrs A felt that the program went well, 'while it was happening'. Teachers were concerned that the tutors did not come to class every week in their scheduled times thus disrupting the rhythm set up in their class sessions. Ms B reflected, 'it started off pretty well. ... but I really felt that the number of absences by the volunteers and coming – to/ing and fro/ing – there wasn't any consistency'. Teachers evaluated success in terms of rhythmic features, the consistency and predictability of tutors' attendances. For teachers, the time at the 'start' of the project, in retrospect, signalled disappointment because it 'started' well but did not continue as hoped. Tutors, on the other hand, essentially created an informal learning environment in which they became acquainted with the children's capabilities in the course of doing the job and adjusted accordingly. We should emphasise here that although teachers made comments about tutors' social skills in terms of communicating their intentions, in practice they were cordial and accommodating to the tutors' needs and movements. As working women themselves, they no doubt also had some idea of the kinds of time schedules and clashes that the tutors faced.

Both teachers and tutors noted the quality of times spent with students. All tutors referred to the enjoyment they gleaned from sharing the children's eagerness, enthusiasm and feelings of success. Lexy said:

I just like teaching the kids. It's a big buzz for me. When they realised they learned something new ... they look at you and say 'wow I can do this' and you go in and they say 'oh Lexy are we doing computers today?' And like that's the thing, it's like they really want to learn what you're offering them.

We suggest that the tutor's commitments were governed by the fact that they perceived volunteering as something that was enjoyable, something they do in their 'spare' time. Given the contemporary struggle over the availability of time for leisure (Warren 2003) tutors' accounts indicate a notion of 'leisure' time rather than work time. Further, as we saw in their choice of classes to work with, tutors' participation was an extension of their mothering role; perhaps an opportunity to schedule more time with their children. However, Ms B noted:

The kids looked forward to that time every week and it just didn't happen. ... I think they (the tutors) had a lot of assumptions about how computer literate the children were. In fact they're not very literate. So those kids who obviously don't have computers at home I don't think many of them knew that that was a mouse and that was a screen.

These examples are illustrative of the opinions in all interviews and reveal the difference between the tutors' understandings of the time spent in training sessions as fun and mutual learning and the teachers' expectations which, while they perceived the children enjoyed the sessions, they felt computer skills sessions were not adequate unless formalised in terms of prior assessment of children's skills, regular contact time and planning.

Apart from their parenting responsibilities, which are likely to be quite similar, teachers' and tutors' life timescapes were very different. Teachers, echoing the objectives of many other school volunteer programs, would have liked ongoing commitment, planning for whole term programs and regular and consistent attendance by the tutors. But Janet, Kirsten and Lexy were accustomed to uncertainty and they treated their volunteer work as one of the enjoyable activities that occupied their days. This sketch of working-class women's timescapes as characterised by intermittency and immediacy is supported by O'Donnell's conclusion that middle-class parents were more likely to be active volunteers (though the working-class women in the Project were very active volunteers), involving their children in organised, regularly scheduled activities. In her study, middle-class parents were also more likely 'to use a variety of

both public and private services' (O'Donnell 1980). Our analysis reveals that to expect working-class women to mirror such patterns of volunteering is unreasonable and unlikely to be successful in the long term.

## Implications

If schools are serious about fostering more egalitarian partnerships with parents, particularly those in low-socioeconomic situations, they will need to take into account lifestyles not governed by the logic of school times, bureaucratic planning and ruling-class values. In the Project we took an open-ended approach to organization and planning thus giving the volunteers some sense of power over the process and honouring their unpaid involvement. Communicating about the organisation and use of time might be a valuable strategy in developing partnerships in low-socioeconomic communities. In our final meeting with the tutors, Lexy suggested that a time frame be set in initial negotiations, say 3-4 months so that they would have a sense of boundedness to the commitment they were making. We learned also that rules of accountability and communication should be discussed and agreed upon.

There are several ways teachers and schools might work with volunteers rather than trying to make them fit teaching timescapes. Teachers could undertake contingency planning, so that the non-arrival of volunteers, or the appearance of too many volunteers does not unnecessarily disrupt events. Schools might set aside 'informal learning' times at regular and predictable times during the school week at which parents could attend when their other time commitments permitted. Further, some learnings, like the use of a computer mouse, can be disengaged from time and frequency issues associated with more complex conceptual learnings. The teachers and tutors in the Computer Learning Project agreed that the children progressed quite well in their computer skills development, but for the teachers, this outcome seemed not adequate because it was not planned properly, or was not achieved through regular 'scaffolded' lessons. Outcomes could be redefined in shortened timespans of perhaps two to three weeks which volunteers might find more meaningful in terms their lifeworlds and the ways they construe the task of volunteering.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> To protect the identities of participants the locale is given the pseudonym, 'Indy Estate' and pseudonyms are used instead of people's real names.
- <sup>2</sup> The Parenting Payment is a welfare benefit paid in Australia to parents caring for children under 16 years of age.

- <sup>3</sup> We are indebted to the participants in the Methodology section at The Australian Sociological Association conference, LaTrobe, Beechworth in December 2004 for pointing out the dimension of 'timeliness' as an aspect of collaborative decision-making.
- <sup>4</sup> In Queensland, all State School teachers were required to demonstrate minimum standards of competency in using information technology.

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