

## CHAPTER 3

### PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

After the discussion of the models of parent involvement in the education of the learner, the nature of parent involvement in the education of their children, the study of parent involvement in education in South Africa becomes necessary.

In this chapter a closer look will be given to the historical background of education in South Africa in the pre-democratic and post-democratic era and parent involvement in the education of their children in South Africa.

The reason for this exercise will be to show that parents need to be concerned with the education of their children. This notion is fully supported by Johnston and Hedemann (1994:194) and Dimmock *et al.* (1996:6) who state that the restructuring of education over the past decade in many countries has been characterised by the devolution of power and responsibilities of parents and schools.

Parent involvement in education is now assuming a new form in South Africa as a result of the greater democratisation of education in this country (SASA, 84, 1996:6).

However, during the last decade changing socio-political circumstances in this country have brought the importance of parent participation to the fore. More recognition has been given to the role of parents in the management of the school. Furthermore, the need to equalise educational opportunities in South Africa has placed greater financial burdens and responsibilities upon parents, thereby involving them more directly in education. Legislation has given parents a more formal stake in the management of

schools (Steyn *et al.*, 1997:40-41). Educators thus realise more than ever before that the success of their efforts depends largely on parent confirmation and co-operation (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993:96-97).

In the pre-democratic era the Government initiated parent involvement in different communities.

### **3.2 GOVERNMENT INITIATED PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRE-DEMOCRATIC ERA**

In accordance with Claassen (1995:449) the terms democratic and pre-democratic era are used to indicate the post-election and pre-election eras respectively.

Parent involvement in the pre-democratic era will be discussed under the Black communities, White communities, Indian communities and Coloured communities as the situation and the administration of education in these communities were different from one another, therefore the discussion will be handled separately.

#### **3.2.1 The situation in black communities**

##### **3.2.1.1 Parent involvement during missionary education**

While acknowledging the fact that the missionaries pioneered a Western type of education among Blacks in South Africa, this education was full of shortcomings and failures with regard to parent involvement. According to Florin (1965:33) Christianity played a forceful role in changing the tribal traditions of the Blacks. Christianity being the main aim of education, yet it did not make any provision for Black parent involvement in the education of the learner.

### **3.2.1.2 Parent involvement during Provincial Administration**

Besides a few local councils and advisory boards through which Black parents could make recommendations to the Provincial Administrators, the control of education still remained almost entirely in the hands of White administrators (Behr, 1978:166). Another difficulty which the Provincial Administrators were faced with that there was no general legislative authority which would centralise Black education as an integral part of all social services under a system in which active participation of Black parents would be secured.

In conclusion, however, despite the difficulties which the Administrators encountered in Black education in the Union of South Africa, important ground work was started in getting Black parents involved in the education of their children (Behr, 1978:166).

### **3.2.1.3 Parent involvement in education before 1994**

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 resulted in Black parents having a direct involvement in the running of schools. Black parent bodies as constituted by the Department of Bantu Education were entrusted with various powers and functions which made them effectively involved especially in the local control of schools. In terms of the aims of Bantu Education, these parent bodies were elected by parents in order to represent their educational aspirations. Black parent bodies utilised their powers and responsibilities to control schools which fell within their jurisdiction (Barron and Howell, 1974:143).

Jefferson (1973:153), stating the success and progress of the involvement of Black parent bodies in the education of the child, mentions that by 1970, there were 500 school boards and 6000 school committees serving in Black schools. In these parent

bodies, about 50 000 Black members who were elected by parents served to represent their interests in the education of their children.

Despite the success achieved by the introduction and implementation of Bantu Education Act 1953 which resulted in effective Black parent involvement in the education of the child, there were numerous problems which parent bodies were faced with in the execution of their various functions. Some Black parents did not welcome the introduction and implementation of the Bantu Education policy. They alleged that Bantu Education was an inferior system of education designed to lower the standard of Black education. Other Black parents felt that they had not been consulted when Bantu Education was introduced and they were therefore not readily prepared to co-operate with the department (Horrel, 1968:140).

The Education and Training Act (SA, Act 90 of 1979) replaced the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the Bantu Special Education of 1964 (Behr 1988:200). The Act sought to do away with some of the worse aspects of previous legislation. It dropped the designation *Bantu* and replaced it with *Black*. It declared that compulsory education would be a central aim of policy. It also pledged itself to the active involvement of the parents and communities in the education system (Mncwabe, 1992:59). Moreover, educators were no longer to be hired by school boards. Their appointment and dismissal became the domain of the Department of Education and Training. Another important aspect of the Act was the provision that the home language would be used as medium of instruction up to Standard 2. The introduction of compulsory education in certain areas was also suggested, provided that the parents wanted it and co-operated with the Department of Education in the matter (Davies, 1990:351).

In response to the Bill, some Black education groups, such as the African Educators' Association (ATASA) and the Transvaal United Educators' Association (TUATA), expressed cautious approval of certain provisions, but all Black organisations rejected the continuing categorisation of education on a racial basis and the retention of a separate department of Black education (Davies, 1990:352). In 1981 an official announcement by the Minister of National Education in the House of Assembly promised compulsory education in 38 selected urban school districts applicable to pupils entering the first year of schooling. This step was welcomed by opposition leaders, but many blacks perceived a more sinister purpose behind this new dispensation; that of a political tool to be used against school boycotts, since trouble-free areas could be given preference over troublesome localities. Furthermore, penalties were to be imposed for non-attendance at school, but the onus for getting children to school, (and thereby containing learner unrest), was being shifted from the authorities to the parents (Davies, 1990:357). Both educators and learners felt that the Act did not go nearly far enough, and the school boycotts continued (Samuel, 1990:25). However, this time learners started to relate the educational issues to the broader political struggle of Black communities.

#### **3.2.1.4 Parent involvement and the uprising of 1976**

In 1974 a circular was issued stating that Afrikaans be made a medium of instruction in half the number of high school subjects and the rest in English (Samuel, 1990:21). This evoked an angry response from educators, parents and learners and ultimately led to a march by learners to the Orlando Stadium, on June 16, 1976. This event triggered off riots, violence and unrest which spread throughout South Africa in the months that followed. The unrest persisted for some eight months. By then 575 people had been

killed, at least 3 900 were injured, and incalculable damage had been caused to state and private property (Behr, 1978:195).

A few days before June 16, 1976, parents in Soweto began to establish their own representative committees, because they felt that the school committees and boards were not representing them properly. The learner movements were already bypassing these state structures and an entirely new era of political and educational struggle opened up. This did not greatly influence the officials of the Department of Education and Training and in spite of fierce opposition to its educational policy discourse, the state went on to introduce the Education and Training Act of 1979, in which both school committees and school boards were re-established (Mkwanazi 1993:55).

#### **3.2.1.5 Shifting the focus from parents to learners**

The re-evaluation of education after the 1976 uprising took some time to be worked through, and in the immediate aftermath of the uprising only faltering attempts at educational change were made. The state's overriding aim until 1977 was to batten down the hatches on continuing learner protest which reached its post-Soweto peak in October 1977 when the number of Black learners absent from school for political reasons reached 196 (Davies, 1990:350).

State repression took the form of expulsion, school closures, arrests of learners and educators and finally, the banning of eight Black Consciousness groups including the Education and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa, the South African Learner Movement and the South African Student's Organisation (Davies, 1990:351). These actions brought the resistance to Bantu Education to a temporary halt, although the majority of secondary schools in Soweto remained closed throughout 1978 (Davies, 1990:351).

In 1984 the crisis in education intensified, and in 1984 alone over 500 000 learners had been involved in the protest against South African education system (Samuel, 1990:27). The turning point in the events of 1985 was the declaration of a state of emergency in 36 magisterial districts on July 21, 1985 (Samuel, 1990:27). Black schooling became punctuated by waves of boycotts, school take-overs and vandalism, as well as by persistent police harassment, detention, and killings (Murphy, 1992:370). In the first twelve months of the state of emergency more than 700 persons involved in education were detained (Hartshorne, 1990:169).

### **3.2.1.6 Type of formal parent involvement**

In the pre-democratic era, allowance was made for two types of formal parent involvement, namely; a statutory parent body (usually called school committee) and a non-statutory body (usually called a parent-teacher association, or a parent-teacher-student association) (Weeto, 1997:27-32).

#### **(i) Statutory parent body**

The statutory parent body (management council, school committee or governing body) had certain powers given to it by the law (hence the term statutory), and functioned in most traditionally White schools, but was not so well established in Black schools because parents felt that school committees and school boards were not representing them properly (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88).

Although the management council could not concern itself directly with the professional activities of the school, it could, however, report on them and make recommendations to the Director of Education. This could include recommendations regarding the appointment of educators (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88). The management council/school

committee could also collect money to defray current expenditure and also controlled such funds. Finally a management council carried out all duties entrusted to it by education authorities (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:89). The management council/school committee functioned on the local level. The statutory body functioning on district level was known as a school board, and had a supervisory, advisory, administrative and managerial task as regards education (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:88). According to the circumstances, such as the size of the school district or the number of educational institutions within its boundaries, a school board could consist of 6 to 12 members representing the various institutions.

**(ii) The non-statutory parent body**

The non-statutory parent body, usually called Parent-Educators Association (PTA) or Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA), did not have powers granted to it by law. Its main purpose was to combine the efforts of parents and educators to a limited degree when a service, such as fund raising, was required by the school (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:88).

Although there were many school committees and school boards in place by the end of 1960's, their structure and policies continued to generate friction between the school committees, the community and educators because of lack of accountability of the boards to parents allowed them to "trample over grassroots opinion" (Hyslop, 1989:210). The Department of Education and Training's treatment of school board members also served to undermine their credibility and their loyalty. For example, members of boards and committees who were politically suspect were arbitrarily removed from their positions (Hyslop, 1989:211).

Mkwanazi, (1993:53) concedes that the school boards and committees were successful in forcing parents to finance their children's education.

The introduction of the De Lange Commission in 1980 was an attempt by the government to address the deepening crisis in education and the uncompromising stance of the parents on involvement in education through established structures (Mkwanazi, 1993:55). Although the report stressed the need for parents to have a greater share in decision making, the role of the parents in legitimising the system was once more emphasised (Mkwanazi, 1993:56 and Kallaway, 1990:33).

The government's Educational Renewal Strategy (ERS), launched in 1991, contained proposals for the decentralisation of the education system through the establishment of management councils at all schools with increased decision making and executive functions (ERS, 1991:75-76).

The curriculum model of the same year moves further than the ERS in regard to parent involvement in education and acknowledges their participation in curriculum development. Mkwanazi (1993:59) states that this "represents a notable shift on the part of the state towards recognition of the opposition's concept of parental governance." The feeling of the majority of Black academics and parents was that the concessions were too few and too late.

### **3.2.2 The situation in white communities**

The Cape, Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal, which formed the Union of South Africa in 1910 comprised the erstwhile British colonies and northern republics. They brought to the conference table fairly a well-developed system of education based upon a pattern of state-controlled education which had begun to emerge in the Cape as early

as the 1830s', the policy in the establishing of schools being based upon state aid for local educational enterprises. Local bodies, representative of parents, were usually given powers (Behr, 1988:36).

In 1961 RSA was divided into four provinces namely; Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State and Cape. Each of these provinces had delegated powers for the implementation of education policy in pre-primary, primary, secondary and specialised schools, and educator training and technical colleges.

White education found itself in the anomalous position of being under decentralised provincial control in respect of the general education of the vast majority of the learners, and under centralised governmental control in respect of vocational and specialised education (Rose, 1976:19).

Prior to September 1984 education for Whites was administered by five departments. The then Department of National Education was responsible for higher education which included specialised education and education offered by technical colleges and technikons (Steyn, *et al.* 1997:22).

In terms of the 1983 (Act 110 Of 1983) all education for Whites was administered by the Minister of Education and Culture, administration: House of Assembly. The four provincial education departments were constituted as executive provincial education departments under the Minister of Education and Culture, Administration: House of Assembly. Universities and technikons historically considered as mainly for Whites, were also the responsibility of this Minister.

White parent bodies utilised their power and responsibilities to control schools which fell within their jurisdiction. Parent bodies were responsible for hiring and dismissing of

educators as well as to ensure effective teaching and administration in the school. They participated in fund raising, and sports organisation (Jefferson, 1973:145).

### **3.2.3 The situation in coloured communities**

Control of Coloured education in pre-democratic era was the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Culture (House of Representatives). The Department of Education and Culture was the policy determining executive authority of Coloured education.

For effective control of education, the Administration of Coloured Affairs had been divided into regional offices, each with a regional representative at its head. These offices represented the Education Directorate as well as the other Directorates of the Administration in a specific region.

In order to accommodate parent involvement in school affairs at local level, regulations provided for the establishment of a school board or committee.

Each school within the regional councils were statutory bodies which represented the local parent population. These school committees recommended educators for appointment (Duminy, & Söhnge, 1992:141).

### **3.2.4 The situation in Indian communities**

The control of Indian education in the pre-democratic era was the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Culture of the House of Delegates. The Department of Education and Culture was the policy-determining executive authority of Indian education.

The Indian Act of 1965 (Act 61 of 1965) provided for parent involvement in school affairs in the form of education committees. Statutory education committees formed a link between school and parent. Their functions were mainly supervisory, advisory and related fund-raising. Members of the education committees were elected by the parents (Duminy, et al. 1992:140).

### **3.3 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES IN THE DEMOCRATIC ERA**

The empowerment of the masses was something the ANC felt strongly about and following their victory in the 1994 elections this was also reflected in their commitment to increasing parent involvement in education.

#### **3.3.1 The White Paper on Education and Training, 1995**

The changes envisaged for education in South Africa in the White Paper on Education and Training (SA,1995:22), highlights the importance of parent and community involvement in education.

According to The White Paper on Education and Training (SA, 1995), the principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision-making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups and role players. This is the only guaranteed way to infuse new social energy into the institutions and structures of the education and training system, dispel the chronic alienation of large sectors of society from the education process, and reduce the power of government administration to intervene where it should not.

### 3.3.2 The Hunter Report

On the 31 August 1995, the report of the committee to review the organisation, governance and funding of schools, was released. The committee was chaired by A P Hunter and the report is commonly referred to as the Hunter Report. In this report various suggestions related to school governance (or formal parent involvement) are made.

The Hunter Report (1995: 51) acknowledges that " parents have both the right and the responsibility to participate in the education of their children" and recommends that schools establish governance structures that will enable elected representatives to assume active and responsible roles in the determining and adoption of policies in schools. School governance and management are seen as interwoven elements in a process that is aimed at enabling schools to provide effective and efficient education, and therefore difficult to define. Nevertheless, the committee agreed that governance is primarily concerned with the formulation and adoption of policy, while management is concerned with the day-to-day delivery of education. This being so parents would be entrusted with the responsibility and authority to formulate and adopt school policy, while day-to-day decisions about the administration and organisation and activities, supporting teaching and learning in the school, would be the domain of the professional staff, although stakeholders should have the right to comment on and make suggestions with regard to such decisions (Hunter Report, 1995:52).

In their discussion of the role and responsibilities of governing bodies, the committee agreed that not all bodies would be able to accept responsibility for the total range of functions (Hunter Report, 1995:56). The committee suggested that a governing body should be able to negotiate for certain powers or functions. Examples of such functions

are the maintenance of school buildings, the purchase of textbooks and materials, and the purchase of equipment. If the governing body does not have the relevant management capacity, the educational authority will exercise these powers on behalf of the governing body (Hunter Report, 1995:57).

Many schools and school governing bodies have accumulated substantial knowledge and skills to run their school effectively. Many communities have, however, not had the opportunity to do so. In this regard the committee suggests a process of capacity building, which they defined as the " power to act " (Hunter Report, 1995:97). Capacity building is directed at community empowerment and entails the development of both the material and human resources (the knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for effective governance and management. The recommendations of the Hunter Report were taken up in the White Paper on Education No.2 and provided the framework for the South African Schools Act of 1996.

### **3.3.3 The White Paper on Education No. 2, 1996**

The Education White Paper No. 2, entitled *The organisation, governance and funding of schools*, was released in February 1996 and is based on the proposals set out in the Hunter Report.

Included in the White Paper (SA, 1996:16) is the suggestion that the school governing structures should involve all stakeholder groups in active and responsible roles, encourage tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision-making. In accordance with the Hunter Report, the White Paper acknowledges that national and provincial policy should allow for the fact that such capacities may be underdeveloped in many communities and will need to be built.

According to the White Paper (SA, 1996:17) each public school must have a governing body by January 1997, which should comprise elected representatives of:

parents and guardians of learners currently enrolled at school;

- (i) educator
- (ii) learners (in secondary schools only);
- (iii) non-teaching staff;
- (iv) the principal (ex officio);
- (v) members of the community, elected by the governing body.

Each public school governing body will be responsible for a set of basic functions (basic powers), but will be entitled to negotiate with its provincial education department to take responsibility for additional functions (negotiated powers) as and when it is willing and believes it is able to do so (SA, 1996:18).

The list of powers which the Ministry of Education proposes (SA, 1996:19-20) includes:

- **Broad policy**

- (i) the school's mission
- (ii) development, implementation and review of governing body policies
- (iii) promoting the best interest of the school community

- **Personnel**

- (i) recommending and negotiating teachers' temporary or permanent appointments (in consultation with provincial department)
- (ii) recommending the appointment of administrative staff (in consultation with provincial departments)

- **Admission**

- (i) admission policy (in consultation with provincial departments)

- **Curriculum**

- (i) school times and timetable (following provincial guidelines)
- (ii) language policy (within the framework, providing no form of racial discrimination is practised in exercising its policy)
- (iii) school-level curriculum choices (within national and provincial frameworks)
- (iv) extramural curricula
- (v) codes of behaviour for staff and learners (following provincial guidelines)

- **Financial**

- (i) raising and controlling funds
- (ii) school budget priorities
- (iii) purchase of textbooks, materials and equipment
- (iv) payment of light and water accounts

- **Maintenance**

- (i) maintenance of buildings

- **Communication**

- (i) reporting to the parents
- (ii) school-community communication

- **Community services**

- (i) local services for children and youth
- (ii) community social, health, recreational and nutritional programmes

A task team has been established to plan a comprehensive programme to build capacity for management and governance where this needed (SA, 1996:25). The White Paper (1996:20) concludes:

*The idea that all public school governing bodies must be responsible for a basic list of functions is deceptively simple. Once implemented, the vast majority of South Africans will recognise that this decision constitutes by far the most significant devolution of responsibility in the history of South African education.*

This is indeed true, especially regarding the role of parents in predominantly Black schools. However, the success will depend to a great extent on the proposed training programmes for members of the governing bodies. Moreover, not all educators are in agreement with the proposal that governing bodies are still to be consulted regarding appointment of educators to schools, or with the fact that parents are to be in the majority and can outvote educators on all issues.

In predominantly White schools, where some governing bodies have had extensive powers (such as at Model C schools) it is felt that the rights of parents could be violated by the limits placed on the role of governing bodies in such matters as the appointment of educators, the determination of school fees, language of instruction, religion and other admission criteria (SA, 1996:7).

In general, the acknowledgement of the government that parents have the right to be involved in decision-making at schools is commendable. However, it is lamentable that there is a lack of encouragement or incentive to expand parent involvement to other aspects of education. School governance is of great importance, but does not involve the majority of parents, besides allowing them to vote for the members of the governing

body. If the advantages of parent involvement, as set out in Chapter 2 (2) are sought, parent involvement on a broader front must be pursued.

### **3.4 LEVELS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

There are three main educational levels through which parents could become involved in the education of the learner. These levels should provide structures through which parent groups can make regular recommendations and suggestions and by so doing assist the learner to grow towards responsible adulthood. These levels will be discussed in accordance with the structures of parents as individuals and parents as groups.

#### **3.4.1 Parent involvement on the micro- educational level**

The micro-educational level is one of the levels which provides for the structure of individual parents to become involved in the child's education. This level refers to the direct personal contact between individual parents, learners and educators. This level should create a valuable communication structure between individual parents and educators at which the educational progress and problems of the learners can be discussed openly and freely (Steyn, 1988:7).

The micro-educational level is the level at which parents can come together to elect a few parents who form parent bodies to represent their interests. These parent groups can be statutory or non-statutory bodies. The commonly known structures of parent groups such as school committee members, school board members and parent educator association members operate on this educational level (Barnard, 1986:7). These elected parent bodies operate mainly on the mandate of the majority of parents and by so doing contribute towards the smooth running of schools.

According to the Report on the Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools (Department of Education, 1995), the governing body may be made up by non-teaching staff and community representatives. According to the White Paper 2 (SA,1996:3-15) and the Free State Education Act (SA,1996:13), the majority of members of the governing council should be parents of that school. This is seen as major shift towards a national, democratic and a non-racial system of school as these stakeholders will have the responsibilities in deciding the direction of education in schools (SA, 1996:3.12). This Paper also stipulates that some of the anxieties that have been expressed about this representation on the governing bodies will be sorted out only if the roles of the members are identified (The White Paper 2, 1996:3.14).

The White Paper on Education in the Republic of South Africa (1996: Chapter 29 [2]) stipulates that schools will be controlled by a well-representative governing body that will look into, among others, the interests of parents as the main stakeholders in education. Nzimande (1996:15), further mentions that the involvement of the State in education will be minimal, thus giving parents a greater say. However, no provision for parents to be directly involved in school activities. That is, there are no adequate structures put in place that can allow parents to feature in school activities to make direct representation on their expectations and aspirations with regard to legislation, management and operational areas.

In UK (Partington & Wragg, 1989:57), it is not surprising that in most schools the involvement of individual parents in school matters is overshadowed by the chosen governing body. Parents are usually not given feedback on strategic decisions that are being made by their chosen representatives.

Despite the fact that the RSA has purposefully through several legislations encouraged parent involvement in school activities, educational policies are still flawed with numerous contradictions (Bastiani, 1993:107). Section 53 of Act 70 of the South African Schools Act of 1988 ensures that parents should be effectively involved in school activities.

In the USA (Dimmock *et al.* 1996:10) assert that although parent involvement has been ensured by legislation, in most cases it is not clear what the nature, effects and extent of these exercises are. Secondly only a few parents may be appointed on representative bodies, leaving the majority of parents not featuring in school activities (Regulation 692, Section 8 of 1990). It is clear from the above-mentioned statements that parents would fail to take their rightful place in the education of their children.

According to South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996:16) parents or guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and have the right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance. Parents have the inalienable right to choose the form of education which is best for their children, particularly in the early years of schooling, whether provided by the state or not, subject to reasonable safeguards which may be required by law. The parents' right to choose includes choice of the language, cultural or religious basis of the child's education, with due regard to the rights of others and the rights of choice of the growing learner.

### **3.4.2 Parent involvement on the meso- educational level**

This level refers to parent-teacher contact at the highest possible level in South Africa. Parents can organise themselves in order to form a co-ordinated negotiating body so that they can address their needs and interests (Van Schaalkwyk, 1990:67).

The following are examples of parent associations that operate at this level:

Federation of Parent Association and the Advisory Council (Makoanyane, 1989:42). The Gauteng School Education Bill (1995 [31]), chapter 5, stipulates that the Member of the Executive Council shall establish the Education and Training Council in which, among its members, parents will be represented. The task of parents at this level is to determine the educational policy of the province.

According to the School Education Bill (North West Province, 1995 [4 (1) ] and the Free State Education Act (1996 [5 (2) ] ), the Minister has to consult with the educator and parent organisations to discuss:

- equal education and access to State schools
- the medium of instructions in schools
- the right to religion-orientated education
- provision of parent involvement in education
- educator and personnel salaries
- standards and norms of examination and curriculum.

### **3.4.3 Parent involvement on the macro-educational level**

Van Schalkwyk (1991:12) maintains that the South African education system has been characterised by complex bureaucratic structures where the decisions are taken at the highest level and little room is left for a few parents at the lowest level. Dimmock *et al.* (1996:5) comments on this by stating that world-wide public education has no room for non-professionals. Parent involvement where it exists has been left to trivial issues such as fund-raising, providing of school equipment or sitting in forums which do not cater for their needs and aspirations about the education of their children. At the

highest level of the education system, parents act only in an advisory capacity and thus are unable to decide on the form of education that is supposed to be offered.

If this state of affairs continues, educators will be faced with parents that will not see the need or would not be eager to be involved in school activities if their function is only to make recommendations and not be part of the decision-making process.

In the Republic of South Africa, before 1994 education was controlled by the State, which was a political institution. A parent came second and as such was not considered, because the political aspirations of the State came first (Van Schalkwyk, 1991:12). The implication was that parents have to conform to the State policies no matter how unhappy they might have been about the form of education. This state of affairs made it difficult for the educators to involve parents effectively in school activities, for they were not part of the decisions that were taken. Even if parents featured in committees or councils, their representation was minimal and as such their influence was not even realised.

New policies and legislation in South Africa (White Paper on Education and Training, 1995; South African Schools Act, 1996) support the optimal involvement of parents in the education of their children. The National Commission on Special Education Needs and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) report and emerging policy extend this principle to include parents in the assessment of needs and provision of support to schools and learners.

The above-mentioned policy documents emphasise that parents must be involved in the processes of identifying barriers to learning and development, and in developing plans of action to address these barriers.

By virtue of their majority representation on school governing bodies in schools in South Africa (SA, 1996), parents have a central role to play in developing local school policy and governing the schools in such a way that the learners are ensured of effective learning (Engelbrecht,*et al.* 2001:56).

The value of parent involvement is undisputed. What is a challenge, however, is how to foster this involvement in a country that has consistently disempowered most parents in and outside of the schooling system. Strategies aimed at addressing this challenge must therefore be pursued if this principle is to become a reality (Engelbrecht, *et al.* 2001:55-56).

Keyter (1995:14) maintains that the State policy should ensure that greater parent involvement in school activities be realised if the education of children has to be successful. He states that in the past the State had greater control of Black education than for other race groups. This state of affairs limited and failed to encourage parents to have a better say in matters that affected the education of their children. But if the policies that are decided upon and put in place should first conform to the convictions of the ruling political party, then to others, including parents, it would be difficult for the parents to be associated with the school activities and thus could create problems for the school to try to involve parents effectively. On a national level parents can organise themselves on a voluntary basis in order to form a co-ordinated negotiating body capable of negotiating with the national education authorities in order to further their interests. Parent bodies can link the family as a structure with an interest in education to the rest of the education system (Van Schalkwyk, 1992:67).

The Ministry of Education (White Paper 2, 1996:10) had strongly endorsed parental rights in their children's education that parents or guardians have the primary

responsibility for the education of their children, and have the right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance. Parents have the inalienable right to choose the form of education, which is best for their children.

The South African School's Act (SA, 1996:4) highlights the major role of parents in school governance, to be exercised in the spirit of a partnership between the provincial education department and a local community with an aim of promoting the best interests of the school, and to strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school.

The governing body is made up of parents, educators and community members who have substantial decision-making power, selected from the menu of powers according to their capacity. The governing body of a school must take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school.

This level is specially created to give parents an opportunity to make an input into the affairs of the education of their children.

In conclusion, the structures of parent involvement in the education of the learner, as individuals as well as groups, should be fully implemented if the problems of parent involvement are to be eliminated. Parents as individuals have a responsibility to give their children moral support so that their children can perform and achieve well at school. Parents should not withdraw their involvement as soon as their children go to school; both parents and educators should supplement each other in providing for the educational needs of the learner.

Parent groups on the other hand operate in the structures of educational level where they become involved in the functioning of schools on a local level as well as on the highest policy making level. Parent groups usually operate on the mandate they receive from individual parents whom they represent in the educational affairs of the learner.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

It is very clear from the above that parent involvement in the education of children in school activities in South Africa has been long acknowledged. Van Deventer (1994:51) pleads that parent involvement in school activities should be optimised so that education of children can be effective.

Parent involvement has been shown to make a positive contribution to alleviating many problems, both in countries overseas, as well as in South Africa, although its local involvement has been mainly limited to crisis management. With the government now firmly committed to involving parents and the community in educational matters, it is necessary both to determine what the community understand by this term, as well as to research the prevailing attitudes to parent involvement, particularly within the previously disadvantaged communities.

South African history and the limited research on parent involvement undertaken thus far, illustrate a great willingness on the part of Black parents to be come involved in the education of their children.

In this chapter parent involvement in education in South Africa as a theoretical framework for the discussion of parent involvement in education of their children was dealt with.

The next chapter will deal with empirical research. Consideration was given to the aims of empirical research, research design, selection of population and construction of the questionnaire.