CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

While the Republic of South Africa (RSA) is presently moving through a dramatic transition process, and while it is grappling with the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), it cannot miraculously shake off the legacy of the apartheid past. Although the Republic of South Africa is moving away from racial division, it is true that this legacy causes a myriad of problems among traditional black schools, particularly due to the denial of educational equity for the past-disadvantaged majority population (RDP, 1994: 60).

Although the lack of equity in education has crippled the quality of life of the past disenfranchised and marginalized population, particularly with regard to home environments that lack the resources to address educational needs adequately, it is possible for educators to create a breakthrough for children from such disadvantaged homes (Jantjes, 1995: 289-290).

Although consensus has not been reached, it is now becoming more widely accepted that positive parent involvement and partnership with schools is a pre-requisite of effective schooling and that cooperation between home and school can raise educational achievement (Tomlinson, 1993:131).

The focus of this study is on reasons for non-involvement of parents in the education system. This study will aim to contribute towards the development of the focus area NQF field 5 *Education, Training and Development* by researching parental involvement

within the context of the rights, duties and accountability of parents as stakeholders in education.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to RDP (1994:60) the education system is perceived as legitimate because of its democratic and non-discriminatory policies on the provision of education in the country, which stress equal opportunities for all. This is a positive indication for education transformation if compared to apartheid education, where parent involvement was not encouraged to the same extent (Le Roux, 1994:196). The 1976 uprisings brought the subject of education into black homes countrywide. To a large extent, the unrest actually revealed the paucity of black parent involvement in educational matters. The unrest also showed how little parents knew about the education system and role of government (Le Roux, 1994:190-191).

Parental involvement is undoubtedly one of the most important issues in the current educational debate. The basic concept is not new of course, but in recent years there have been a number of developments in attitudes, policies and practices that attracted widespread interest. This is evident from the large and rapidly increasing academic literature on the topic and the frequent references to it in the media (Jowett, & Baginsky 1991: 46). The efficacy of parent involvement has overwhelming research support. The fact is that parents are the key factor in children's growth, cognitive development, literacy development and general school learning. According to Jowett, & Baginsky (1991: 4) the aim of parental involvement is not to try to change the parent into a professional educator, but rather to augment existing parenting skills.

The single most important way to improve education is to strengthen parental involvement. The achievement of academic success in school depends on a triangle of

interaction of three elements, namely: the educator, the parent and the learner (Engelbrecht *et al.*1996:88). Research has indicated that any form of education that excludes any one of the three elements seems to be ineffective in both the rural and urban areas of the Republic of South Africa (Engelbrecht *et al.* 1996:88).

Pretorius (1990:219) Snyman (1990:19) and Dikker (1990:19) agree that through parental guidance, parents can be moulded, guided and educated so that they can perform basic parental functions. These functions include educating the child toward school preparedness, study aid for the child and adequate education and support. Parent involvement is subsequently linked to community service and school service.

A research project involving ten secondary schools in England and Wales aimed at identifying appropriate strategies for involving parents in their adolescents' education, revealed that parent involvement can bring about an improved self-confidence and self-esteem, co-operation between parents and educators and improvement in learner behaviour and attendance (Street, 1998:359).

It is a point of concern that so many learners are leaving school without actualising their potential. Once learners fail they are seen as failures of the education system. Not only does failure have far-reaching effects on the personality and future of the learner but the community also suffers. The learner who has failed finds it difficult to obtain a suitable job and turns to juvenile delinquency, thereby becoming a burden to the community (Le Roux, 1988:42). When learners drop out the nation is hurt grievously in terms of health, wealth and the achievement of its democratic goals (Gage, 1990: 280).

The attitudes of education participants (educators) will also be an important factor in the implementation of parent involvement in the education of their children.

Related research done on educator-parent-learner relations in Cyprus by Georgious (1995 - 1996:363) revealed that involving parents in the education system causes constant friction between educators and parents as one blames the other for the existing tension. The educators feared that as the Parents Association became more powerful, it would threaten their professional well-being. Therefore, parent involvement initiatives were not very popular among educators.

According to Griffith (1996:363) a research study done in Maryland reveals that most educators recognize parent involvement in school activities and in the learner's schoolwork as integral to successful learner academic performance and that parental participation can be influenced by positive attitudes of educators, parents and learners and a good quality of parent-school and parent-educator relationships and learner academic achievement will be maintained.

The discussions held with principals of the four traditional black high schools with a high failure rate compared to traditional white schools with high pass rate representing Potchefstroom district in the North West Province of South Africa revealed that parents are not involved in the education of their children. According to North West Province Examination results, report (1998:19) the poor grade 12 results are due to absence of parent involvement in many schools of the North West Province.

Research conducted by Heystek (1998:13) verifies the assumption that parents are not actively involved in school activities and education of their children. Weeto (1997:2-3) investigated the problems that school principals experience to involve parents in school activities in the secondary schools in the Free State Province.

According to Van der Westhuizen, et al. (1999:315 – 319), lack of parent involvement in the education of learners is ranked first by school principals and second by educators

and learners as the cause of poor grade 12 results, and this confirms that parents are not sufficiently involved in the education of their children and their involvement is necessary to improve academic achievement of learners.

As far as could be established, the reasons for lack of parent involvement in the education of their children in the North West Province of the Republic of South Africa have never been examined.

Informal interviews which were held with various educators of North West Province revealed that a pass rate of 50% is considered a satisfactory academic achievement whereas a pass rate below 40% is considered as a high failure rate. Van der Westhuizen, et al. (1999:315 – 319), on problems of poor grade 12 results 1997 in the North West Province, revealed that lack of culture of teaching and support services are the main factors that contribute to the poor grade 12 results. Research also shows that parents play a vital role in encouraging their children to learn and in supporting them emotionally especially when the learner is faced with examination.

In the light of the above-mentioned background of the problem, it is clear that parents are not sufficiently involved in the education of their children in the North West Province of the Republic of South Africa, and the literature on parent involvement raises interesting and important research questions.

The following problem questions arise:

- What is the nature of parent involvement in education?
- What is the degree of parent involvement in education in South Africa?
- What are the reasons for lack of parent involvement in the education of their children?

- What possible recommendations can be made for improving parent involvement in the North West Province? "

1.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of this study are:

- To determine through literature study, the nature of parent involvement in education

- To establish through literature study, the degree of parent involvement in education in South Africa

- To determine through an empirical investigation, the reasons for lack of parent involvement in the education of their children

- To make recommendations for improving parent involvement in the North West Province.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aims of the research will be achieved by means of the following methods:

1.4.1 Literature Study

Both primary and secondary literature sources will be studied to gather information that will describe:

- The nature of parent involvement in education.

- Parent involvement in education in South Africa.

- The degree of parent involvement in education in South Africa.

- The reasons for lack of parent involvement in education.

A DIALOG and UCTD-search was conducted with the help of the following key words: "parent", "academic achievement", "parent involvement", "influence", and "Grade 12 pupils".

1.4.2 Empirical Research

1.4.2.1 Introduction

An empirical investigation will be conducted to determine the degree of parental involvement and the reasons for lack of involvement of parents in the education of children in the Potchefstroom district of the North West Province.

1.4.2.2 Instrument

An instrument is an appropriate research method used for gathering data from respondents about variables of interest to the researcher in order to achieve the aims of the study. Data for this study will be collected through the use of the questionnaire survey technique, which will be developed in the light of literature study. A structured questionnaire will be designed and administered to the sampled parents of school children. A similar questionnaire, applicable to educators, will also be implemented.

1.4.2.3 Population

The population comprises parents and educators from all secondary schools in the Potchefstroom district of the North West Province.

1.4.2.4 Sample

A sample of selected parents (n=400) and selected educators of four schools (n=100) that have a pass rate below forty percent (40%) and four schools with a high pass rate above 70% representing Potchefstroom district of the North West Province of the

Republic of South Africa will be used. Stratified random sampling method will be employed to ensure that identified groups (in terms of grade 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12) and educators are represented.

1.4.2.5 Pilot study

The questionnaire will be pre-tested by administering to five selected number of respondents with regard to its qualities of measurement and appropriateness, and to review it for clarity.

1.4.2.6 Ethical consideration

Permission to conduct the study will be obtained from the Department of Education of North West Province - Potchefstroom district and from the principals of the schools selected.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and no information will be made available to an unauthorized person without the permission of the schools in question and the Department of Education of North West Province - Potchefstroom district.

1.4.2.7 Statistical techniques

The Statistical Consultancy Services of the Potchefstroom University for CHE: Vaal Triangle Campus will be approached for assistance in the analysis and interpretation of data collected.

1.5 FEASIBILITY OF STUDY

The study is feasible in that:

- There are sufficient literature sources on the topic. DIALOG and UCTD searches have been conducted using the following key words: "Parents", "secondary school", "academic achievement", "parent involvement", "influence" and "grade 12 pupils".

- The study will be conducted in the Potchefstroom district schools of the North West Province, which are accessible to the researcher.

1.6 DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

The field of study covers the nature of parent involvement, the methods available to involve parents in the education of children and the reasons for lack of involvement of parents in education of their children.

This research is confined to lack of parent involvement in the education of children in the North West Province with special reference to Potchefstroom district schools.

1.7 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1   Introduction

Chapter 2   The nature of parent involvement in education

Chapter 3   Parent involvement in education in South Africa

Chapter 4   Empirical research

Chapter 5   Presentation and interpretation of data

Chapter 6   Summary, conclusions and recommendations

1.8 RELATED RESEARCH

Makoanyane (1989:124) investigated structures, which are available for parents to participate meaningfully in the education of their children, and identified the prevailing problems which hinder effective parent involvement in the education of the child, in schools for Blacks with special reference to the Vaal Triangle.

Jantjes (1995:290 - 301) in her research concludes that parents and therefore the home can influence learners education positively. The aim of her study was to explore the impact of the home environment on school achievement. Her study however does not address the nature and reasons for lack of involvement of the parents in education in the North West Province.

Weeto (1997:2-3) investigated the problems school principals experience to involving parents in school activities in secondary schools in the Free State Province.

In this research project the focus will be on the reasons for lack of involvement of parents in education and methods of parent involvement in the North West Province.

1.9 DESCRIPTION OF TERMS

Only those terms that are used in a specific context in this research will be clarified.

1.9.1 Parent

According to (Van der Westhuizen, 1996: 212-213) the concept "parent" refers to an adult person who shows and guides a child. Barnard and Vos (1980:88-90) however, state that a mature person can be regarded as a parent. "Parent" can also refer to a legal guardian of a child (Barnard, 1996:75-76). According to De Villiers (1988:146-

147) "parent" can also refer to a biological father or mother who may decide to teach his/her child.

In the context of this research, however, the concept "parent" means any responsible adult who is either elected or nominated to represent the interests of the child in the field of education. A parent in this regard therefore is an adult whose aims are mainly to guide and assist the child in his/her learning endeavours.

1.9.2 Child

The term "child" refers to a non-adult. "Non-adult" implies one who is not yet adult but who is on route to adulthood. Mature adulthood is usually what a child strives for (Gunter, 1965:48). A child by the very nature of not being an adult yet, depends upon the assistance and guidance of one who is already an adult to reach responsible adulthood. According to Landman (1974:24-25) a child is one who depends upon an adult to exploit his inborn potentialities until he reaches a stage where he can gradually start to make his own responsible decisions confidently.

A child in the context of this research however, will mean a non-adult who relies upon both the parent and the educator to develop his learning skills and potentialities to the full.

1.9.3 Learner

One who is learning a subject content or skills, or one who acquires knowledge, skills and receives instruction from the educator (Hegarty, 1993: 117-130).

1.9.4 Secondary School

This term refers to the post-primary school from grade 8 to grade 12.

1.9.5 Parent involvement

"Parent involvement" is when parents participate in the affairs of the education of their children. Parent involvement therefore refers to the role that parents play for the purpose of improving learning conditions of the child (De Villiers, 1988:149). This implies that parents have a right and an opportunity to make an input and suggestions in the affairs of education. Parent involvement is particularly intended to create a condusive climate in which a child derives pleasure from learning (Buys. 1986:9).

Parent involvement means that parents, as partners, participate with educators in the interests of the education of the child. Parent involvement implies co-operation between parents and educators. True parent involvement means partnership between parents and educators with the sole purpose of assisting the child in his/her educational endeavours (Postma, 1986:125).

Parent involvement in this research should be understood to mean the intentional efforts which are made by the parent in order to assist his/her growing child.

1.9.6 Education

The concept "education" has been defined by various authors, and there is little agreement amongst those who are involved in education as to what precisely "education" is. Straugham and Wilson (1983:16-17) suggest that it is easier to define education if its aims are clear. In the center of the aim of education lies the child. Generally speaking the aim of education can be regarded as to help the child to adapt to continual influences to which he is subjected by the various physical, biological and social environment in which he lives (Straugham and Wilson, 1983:17). Thompson (1980:80) states that the main aim of education is to cater for the physical, mental,

moral and spiritual developments of the child. Power (1982:226) describes education as a life-long process. He maintains that education begins at birth and continues throughout life.

In the context of this research, however, education should be understood to mean that continual process of assisting the total developmental stages of a child. A child is not mature and therefore, through education, he/she should be guided during the phases of development. Education in this regard refers to both informal and formal learning of the child.

1.10 SUMMARY

Economic competition and social stability require that the current high level of academic and social failure in schools today has to be reduced drastically. The school cannot address this problem alone. Schools and families need each other, and need to devise ways of working together for the benefit of children. To build such a partnership effectively, it is necessary for all parties to truly understand each other.

Involving parents in the education of their children has become a major goal of professionals, particularly those working with at-risk students. However, systematic collaboration between the home, the school and the community remains a distant reality. If education is to foster learning, it should be an uninterrupted experience that actively involves the learner and his or her surroundings. Consequently continuous support from the home, community and the school are necessary prerequisites for academic success.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the purpose of the research and to state the problem of the research.

The aims of the research were stated. The method of the research was explained and the demarcation of the field of study was indicated.

The composition of various chapters and the definition of terms were treated in this chapter. The next chapter will deal with the nature of parent involvement in the education of the child.