AN EMPOWERMENT APPROACH TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that:

AN APPROACH TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

is my own work, that all the resources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references[1], and that this thesis has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university.

M.M. Tshabalala

[1] Some sources do not have page numbers.

DEDICATION

I hereby dedicate this work to the following people:

My late parents, Tshwene Moses Matabane and Nellie Thoko Matabane.

My brother, Joshua Matabane, and my sisters, Mathabo and Modeihi.

My sons, Mtshezi and Mzwandile, and my only daughter, Nomalanga. "You were true angels through this hard time.

My grandsons, Thinabakho and Khayalethu.

My husband, Letsika Tshabalala. "You are the best thing in my life."

May God Bless you.

I love you all.

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My colleagues, Dikeledi Lenkwane, Doctor Mokhatla.

Dikeledi Mokoena, for typing after school, on weekends and even during the night. "This is yours too!"

Keletso Malebo for her technological skills.

Principals and parents of Thabong schools, for taking part in this research. "Thanks a million!"

Puleng Khoza, Mpho Matsoso and Mafusi Mokhatla. "For your prayers."

Polokong school staff. "You are wonderful people. Keep up the good work."

Above all, God, the Almighty, who lifted me up when I could not move anymore!

ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in education is accepted as an important aspect of learner academic achievement. In fact, there is research evidence that associates high learner achievement with high rates of parental involvement. However, judging by the poor levels of achievement attained by learners in, for instance, areas like reading, writing and numeracy in primary school grades, the question rises as to whether parental involvement is consciously promoted in primary schools.

This empirical research intended to investigate how parental involvement is currently promoted in primary schools. The literature review revealed the basic obligations of schools and parents as expressed in Epstein's six typologies of parental involvement, which form the basis of all endeavours towards enhancing parental involvement. Consequently, it is concluded that strategies or programmes aimed at promoting parental involvement, must embody parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, participation in decision-making and collaboration with the community. In this regard, the child's environment should be regarded as an ecology consisting of the school, home and community.

The main empirical research finding indicates generally, that the meaning attached to parental involvement falls short of its essence, and focuses on response activities from both school staff and parents. The main recommendation, therefore, is advocacy that begins with empowering all stakeholders with regard to the essence of parental involvement. In this regard, the Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement (EAPI) recommended in this research, proposes a model that empowers individual schools and the community, through a school-based and cluster-based focus. The EAPI model presents a series of actions leading to a *modus operandi* that recognises the power of *zenzele* (do it yourself) for schools and parents, and *masakhane* (doing it for ourselves together) for school clusters and the community. Both concepts utilise principles based on *ubuntu* and express the adage: "it takes a village to raise a child."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

ANNEXURES

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

It seems undeniable that parental involvement in children's schooling can enhance the educational process. This, according to Comer and Haynes (1997), is because parents can contribute insights and knowledge that complement the professional skills of schools' staff in ways that strengthen academic and social programmes. LaBahn (1995) opines that though parental involvement is vital and can produce great rewards for all concerned, it has been found that schools do not always know what parental involvement really means.

The primary school is of interest to the researcher because it is the entry point of a child's educational and academic road and it is at this stage that the culture and tradition of committed parental involvement should be promoted and laid as a foundation for enhanced learner benefit, which will be sustained throughout a child's schooling. This is also the stage where the child's family environment and the school environment seem to overlap more than in the child's later schooling years. LaBahn (1995) argues, in this regard, that parental involvement declines as their children grow older and occurs seldom in secondary schools than in primary schools.

This research departs from a point of view that parental involvement can, and should be enhanced and sustained throughout children's school lives and takes a cue from Comer and Haynes' (1997) assertion that parental involvement programmes that are instituted in traditional bureaucratic and inflexible school environments, are less likely to yield positive results. To this end, maximum benefits of parental involvement can be found in approaches, programmes, and activities that seek to involve parents at all levels of children's school life. Such involvement means support of a school's educational programmes, active

participation in daily activities and involvement in school planning and management. This research thus seeks to investigate and expose parental involvement based on the ecological perspective of the school and home and propounds the school and home as the child's ecologies. It is also motivated by the African sayings that "it takes a village to raise a child" and that, "all children are my children"; and "your child is my child" as being well-known expressions articulated by adult community members.

The South African Schools Act No. 84 (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996) locates schools on a path of democratic management and governance. This in essence, implies the application of democratic principles of consultation, collaboration and stakeholder involvement in education and in particular, the running and governance of schools. For this reason, parental involvement is a critical aspect of effective teaching and learning in schools.

Most stipulations of the SASA require parents to be involved in all school activities. Among others, the SASA (Republic of South Africa, 1996) requires parental involvement in such matters as admission of learners to schools, language policies, disciplinary measures, including codes of conduct for learners, suspensions and expulsions, school governance, maintenance of school property, determining the school curricular, including extra-mural activities, managing financial matters and recommendation of staff appointments. These roles mean that parental involvement goes beyond ensuring that their children attend school and do homework, as well as contributing financially to the school. It includes actual involvement in decision-making regarding all aspects of the school's functioning. In essence, this implies being involved in all activities aimed at ensuring that teaching and learning is effective.

However, apart from prescribing and describing roles and functions of parents in schools, school improvement attempts have largely focussed on parental involvement in terms of the functioning of the school governing body as well as

programmes aimed at the professional aspects of schools by way of staff empowerment. A comprehensive South African literature search yielded very little research on the empowerment of schools regarding the involvement of parents in schooling activities. Enquiries at education departmental level indicated empowerment and capacity building programmes largely dealing with specific issues such as school governance, financial management, fundraising and programmes dealing mostly with information-sharing on the new curriculum. These were largely targeted at parents in school governing bodies. A critical omission in this regard seems to relate to capacitating schools to understand what parental involvement really entails and to expend efforts in the enhancement thereof. This is a consequence of parental involvement, though understandable, being a complex matter. Indeed parental involvement hampered by numerous factors.

A number of barriers to parental involvement are identified in research studies. From the side of parents, Lall, Campbell and Gillborn (2004) cite such barriers as lack of confidence and understanding, poverty and work pressures, as well as parents feeling patronised and unwelcome. Rudolph (2000) posits that some of the reasons of poor parental involvement, include a history of bad experiences in schools, a general lack of trust in institutions, discomfort in speaking to educators, a tendency to equate the questioning of an educator with a display of disrespect, a traditional pattern of deference to education, and a lack of English language skills. A significant barrier to parental involvement is espoused by LaBahn (1995) as relating to parents not believing that they have any knowledge that the school is interested in knowing or acquiring, especially when parents do not have a great deal of education. This may lead to embarrassment due to illiteracy or inability to articulate their thoughts, which may be compounded by their own memories of failure in school.

The barriers to parental involvement indicate the complexity of this phenomenon. Very often, parental involvement in schools is limited to their contributions in terms of listening, contributing financially and dealing with behavioural problems of their

children. Indeed the researcher's own experience at schools identifies such issues as finances, fundraising and behavioural problems as dominant features of parents' meetings. Poor attendance of such meetings and failure to deal with learner behavioural problems is unfortunately often misconstrued by educators equating parental non-participation with parents not caring about their children's education (Rudolph, 2000).

After the arguments raised above are considered, it is clear that parental involvement in schools is not at a level that is significantly beneficial to schools and children's education. This raises the following question:

How can schools and parents be empowered to enhance parental involvement?

This clearly requires a more focussed approach aimed at involving them in all spheres of school life. This means looking at the school's ecology as a starting point for enhancing an understanding of this phenomenon.

This research seeks to determine *how schools and parents can be empowered to enhance parental involvement in the primary school?*

To answer this question, the following sub-questions were explored:

- What is the essence of parental involvement in schools?
- How can parental involvement be enhanced in schools?
- How do primary schools currently promote parental involvement?
- Which empowerment approach can be developed for parental involvement in the primary school?

Research aims guided the exploration of answers to these questions.

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study thus is to examine how parental involvement can be enhanced in the primary school. This is pursued through answering the following objectives:

- examine the essence of parental involvement in schools;
- examine how parental involvement can be enhanced in schools;
- investigate how primary schools currently promote parental involvement; and
- develop an empowerment approach to parental involvement in the primary school.

To achieve these aims, a specific research method was employed.

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Mouton (2001:55), a research design is a plan or blueprint of how one intends conducting research. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:85) describe a research design as providing a plan for collecting and utilising data so that the desired information can be obtained as precisely as possible. This study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is defined as an attempt to present the social world, and perspectives on that world, in terms of the concepts, behaviours, perceptions and accounts of the people who inhabit it (Ritchie, 1998). According to Gay and Airasian (2003:13), qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting with an intention of obtaining a deep understanding about the way things are, as well as how participants perceive them. In this study, the qualitative approach is used to investigate parental involvement in primary schools in the Welkom area of the Lejweleputswa district of the Free State Department of Education.

A phenomenological strategy is used for this purpose. According to Fouché (2002:273), phenomenology seeks to understand and interpret the meaning that people give to their everyday lives. In this regard, Bogdan and Biklen (2003:23) state that researchers in phenomenology attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. In essence, this implies a study that describes the experiences a phenomenon, topic or concept has for various individuals. The researcher does this by entering the subject's "life world" or life setting, mainly by means of observing participants and interviews (with up to ten people) in order to analyse the conversations and interactions that the researcher has with the participant (Fouché, 2002:272).

This research intended to "enter" participants' life settings in order to find out what parental involvement means to them and how they get involved in schools as well as how parental involvement is enhanced in their schools. This was done by engaging participants in one-to-one and group interviews. Therefore the method for this study involved collecting data through both the literature review and empirical study.

1.4 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

This study considers parental involvement from the systems ecological perspective, which propounds that the family and child are embedded within many systems of influence (Christenson, 2004:83). The child's family is an entity within a particular environment or ecology, which consists of nested structures, each inside the next Keyes (http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/keyes.html). At the innermost level is the immediate setting "containing" the developing person (child), which Brofenbrenner (*in* Keyes, http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/keyes.html) refers to as the microsystem and relates it to a person and his or her immediate environment. The next system, the mesosystem, represents the relations between the settings in which the developing person participates (in this case, home and school). The third level, the exosystem, refers to one or more settings that affect

the person but do not "contain" the person (in this case, such structures as the church). The final level, the macrosystem, refers to values, laws and customs of the culture that influence all the lower levels. Keyes then makes the point that there is interconnectedness both within and between the settings.

According to Connard and Novick (1996), as children move out into the world, their growth is directly influenced by the expectations and challenges from peer groups, care-givers, schools, and all the other social settings they encounter; strong linkages between families and community organizations such as schools, open channels that allow vital information and resources to flow in both directions, support families, schools, and communities; and the work environment, community attitudes and values, and large society shape child development indirectly, but powerfully, by affecting the way a family functions. For this reason, Comer and Haynes (1997) opine that children learn best when the significant adults in their lives work together to encourage and support them. Significant adults in this regard include children's parents, educators, other family members and members of the community. Parental involvement is then viewed as the participation and engagement of children's significant adults namely, educators, parents, and members of the community in school activities to support and encourage them.

Parental involvement in this study is therefore, viewed in terms of parent, family and community partnerships with the school and according to Epstein and Salinas (2004:14), this entails certain obligations pertaining to the parents and the school namely, *parenting*, which relates to helping parents and all families establish home environments to support children as learners, *communicating*, which relates to designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and children's progress, *volunteering*, which entails recruiting and organising parent help and support, *learning at home*, which relates to providing information and ideas to families about the way to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning, *decision making*, which implies including parents in school decisions,

developing parent leaders and representatives and *collaborating with the community,* which relates to identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and children's learning and development.

The foregoing exposition outlines what parent and family partnerships with the school entail namely, child care and support. This study locates the understanding of parental involvement within the obligations pertaining to parents (family), the school and the influence of the community as another system influencing a child's development and learning as espoused above. In addition, parental involvement is contextualized within the African precept of communality, which is rooted in *ubuntu,* the philosophy key to all African values and involves humanness, a good disposition towards others and a moral nature (Mthembu, 1996;216; Broodryk, 2005:12). According to Mthembu (1996:216), in terms of this value, two important practices emerge namely:

- *zenzele (do it yourself),* which relates to individual entrepreneurship and implies individuality in doing things. This can be related to parents or the family's attempts to do well for themselves in terms of encouraging and supporting children's education. This ties in with Epstein's (1995) parental obligations of parenting and learning at home; and

- *masakhane* (doing it for ourselves together), which relates to group-based practices, whose importance is the collective ability and sharing. In terms of Epstein's (1995) exposition, it relates to practices involving communicating, volunteering, decision making and collaboration with the community.

Parental involvement thus entails the parent and family, as the child's immediate environment, *zenzele* to ensure that the learner is cared for in order to achieve academically. It also entails the involvement of the community and school in terms of *masakhane* to care for all children in order for them to achieve academically.

This means involving parents as individuals who have obligations of care and support for their child(ren), as well as involving the community and the school who also have obligations to care for children in ways that ensure that they these systems support each other, children and schools. It is this interconnectedness of the child's family, community and school that projects the importance of parental involvement in his/her development. According to Giles (1998), this indicates the strengths and weaknesses of a school and its environment, comprising the child's ecologies, and shows that these settings can affect each other as well as the children. This issue projects the importance and significance of *masakhane*, which in the sense of *ubuntu*, gives expression to advocating communality as a strong and binding network of relationships namely, "all children are my children" (The People's Agenda, http://www.thepeoplesagenda .co.za/za/content/economic/childs rights.asp) and that "it takes the village to raise a child", which according to Mthembu (1996) implies that children not only belong to their biological parents, but are also under the authority and control of any adult in the community. This means that any child belongs to the community (*masakhane*) and thus the community is also responsible for raising, supporting and encouraging them educationally and academically.

Taking the two afore-mentioned practices and the philosophy on which they are grounded namely, *ubuntu*, this study approaches an empowerment approach for parental involvement in terms of the communal spirit advanced by the philosophy of *ubuntu*, which propounds such practices as value-sharing, interconnectedness, communal relationships, continuous integrated development and collectivism (cf. Mthembu, 1996). This study propounds that these practices are generally familiar and well-known to most parents in the South African context. Consequently, invoking them in schools' parental involvement activities is sure to enhance parental involvement. Therefore this study is grounded in parents' and schools' obligations in terms of Epstein's typologies as well as communal practices based on the African philosophy of *ubuntu* with its concomitant practices. This is

expressed in the approach for parental involvement that this study proposes (cf. Chapter 5).

1.5 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Parent: For purposes of this study, a parent refers to a child's biological parent(s), stepparent(s), grandparent(s) and any person who is a legal guardian of such a child and is responsible for his/her upbringing and wellbeing.

Family: For the purpose of this study, a family is seen as a family with a single parent (to include one adult parent, mother, father, step-mother, or step-father), single adult (to include one adult of any relationship), two-parents (to include a father and mother or step-father and stepmother), two-adults (to include two adults of any relationship such as grandparent, roommate).

Parental involvement: In this study, parental involvement relates to participation and engagement of a parent in any school related activity that is aimed at promoting the child's best interests in terms of learning at school.

An ecological perspective: According to Connard and Novick (1996), an ecological perspective emphasises the interconnections of events and the bi-directionality of effects between organism and environment and as such views human development from a "person-in-environment" context, emphasising the principle that all growth and development takes place within the context of relationships. Therefore in this research, an ecological perspective locates parental involvement within parent interaction with the school environment.

Ubuntu: a Zulu word meaning "humanness" and expresses a good disposition towards others and describes the significance of group solidarity and interdependence (Mthembu, 1996:216). In the context of this study, *ubuntu* relates to principles concerned with communality and care for children by the community as expressed in the saying: "it takes a village to raise a child."

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The qualitative nature of this research limits the generalisability of results. As such, the results cannot be generalized to the entire primary school population in the Free State Department of Education. However, it can be stated that in line with the nature of qualitative research, the authenticity of findings is sufficiently addressed by the premise that the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations cannot be replicated, but is, as Bogdan and Biklen (2003:36) suggest, based on the fact that qualitative researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data and tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations or situations.

1.7 DELIMITATION

The study was limited to the Lejweleputswa district's Welkom primary schools in the Free State Department of Education. The population was confined purposively to the parents and principals of primary school learners. The results of the study are therefore not generalisable to the entire population of primary schools. However, in line with the nature of qualitative research, this study is concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of data and seeks to find a "fit" between data and what actually occurs in the setting under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:36).

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study's importance is located in its intention to develop an approach for school parental involvement in the primary school. This will contribute to the body of knowledge in educational management regarding customised and "tailor-made" approaches for educational environments.

The study will also benefit school principals and school communities in that it will provide them with a usable approach to implement in their schools in order to create and sustain a parental involvement approach.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Chapter 1 presents the study orientation and outlines the introduction and problem statement, research questions and aims, the theoretical orientation, definition of operational terms, limitations, significance of the study and the study overview.

Chapter 2 discusses the essence of parental involvement.

Chapter 3 presents a discussion on enhancing parental involvement in schools.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical research design and method. This entails a discussion of the research approach, a description of the method in terms of the instrumentation, the empirical research method, participants in the research and data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis and interpretation of the empirical research data.

Chapter 6 presents the research findings, conclusions and recommendation of this study. This includes the recommended programmes for enhancing parental involvement in primary schools.

1.10 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the general orientation to this research study by outlining the problem statement, research questions and aim, research method, theoretical orientation, definition of operational terms, demarcation, delimitation and limitations of the study, significance of the study and the study outlay.

The following chapter presents the literature review on the essence of parental involvement.

CHAPTER 2

THE ESSENCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is a subject of interest to stakeholders in education. Indeed there are many research studies that have been conducted on the subject of parental involvement, although focus is on different aspects of the phenomenon. However it seems that parental involvement in schools is not at the level that would be acceptable. In consideration of the importance of parental involvement in children's education, it is even more crucial to explore its real essence.

This chapter exposes this phenomenon with regard to the primary school. The rationale behind this study is present in the next section.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The notion of parental involvement in the education of a child cannot be overemphasised. Sheldon (2002:301) makes the point that many schools spend considerable energy and resources to encourage parents to be more active in the education of their children and much educational research has examined whether and how parents become involved in their children's education and in what way schools can increase parental involvement. Sheldon then argues that, despite this attention, educators continue to struggle to understand why some parents become involved in their children's schooling and others do not. Indeed, lack of parental involvement is considered to be a real challenge facing schools. It is thus an acknowledged fact, which is already highlighted in the previous chapter, that parental involvement is crucial to learner well-being and achievement.

There is indeed ample research evidence that shows that learner achievement improves significantly when parental involvement is a feature of a child's

education. In this regard, The Michigan Department of Education (2004:3) asserts that decades of research show that when parents are involved learners have higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates, better school attendance, increased motivation, better self-esteem, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol and fewer instances of violent behaviour. Furtherrnore, family participation in education is twice as predictive of learners' academic success as family socio-economic status, school benefits when parents are involved as parental involvement results in improved educator morale, higher ratings of educators by parents, more support from families and higher learner achievement. Parental involvement also leads to feelings of ownership, resulting in increased support of schools and parents expressing a genuine and deep-seated desire to help their children succeed academically, regardless of differences in socio economic status, race, ethnicity, and cultural background.

Tableman (2004:1) also reports that research studies about parental involvement indicate that: when parents are empowered to become effective partners in their children's education, performance in schools improves dramatically; schools outperform schools without parent and family involvement; schools that have improved educator morale and received higher ratings of educators by parents, are mostly those that enjoy more support from families and experience a better reputation in the community; when parents are involved, learners achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level, exhibit more positive attitudes and demonstrate decreased alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behaviour. Tableman further posits that benefits obtained from parental involvement are not confined to the elementary years, but are evident at all ages and grade levels and that different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains including:

- educators holding higher expectations of learners and higher opinions of the parents; and

- children from diverse cultural backgrounds tending to do better because parents and professionals are bridging the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.

The foregoing exposition highlights the benefits of parental involvement in children's education. These benefits are more obvious in the case of primary school children. The primary school is of interest to the researcher because, as pointed out earlier, it is at this stage that the culture and tradition of committed parental involvement is promoted and laid as a foundation for enhanced learner benefit, which could be sustained throughout a child's schooling. To this end, Caspe, Lopez and Wolos (2006/7:1) assert that during the primary school years, children undergo important developmental changes, which are that their reasoning becomes more logical, their attention gets more adaptable, their logical perspective grows more sophisticated, and their reading and mathematical skills blossom, and with entry into formal schooling, children spend more time away from their families, which includes many hours spent in schools and out-of-school-time programmes.

Therefore throughout primary school, children begin to integrate knowledge from their interactions with educators, peers, and families, in order to construct identities based on their understanding of what they are good at and capable of doing. It is at this stage of the child's development that the parent and family as a unit, lays the foundation for a child's later life at school. The family therefore is engages in *zenzele* which relates to parents or families' attempts to do well for themselves in terms of encouraging and supporting children's education (cf. 1.5).

It is clear therefore, that parental involvement, especially in the primary school, is crucial to a child's development for future learning and career. To understand this phenomenon, the concept, parental involvement is exposed in the next section.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

This research explores parental involvement within an ecological systems perspective. Some models of parental involvement are presented in the next section.

2.3.1 Some models of parental involvement

There are numerous theoretical perspectives on parental involvement. Prominent among them are those that advocate traditional approaches to parental involvement. There are those that also advocate views that differ from the traditional approaches. This section outlines three of the theoretical orientations on parental involvement.

2.3.1.1 *Parental involvement: an ecological perspective*

According to Connard and Novick (1996), an ecological perspective emphasises the interconnections of events and the bi-directionality of effects between organism and environment. It thus views human development from a person-in-environment context, emphasising the principle that all growth and development take place within the context of relationships. According to Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis and George (2004:4), the ecological perspective of parental engagement includes parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do. The ecological perspective thus looks at parental involvement in the context of parental interactions with the school environment. In this sense, parental involvement includes the situations that surround an individual's decision to participate in an event, including his/her relationships with other individuals, the history of the event, and the resources available to both the individual parent and even designers.

In describing the ecology of parental involvement, Barton *et al* (2004:3) depart from the premise of schools as consisting of different spaces or within different social, cultural and political boundaries. Accordingly, parental involvement is seen as a function of space and capital.

According to these authors, *space* is linked with particular activities along two dimensions namely, school-based academic spaces and home/community space. School-based academic spaces are spaces that reflect curriculum and instruction such as the teaching of mathematics or science. School-based spaces also include non-academic spaces or those spaces that reflect the social organisational qualities of schooling not directly implicated in academic learning, such as managing learner behaviour in the school campus, while home-community *spaces* include such spaces as those where parents interact with others about their concerns of schooling, such as church-based groups, parent networks and community organisations.

Capital relates to the beliefs expressed and the actions engaged in by individuals in different spaces. In other words, capital relates to what parents bring to the spaces in their involvement ecology. Barton *et al* (2004:5) cite Bourdieu's definition of capital, where capital can be thought of as the human, social and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes. Ho (1995:49) in this regard argues that parents can invest their income (economic capital) to buy books or computers, or hire private tutors (cultural capital) and can utilise their knowledge (academic capital) in supervising their children's homework or volunteering in school. In the same vein, parents with professional careers or significant social networks (social capital) may occupy a better social position to negotiate with school personnel and grasp important information for their children, and this includes parents' appearance (symbolic capital), which can affect the pattern of interaction between parents and educators, and so on.

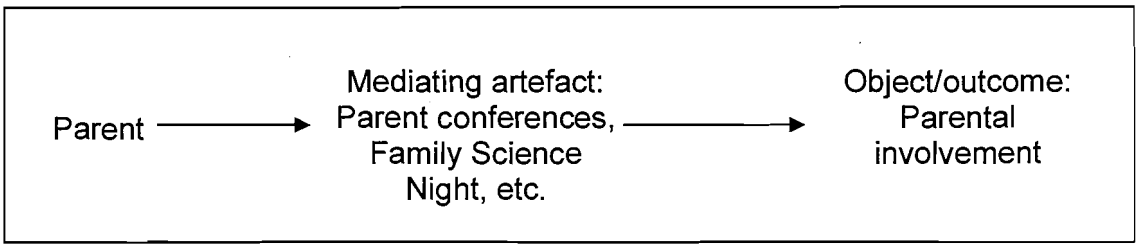
The ecological perspective of parental involvement according to Barton *et al.* (2004:6), seems to create three suppositions namely:

- that parental involvement is the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in the school setting;

- that mediation must be understood as both an action and an orientation to action; and
- that the differences in parental involvement across different kinds of spaces in schools (academic and non-academic spaces) are both a micro and macro phenomenon.

Barton *et* al. (2004:6) illustrate this phenomenon in terms of the traditional and ecological parental involvement paradigms. The *traditional paradigm* is depicted in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 **The traditional paradigm**

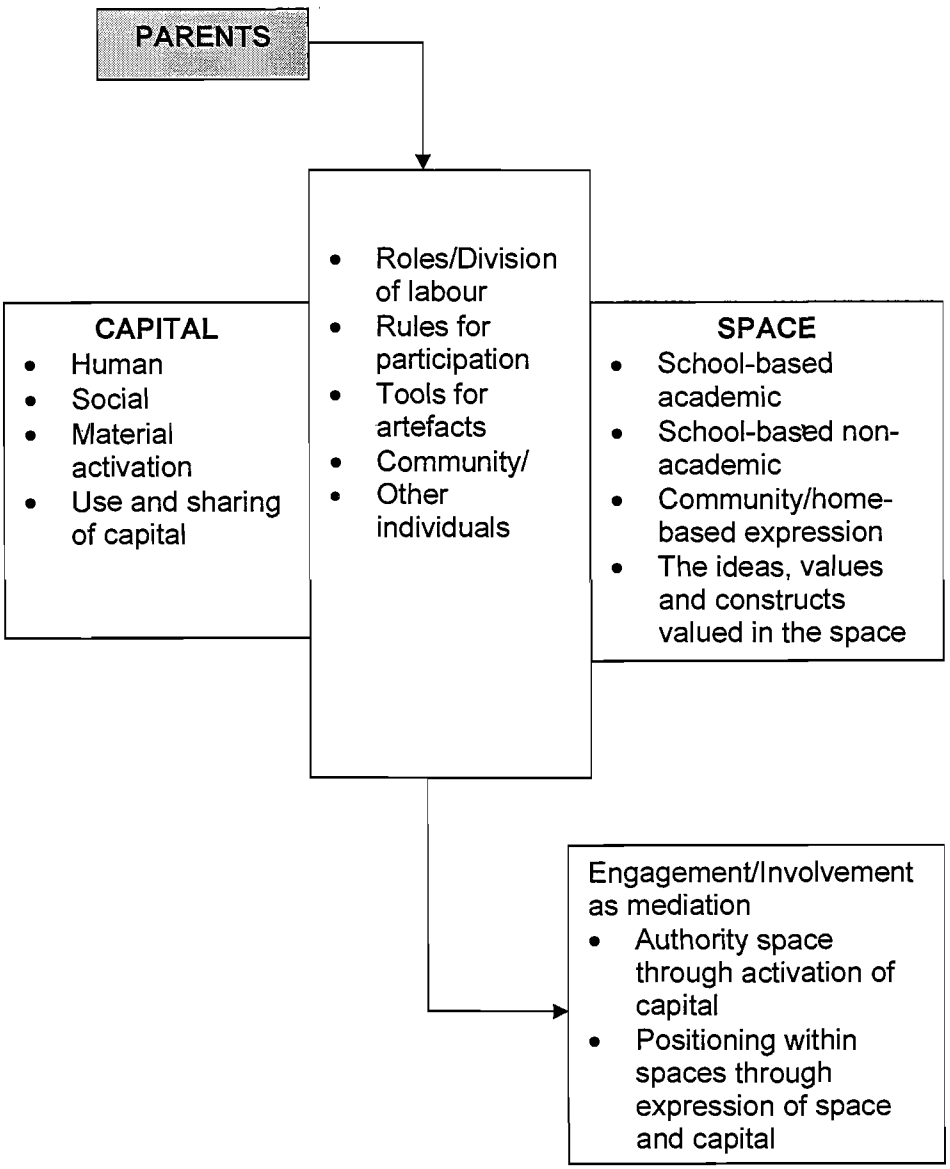


Source: Barton *et al.*, 2004:6

In terms of the traditional paradigm (fig. 2.1), parental involvement is linear, unidirectional and not tied to external factors. The paradigm indicates parental involvement as consisting of spaces, wherein parents for instance, attend meetings, conferences or parent evenings. Their actual inputs or capital are not necessarily reflected. However, Barton *et al.* point out that this traditional paradigm ignores such external factors as time, energy, the ability to get to the school as well as other factors, which does not explain the relationships and activities that make any given parent "informed, competent or involved".

The *ecological perspective* conceptualises space and capital as illustrated in figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 **The ecological perspective of parental involvement**



Source: **Barton *et al.*, 2004:6**.

As illustrated in figure 2.2 above, parental involvement as the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings, means that what parents do in school settings is an active manifestation of the physical and material boundaries of what it is they want to do. This entails, according to this paradigm, three aspects namely:

- *Mediation as action*, which relates to critical actions that parents engage in in terms of involvement, which is what parents do when they examine the assumptions that frame school-based conversations about the roles of parents and families or the common practices and policies of the school. Because parents are actively involved, they deliberate over their involvement, rather than merely accepting roles as specified by the tradition paradigm. This is typified by parents spending time in classrooms and questioning the practices either with other parents or even educators. It can be assumed that this is not necessarily a confrontational form of enquiry.

- *Authoring and positioning as key actions*, which relate to parents being able to activate resources available to them in a given space in order to author a place of their own in schools and how they use or express that place to position themselves differently so that they can influence life in schools. This implies that parents venture into schools, and make themselves present by leveraging available resources (like time, one-on-one interactions with educators, perseverance when there are difficulties or perceptions of interference) so as to have a say or influence the spaces occupied by others in schools. This includes using their own expertise or wisdom as well as using the expertise of others in the community, such as for instance, knowledge and experience gained from their relationships with and observations of other educators in the community. This in essence means parental presence in the form of what they know and have experienced being used as leverages to influence and engage in school activities.

- *Orientation to action as an element of parental involvement or engagement*, which implies that parental involvement is not only action but also an orientation to action, which means that parents' experiences and resilience is used to frame what schooling should be about for their children. For instance, parents' awareness of differences in schools

indicates their awareness of quality in schools is a function of economic and political factors, which then frames their orientation towards actioning the necessary capital, like social, economic or political power to address this issue.

The ecological perspective of parental involvement, unlike the traditional paradigm, puts emphasis on the recognition that parental involvement involves parents interacting with the school environment in terms of active engagement. Thus, as aptly described by Barton *et al.* (2004:11), parental involvement, or more precise, engagement is "a desire, an expression, and an attempt by parents to have an impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued within schools", and indicates that the mediation of space and capital involves an individual's ability to articulate what it is they know and want, for what goes on in schools, and it requires others to listen and be responsive to that articulation.

2.3.1.2 ***Epstein typologies of parental involvement***

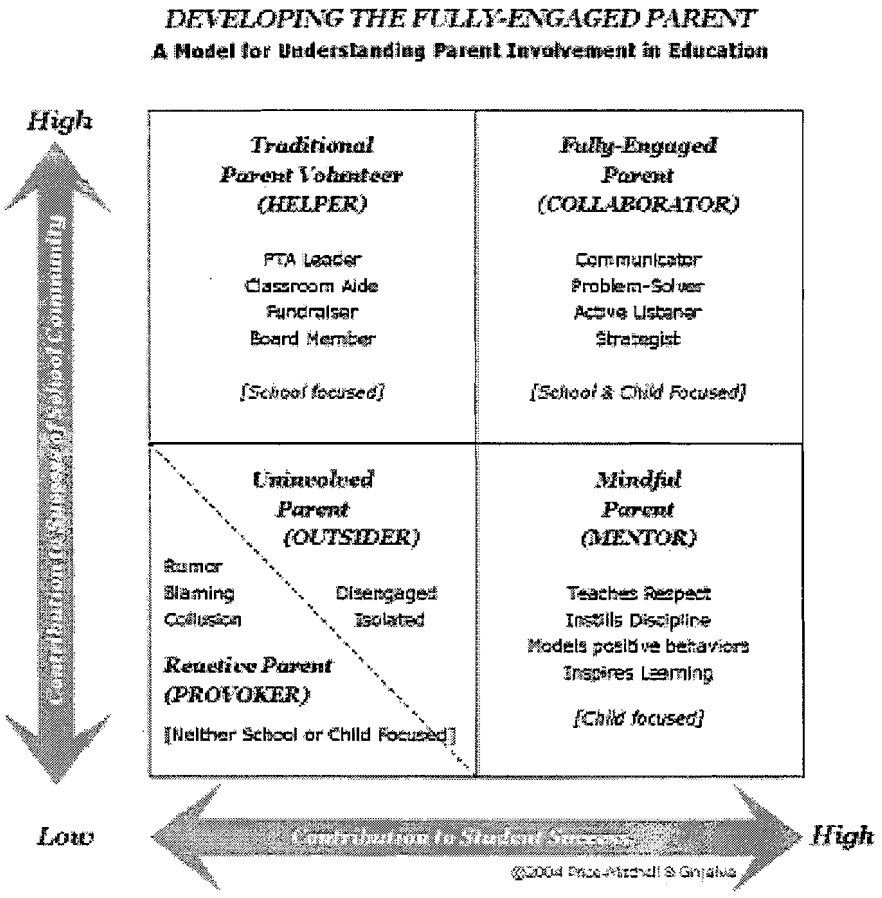
Epstein (1995) argues that the six typologies of parental involvement locate the learner at the centre and thus guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive programme of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for learners, parents and educators. These typologies are parenting, communication, learning at home, volunteering, decision making and collaboration with the community, and are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

2.3.1.3 ***Price-Mitchell and Grijalva's model of parental involvement***

According to Price-Mitchell and Grijalva (2007:2), in every school community, parent behaviours can be categorized into five groups, which groups are very fluid, that is, parents move from one group to another depending upon the situation and their level of involvement. The model in essence, shows the types

of behaviours that could harm as well as help parent-school communities. Figure 2.3 illustrates this model.

Figure 2.3 **Price-Mitchell and Grijalva model of parental involvement**



Source: **Price-Mitchell and Grijalva, 2007:2.**

Figure 2.3 depicts five categories of parental involvement, which are explained in the following way (Price-Mitchell and Grijalva, 2007:2):

- *Traditional parent volunteer*

  The traditional notion of parent evokes thought of volunteering at school in the from of helping in the classroom, fundraising and chaperoning, which in themselves (parent volunteers) are vital parts of the school community,

without which many schools could not provide quality education or raise additional funds for needed programmes and materials. While the traditional parent volunteer contributes highly to the success of the school community, she/he does not necessarily contribute to learner success.

- *Reactive parent*

  The reactive parent or the "provoker" parent uses techniques such as blaming, rumour, collusion and gossip to achieve results instead of employing helpful behaviours to influence change. This reaction often occurs in a crisis situation with a child and can be the result of anger or powerlessness to influence change in any meaningful way, which harmful behaviours are unfortunately often modelled to children. The reactive parent is a low contributor to the success of the school community and a low contributor to learner success.

- *Uninvolved parent*

  The uninvolved or "outsider" parent is generally invisible in the school community and is isolated from other parents. Some such parents willingly choose to be uninvolved; others face overwhelming challenges in their family lives that leave them few options and like the reactive parents, they are low contributors to school success and low contributors to learner success.

- *Mindful parent*

  The mindful or "mentor" parents approach parenting with conscious intentions but do not necessarily get involved at their children's school. They work hard to teach respect and instil discipline at home, model positive behaviours to their children, often read books about parenting and try hard to teach family values to their children. Mindful parents are high contributors to learner success but low contributors to the success of the school community.

- *Fully-engaged parent*

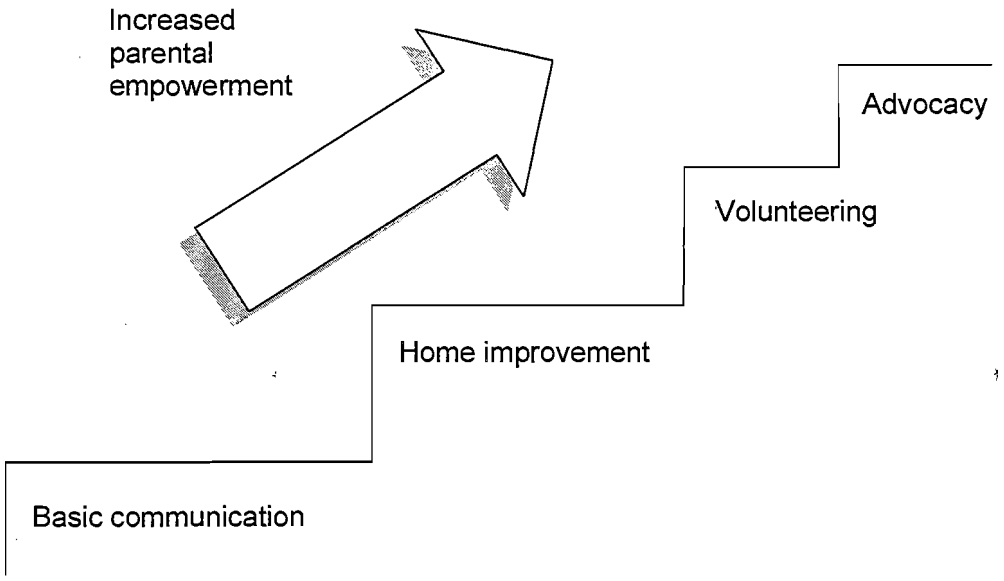
  The engaged or "collaborator" parents understand the concept of "parent-school partnership," act in ways that facilitate its development, and recognises that effective parenting cannot occur in isolation from other parents and the school. With a shared focus on parenting and the success of the school community, they are empathic listeners, communicators, and problem-solvers who often seek support or advice from other parents and use educator feedback to ensure their child is on track. As issues emerge, with the child or with the school, the fully-engaged parent may shift their focus accordingly. The fully-engaged parents are high contributors to the effectiveness of the school community and are high contributors to learner success.

Price-Mitchell and Grijalva (2007:4) contend that a paradigm shift is necessary in thinking about parental involvement in schools, such that the role of the "traditional parent volunteer" must be expanded to include a new category of fully engaged parents who influence both learner success and the effectiveness of the entire school community. Price-Mitchell and Grijalva's model accepts that parental involvement requires building the types of collaborative parent-school communities where children succeed academically and in life.

2.3.1.4 ***Shepard and Rose's empowerment model of parental involvement***

Shepard and Rose's (1995:376) empowerment model of parental involvement is premised on the notion that the highest level of involvement is achieved when parents acquire the knowledge, confidence and sense of community belonging necessary for effective involvement. The model comprises elements arranged hierarchically according to an empowerment theme as depicted in figure 2.3.

Figure 2.4 **Shepard and Rose's empowerment model of parental involvement**



Source: **Shepard and Rose, 1995:376.**

As illustrated in figure 2.3, the first layer represents "basic communication" which relates to parents establishing an initial link with the child's school or educator. At this stage, the parents have accepted responsibility for monitoring their child's progress and for reporting this information to the school and parents may have also committed to accepting educator general information about their child.

The second layer, "home improvement" includes activities that are designed to enhance parenting skills in general and/or skills related to improving a child's home-learning environment, for example, programmes aimed at disciplinary techniques, healthcare, homework assistance and reading at home.

The last levels of parent empowerment, "volunteering and advocacy", extend beyond the immediate family or home with social connections becoming stronger. At this stage, parents' beliefs of self-efficacy are reaching high levels as they learn to interact with learners and other parents at school (volunteering) and work with local, district or national organisations (advocacy).

Shepard and Rose's empowerment model of parental involvement seems to provide an organisational structure and direction for involving parents in terms of empowering them with communication and skills, and as argued by Shepard and Rose (1995:377), this requires increasing parents' sense of trust in self and others, enhanced awareness of viable resources and an ever evolving sense of purpose and responsibility to a larger social milieu as well as one's own family.

The theoretical perspectives of parental involvement exposed above indicate clearly that for optimal engagement, the parents' ecological circumstances need to be considered in creating school environment circumstances that are conducive to learner achievement and school effectiveness. These theoretical perspectives give expression to the meaning assigned to parental involvement.

2.3.2 **The meaning of parental involvement**

Pushor (2007:1) notes that the word "involvement" comes from the Latin word "involvere" which means "to roll into" and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping the parent somehow into the system, which implies that a person is co-opted or brought into the act by another party. Davis (2004:6) defines parental involvement as any activity where a parent or adult caregiver participates in the child's education.

Ho (1995:40) points out that parental involvement is generally constructed upon one of the two *loci*: school or home and that in the past, parental involvement usually emphasized getting parents involved in school as custodians, educator aides, or helpers. Ho (1995:40) concurs with a number of researchers that a more comprehensive definition of parental involvement involves a process of mobilising the potential of parents, both at home and in school for the benefit of themselves, their children and the school.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:4) posit that parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good

models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.

Fan and Chen (2001:3) point out that parental involvement has been defined in practice as representing many different parental behaviours and parenting practices, such as parental aspirations for their children's academic achievement and their conveyance of such aspirations to their children, parents' communication with children about school, parents' participation in school activities, parents' communication with educators about their children and parental rules imposed at home that are considered to be education-related.

Pushor (2007:2) indicates that parental involvement may include activities such as having parents organise events, arrange fundraising activities, be audience members or support classroom activities. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) sees parental involvement broadly as including several different forms of participation in education and with the schools such as supporting their children's schooling by attending school functions and responding to school obligations (parent-educator conferences). They can also be more involved in helping their children improve their schoolwork by providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modelling desired behaviour (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring homework, and actively tutoring their children at home.

Various authors prefer parental engagement to parental involvement and even distinguish between the two concepts. Pushor (2007:2) points out that the word "engagement" comes from the Latin word "en" meaning "make" and "gage" meaning "pledge". Engagement then means to make a pledge or to make a moral commitment. Translated to parental engagement, this means that parents, learners and community members who are engaged are brought into the act because of care and commitment. Pushor (2007:2) describes parental

engagement as a situation where school stakeholders create the agenda, make decisions and take actions.

Pushor (2007:3) also describes parental engagement as a situation where educators enter a community to create, with parents, a shared world on the grounds of the school; a world in which parent knowledge and educator knowledge both inform decision-making, the determination of agenda and the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families and the community and the school.

From the definitions above, a number of features regarding parental involvement are evident, namely that parental involvement entails:

- any activity where a parent or adult caregiver participates in the child's education;
- a process of mobilising the potential of parents, both at home and in school for the benefit of themselves, their children and the school;
- providing good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship;
- contact with schools to share information, participation in school events, participation in the work of the school and participation in school governance;
- activities such as having parents organise events, arrange fundraising activities, be audience members or support classroom activities;
- educators entering a community to create, with parents, a shared world on the ground of the school; a world in which parent knowledge and educator knowledge both inform decision making, the determination of agenda and

the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families and the community and the school; and

- locating the learner at the centre and thus guiding the development of a balanced, comprehensive programme of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with the potentially important results for learners, parents and educators.

This research adopts the view that parental involvement goes beyond merely participating in school activities. Thus, parental involvement entails basic obligations of parents, obligations of schools, parental and community involvement at school (presented in section 2.4.6.1).

This view takes cognisance of the ecological perspective of parental involvement and recognises that parental involvement involves parents interacting with the school environment in terms of active engagement and also takes cognisance of and accepts that parental involvement requires building the types of collaborative parent-school communities where children succeed academically and in life.

Effecting such parental involvement requires an understanding of why parental involvement is important and what its effects are.

2.3.3 **The effects and importance of parental involvement**

Gonzalez-Dehass, Willems and Holbein (2005:108) postulate that though underutilised, parental involvement has been perceived as highly beneficial and indicates that relationships have been found between parental involvement and learner achievement, *inter alia*, academic achievement, learner sense of well-being, learner attendance, leaner attitude, homework readiness, grades and educational aspirations. LaBahn (1999) similarly states that the main benefit of parental involvement is the improved achievement of the learner, which implies that if a parent shows concern, it will translate into greater achievement on the part of the learner and the more the parent becomes involved with the educator, school curriculum and management, the better the parent feels about the school.

Lee and Bowen (2006:194) cite researchers like Barnard, Fan and Chen, Feuerstein, Jeynes, McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino, who have found parental involvement to be positively related to children's educational performance and may mediate the effects of poverty, parents' educational attainment, and race/ethnicity on achievement. This lends credence to assertions made by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:24 & 27), that when a special relationship between parents and professional educators exist in terms of shared aims, good learning progress could take place even in the absence of good practice in the pre-school and indicate also that involvement in the school and parental monitoring of learners' behaviour both had effects on moderating discrepant behaviour.

Thomson (2001) surmises that there is a range of benefits produced by parental involvement, which are:

- *enhanced learning*, which is implied by evidence that indicates that children whose parents are actively involved in their learning are more successful in schooling, which includes improved academic performance, improved school behaviour, greater academic motivation and lower dropout rates;

- *better schools*, which suggests that schools with high parent participation have a "healthier" school climate than others, because parents in these schools get good information from "stakeholders" about perceived problems, needs and preferred courses of action, have a greater spread of leadership in the school, better and more highly regarded management, and a better 'fit" between the services they provide and community and parent needs. Schools that involve parents are also better able to become more distinctive, by developing special programmes that create valuable and attractive opportunities for parents and learners;

- *social benefits*, which means that schools with significant numbers of parents involved in a range of school activities and decision-making build

a sense of community, which not only benefits the school but also its surrounding neighbourhood; and

- *personal development*, which implies that when parents participate in school activities, they often enjoy enhanced social networks and personal support, have opportunities to engage in formal training and education and learn increased planning and management skills and greater social agency (often called "empowerment").

Louw (2004), in addition to the afore-mentioned factors, states that parental involvement is important because:

- it leads to the improvement in the quality of education, so that the mutual involvement between schools, parents and the community is associated with greater educational effectiveness and efficiency, which will in turn benefit the parents, educators, learners and the country as a whole through opening opportunities for development;
- enhances the sense of pride in the community and the school;
- when parents exert a substantial input in the education of their children, they will be less inclined to sabotage educational decisions as they no longer feel alone and alienated when dealing with difficult learners and situations;
- parental involvement can improve the educational opportunities for learners; and
- schools need the financial support of the parent community.

Considering the importance and the effects of parental involvement in schools, it is disconcerting that there are still instances of poor parental involvement. It is necessary to gain insight into reasons why parents resist involvement or parental involvement is underutilised (Gonzalez-DeHass *et al.*, 2001). Barriers to parental involvement shed some light onto this issue.

2.3.4 **Barriers to parental involvement**

Many factors are associated with poor parental involvement in schools. Among other barriers to parental involvement, the following are the most common:

- *Language barriers and illiteracy*

  According to Bermúdez and Márquez (1996), the inability to understand the language of the school is a major deterrent to the parents and results in interactions with the schools being difficult and practically nonexistent. It can be pointed out that as a result of this language factor, school processes of assessment and reporting tend to be one-way, that is, school to parents with little feedback coming from the parents (Moore & Lasky, 2001:6).

  Because of illiteracy, parents may feel that no one in the school will listen to them. In additions, Quezada, Diaz and Sanchez (2003:32) postulate that parents self-worth is diminished as they cannot understand forms sent home to complete and cannot assist their children with school work. These writers also contend that a lack of literacy even in their own native languages can create in parents an even greater sense of helplessness, and embarrassment. As a result, illiterate parents believe they cannot help their children, much less help or support educators.

  Research in South African township schools mostly reveals high levels of parental illiteracy and a consequent poor involvement in schools. Smit and Libenberg (2003:3), Louw (2004), Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004:306) and Myeko (2000:51-52) all found that low literacy levels among parents contributed to poor parental involvement.

  Therefore parental language deficiency and illiteracy can be said to contribute to feelings of powerlessness on the part of parents and can make them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in the school.

- *Cultural barriers*

  Cultural barriers include beliefs perceptions and attitudes and fundamentally held convictions about aspects of schooling, which includes how parents view their role and that of the school (Trumbull, Rothstin-Fisch, Greenfield & Quiroz, 2001:19). In this regard, Trumbull *et al.* (2001:19) make the point that parents may believe that academic instruction should be restricted to school and can best be done by the educator and would want to maintain jurisdiction as socialisation agents at home and thus would not want advice on parenting.

  Due to cultural attitudes, parents may feel that it is disrespectful to talk to educators because it looks like they are checking up on them and parents also may feel intimidated and awkward when approaching school staff (Jesse, http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Noteworthy/Learners_Learning School ing/danj.asp.). Haack (2007:39) cites Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler who argue that some parents are satisfied with the way educators are handling their children's education and see no need to become involved.

  Indeed, research findings in South Africa does point to cultural beliefs held by parents. Van der Westhuizen and Mosoge (2001:193) found that parents believed that schools are autonomous institutions and that educators are sufficiently competent to work alone and that their involvement amounts to intrusion in the work of professionals. Smit and Liebenberg (2003:3) found that parents in previously disadvantaged schools feel that the educators are qualified enough and get paid enough to educate their children, and that they, the educators, are responsible for their children while they are at school.

- *Socio-economic barriers*

  Factors related to poverty in South African schools, in particular, township and rural schools, seem to abound and play a role in limiting parental

involvement. Among other aspects, Van der Westhuizen and Mosoge (2001:193) report the following factors to be ranked highest in terms of influencing parental involvement:

- two working parents cannot find time to get involved in school activities;
- parents who live far away from school cannot get involved in school activities;
- poor parents who fail to provide for their children's requirements fail to come to school; and
- poor parents fear that the school may require them to contribute financially (and thus stay away from school activities).

Smit and Liebenberg (2003:2) found situations that led to poor parental involvement as a result of sub-economic status and poverty. The following quote is indicative of the embarrassment both poor parents and their children experienced at school:

> "... they (learners) were embarrassed because sometimes they were dirty; sometimes they were hungry or most times dirty and hungry. And then, uniform was a big issue — and school fees: they were embarrassed about school fees, ... shouting and ridicule — embarrassing things like um, "doesn't your mother have food?" or "what is wrong with you?", or "do you always look like this?" — it's embarrassing for a child, never mind how you say it — it's still embarrassing. Especially when the reference is made to their parents".

Clearly, these words expressed at school by educators, would lead to parents being too embarrassed to participate at school and eventually lead to children dropping out of the school. Smit and Liebenberg (2003:2)

relate to this as the effect of educators being out of touch with community realities.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:10) indicate that as a result of social class, poverty, health and parental perceptions of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it, differences existing between parents in their level of involvement are associated with socio-economic barriers. In this regard, James (2008:80) identifies single parent families receiving a low income. These parents are forced to work and are hard to reach and may not have the time or transportation to attend meetings and school activities. Their work schedule affects levels of school involvement.

Lower levels of parent education are also related to low income and work efforts and lower levels of parent participation. As such, James (2008:80) indicates that the income of the family may affect educator expectations and attitudes, which may contribute to low parental involvement, especially when parents perceive educators as hostile and insensitive.

- *Perceptions and attitudes towards the school*

Quezada *et al.* (2003:32) postulate that parents usually have a high level of respect for the educators and treat them as professionals who should be left alone to do their jobs as "interference" would be counterproductive. Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004:303) explain this as indicating that many parents do not seem to understand their role as parents and they found in their survey that in fact, ninety percent of parents regarded the schools as being competent enough to deal with their children. In this regard, Christie (2001:56) found that parents often saw the school as having responsibility for their children and for running itself, and attempts to involve parents were viewed as the school not fulfilling its responsibility.

Jesse (http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Noteworthy/Learners_Learning_Schooling /danj.asp.) indicates that feelings of inadequacy, failure, poor self-

worth, suspicion or anger aimed at the school, can create barriers to parental involvement and that some parents have a "leave it to the school" attitude, while others have logistical problems and some have economic, emotional or time constraints to handle.

Quezada *et al.* (2003:32) also indicate that because many parents do not have the required education, they feel inadequate having academic discussions with educators. This is exacerbated by negative experiences of their schooling. Bermúdez and Márquez (1996) make the point that many parents have had negative experiences of their own, and these memories linger through adulthood and that these negative feelings toward home-school interaction are often reinforced when schools communicate with parents only to share bad news about their children. In this regard, a parent in Finders and Lewis' (1994:51) research had this to say:

> "They expect me to go to school so they can tell me my kid is stupid or crazy. They've been telling me that for three years, so why should I go and hear it again? ... See, I've been there. I know. And it scares me. They called me a boy in trouble but I was a troubled boy. Nobody helped me because they liked it when I didn't show up. ... I dropped out nine times. They wanted me gone".

This, Finders and Lewis (1994:51) indicate that for many parents, their own personal school experiences create obstacles to involvement and those who have dropped out of school do not feel confident in school settings. Haack (2007:147) contends that parents may want to support their children's education, but may believe that educators do not want their help, do not support their efforts, or do not value their contributions.

Perceptions and attitudes towards the school are best articulated by Project Appleseed (projectappleseed.org) that families are not sure how

far they could go in making suggestions or asking questions; they are worried that children would be punished for their parents' actions by an educator or principal who was annoyed or threatened by the parent.

- *Too many responsibilities*

Quezada *et al.* (2003:32) state as a barrier the fact that some parents have many responsibilities, including working two jobs, which interferes with their attendance at school meetings, or parents might have physically demanding jobs and may be too tired to attend to school functions. Davis (2004:25) posits in this regard that time barriers infringe upon successful homework completion and parental involvement in learning activities. Wherry (2008) asserts that lack of time to be more involved with children's education is the single biggest parental involvement barrier.

Arnini (2007:6) suggests that other parents express concerns revolving around issues such as day care, transportation, and work and asserts that time is a major deterrent to parental involvement because parents' work schedule and other commitments may hinder their availability for parent meetings since schools often only hold a meeting once, and many parents miss out on the opportunity to attend. To this end, LaBahn (1995) and Ball (2001:41) state that there is a shortage of time for parents with "simply not enough hours in the day to accomplish anything". James (2008:79) also reports that the work schedule of the parent affects levels of school involvement, especially in the case of single parent households.

Finders and Lewis (1994:51) indicate that time constraints are a primary obstacle for parents whose work does not allow them the autonomy and flexibility characteristic of professional positions, while other parents work during the nights, making it impossible to attend evening programmes and difficult to appear at daytime meetings that interfere with family obligations and sleep.

- *School characteristics as a barrier to parental involvement*

  Singh *et al.* (2004:304) posit that at times the school environment seems not to be "open" to parents. These researchers found from their research that sixty eight percent of the parents interviewed, mentioned that the schools "intimidated" them and appeared to be unwelcoming to their ideas. One parent, in his mid-forties stated that he goes to his child's school "only when it is really necessary. Maybe when my boy has done something bad". The same research also found that Parent Teacher Association meetings are for parents who can speak fluently and those who are not daunted by the presence of educators, with parents also pointing out that the educators never called them for ideas of improving quality in the schools. They felt that they were only "called when the staff wants to report something. Our ideas do not seem to matter, although some of us would like to be involved".

  According to Gonzalez-DeHass (2005:59) some educators view parents as problems that are best kept at a safe distance from the genuine work of the schools and as people who often have to be appeased when angry. Consequently, parents often feel unwelcome on school premises, feel like intruders rather than partners, and when they contact educators with questions, the initial reaction is that they are interfering.

  The findings from research by Singh *et al.*'s (2004:304) capture the essential character of schools as seen by most parents. It must be conceded, however, that these perceptions would also be a function of parents' own personal circumstances as alluded to above. Haack (2007:37) argues that parents are more likely to become involved at school if the school welcomes their involvement, makes it easy for them to be involved, maintains classroom and school discipline, and if educators and learners respect each other.

Haack (2007:37) further states that some educators may view parents as unable to work collaboratively, and may not try to involve them or tell them how they can help, many educators do not know how to involve parents, do not think their involvement will make a difference, believe parents do not have the necessary skills, or do not think it is fair to ask parents to spend time on school-related activities at home, and additionally, educators may not have to time to devote to parental involvement given their other instructional responsibilities.

Carey, Lewis and Farris (1998:27) found lack of time on the part of staff, lack of staff training in working with parents, staff attitudes about the parents, concerns about safety in the school area after school hours as common barriers relating to parental involvement in schools.

While there are numerous barriers to parental involvement at schools, it seems an indisputable fact that parental involvement is of immense benefit to children's education. In this regard, Tableman (2004:1) as pointed out before, contends that there are benefits for parents, educators, learners and schools. It is also undeniable that parents generally do want to be involved. This necessitates schools to engage in strategies aimed at enhancing parental involvement.

Having exposed the concept of parental involvement, a brief background to parental involvement in the South African context is outlined in the next section.

2.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Parental involvement in South African education can be considered in the context of the two prominent periods of history namely, the *apartheid* and the democratic periods. During the *apartheid* period, legislation that allowed for parent participation in schools was enacted. According to Maboe (2005:14), the National Policy for General Education Affairs Act 76 of 1984 provided guidelines for co-operation between the school and parents and in terms of section 2(1), cognisance was to be taken of the freedom of choice of parents in as far as the

admission of pupils to schools is concerned, and that parents had some say and a co-responsibility as far as formal education was concerned. This in a way gave parents some powers on issues related to the education of children.

The National Policy Amendment Act 103 of 1986 supplemented the Education Act (76 of 1984) on parental involvement and at the same time increased the authority and responsibility of the school committees (later changed to management councils) to allow parents to have a greater say in the education of their children and, as stated by Maboe (2005:15), included matters such as consultation on the appointment, promotion and dismissal of staff. The Act made reference to the 'Organised Parent Community', which referred only to those councils and committees established by or under any law and the bodies and associations recognised by the Minister or the Head of Education or an Executive Director of Education authorised thereto by the Minister.

Therefore parental involvement meant an arrangement authorised by legislation and further suggested that parents should act strictly in line with the legal provisions (Maboe, 2005:15). What comes out clearly from the provisions of this Act and which was typical of the *apartheid* era, is the regulation of parental involvement through legislation, which ultimately culminated to the care of buildings, controlling hours of school attendance, administration of school funds and admission of pupils.

During this era, reference to parental involvement in didactics and other matters pertaining to effective learning and teaching at schools was not made in the legislation, except for common law and customary law (mainly related to blacks) influences (Maboe, 2005:16). For instance, parents had the understanding that the school can act on their behalf as a result of the *in loco parentis* principle derived from common law. The principle allowed educators to act in the place of the parent. In this way, parental involvement found expression from common law influences such as:

- the responsibility for the children's health, education, welfare and religious training;
- the responsibility to make the child attend school regularly;
- a right to their own feelings towards education;
- their own feelings about their children's place in the education system;
- authority in the home;
- meaningful communication with the child's educators;
- being involved in planning and maintaining parent groups;
- being involved in helping children with curriculum work;
- helping the school to discipline the child; and
- the rights of parents to know the school's policies and programme plans; understand the evaluative techniques of the school as they relate to the child, be represented in policy-making decisions, have access to special services for children with special problems, privacy, protection and due processes as defined by law and have greater control over their children's public education.

Needless to say, parental involvement during the *apartheid* years was minimal except for instances directed by legislation. Issues of involvement in so far as decision-making is concerned, were not covered. Thus, it can be concluded that while there was some form of parental participation, it was not of such a nature as to effect a real contributory impact in the education of their children.

The democratic era, on the other hand, is marked by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which is the supreme law of the country. All legislation, including that pertaining to education and schools is subject to the provisions of the Constitution. The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 was enacted to give effect to the determination of national policy for education and it emphasises the rights of parents in school governance. However, it is the SASA that gives

expression to the provisions of the Constitution and the National Education Policy Act as it directly deals with issues of parental involvement.

The SASA provides for more parental involvement in children's education. In fact, in terms of the SASA, parental involvement has become more comprehensive and meaningful. According to the SASA (Republic of South Africa, 1996:14), the governance of the school is vested in the school governing body (SGB), whose composition comprises parents and educators (including learners in the secondary school). It is noteworthy that the SGB parent component consists of more members than that of other components, like the educator component (section 28(8).

The SASA and numerous other policies introduced during the democratic era introduce important elements of parental involvement namely, consultation and collaborative decision-making. This implies that decision making at school level on all issues pertaining to learning and teaching is based on the democratic principles of stakeholder involvement and participation in decision-making. In this regard, Baloyi (2003:32) posits that (the education) policies recognise the role of the parent community and encourage them to help the school achieve its vision and mission. This is possible if parents are involved actively in the school processes of teaching and learning.

The foregoing aspect of school governance and parental involvement is expressed in the White Paper on Education and Training (Republic of South Africa, 1995), which states:

> "The principle of democratic governance should be increasingly 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 the new social energy into the institutions and structures of the education and training system, dispel any chronic alienation of large sectors of society from

the education process, and reduce the power of government administration to intervene where it should not".

The foregoing discussion highlights an important aspect of parental involvement as not only being involved in roles of seeing that their children are ready and prepared for school, but also of decision-making in crucial aspects of teaching and learning. This calls for an understanding of a parental involvement framework that considers the whole schooling support perspective. The next section presents the concept of parental involvement in the context of an ecological framework.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented a literature review exposing the nature of parental involvement in schools. This included an exposition of the rationale for a focus on parental involvement, some models of parental involvement, including the ecological perspective, Epstein's typologies of parental involvement, Price-Mitchell and Grijalva's model and Shepard and Rose's empowerment model. The chapter also presented the meaning of parental involvement and barriers to parental involvement.

The following chapter presents a literature review detailing the enhancement of parental involvement in schools.

CHAPTER 3

ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in the previous chapter, there are many reasons why parental involvement is poor at schools. This chapter sets out to discover ways of enhancing parental involvement at schools.

3.2 ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Enhancing parental involvement is a critical aspect of improving schools and strengthening learner achievement. In considering strategies for enhancing parental involvement, it is important to take into account the parents' ecological circumstances (cf. 2.4.1.1) and parental behaviour as espoused by Price-Mitchell (cf. (2.4.1.3), which are both expressed in Epstein's typologies of parental involvement (cf. 2.4.1.2).

According to Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:52), attempts to promote parental participation in education may usefully be organised into three categories. First, there are those activities which focus on the immediate connectivity between schools and parents. Secondly, there are activities which cast the issue of involvement more broadly into family and community education programmes. Thirdly, there are parent training programmes aimed at promoting parental psychosocial health and/or relationship skills which are known to be foundational to parental involvement. It seems that all these activities are aimed at encouraging and enhancing parental involvement by addressing the barriers that often cause poor involvement.

Collins (1995) states that the most commonly identified factor contributing to successful parental and community involvement is parental support, which relates to the support of the school's management and is a key factor contributing to parental and community involvement at all schools. Support includes

establishing structures that involve parents. In this regard, Louv (1999) argues that without organisational structures for parent visitors and volunteers, parents can feel at a loss as to how they can help, and educators can sometimes feel burdened by parent volunteers whose skills may not match the educational needs.

Collins (1995) also identifies *a* welcoming atmosphere at school as a major factor contributing to parental and community involvement in all schools and reports that due to this, parents mentioned that they had easy access to the school at any time, and with the understanding that they do not interrupt instruction, parents were allowed to enter classrooms at any time to talk to their children or the educator. Collins (1995) reports that in many schools, parents feel welcome in the staff room and they mingle with educators, such that in general, a feeling of mutual respect and consideration between staff and parents was characteristic of the discourse between educators and parents.

Rudolph (2000) translates a welcoming school atmosphere into the school climate, which is the educational and social atmosphere of a school and argues that in schools with a welcoming school climate, educators treat parents with respect and encourage their participation in all types of involvement and as a result, parents feel accepted, respected, and needed, and they are more likely to become involved in the school. Rudolph (2000) advocates several ways of creating a welcoming school climate, which involves:

- the creation of a parent centre at the school, which is a special room where parents can congregate, plan school activities, and work on classroom projects and can be staffed by a parent liaison or school-home coordinator as well as parent volunteers. It offers a place for parents to share conversation, discuss school information, and become involved in school activities. The parent centre offers parents a welcoming atmosphere and various activities, such as recruitment of parent

volunteers, a clothing exchange, grade-level breakfasts, and general educational development.

Carey *et al.* (1998:23) postulate that when schools create resource centres devoted to parents' needs, they provide a signal that parents are welcome in the building. These centres typically are places where parents can get information on parenting and school-related issues and can gather informally. In some cases, resource centres sponsor classes or workshops for parents and provide referrals to social service and child care agencies.

Louv (1999) reports that some schools have created school-based community involvement centres that recruit and train volunteers and visitors and help educators make the best use of them, with the centre staff, consisting primarily of parents who coordinate parent volunteers, class visitations and support for educators and staff and can also offer parental involvement workshops, led by educators or parents.

- *a* family involvement policy, which is a written statement that reflects the school's commitment to a partnership approach with parents and encourages all parents to become involved in the school at whatever level they are able to participate and provides opportunities for parents to visit the school during "open houses", parent educator conferences, classroom observations, art and music events, and athletic and academic programmes. It emphasizes that the school should accommodate parent work schedules when creating parent-involvement activities and should also provide opportunities for parents to voice their comments and concerns and should be supported by all school managers, educators, and support staff should demonstrate their support of this policy through their attitudes and actions.

- effective communication between the school and parents which keeps parents informed about school events, policies, and learner achievement, and also provides opportunities for parents to express their thoughts and

concerns. Written communications from the school can include introductory letters at the start of the school year, personal notes, newsletters, school calendars, school handbooks, and learner progress reports (Collins, 1995; Rhodes, 2003; Williams, Williams & Ullman, 2002:45).

Rudolph (2000) stresses that all written communications should be in an easy-to-read style and should appear in the preferred language of the family and can include oral and in-person communication *via* telephone calls, home visits, parent-educator conferences, and one-on-one meetings.

- the provision of ongoing professional development in family involvement for all school staff, which can help educators develop skills in working with parents and families, reducing barriers to parental involvement, communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse families and improving two-way communication between school and home. Jesse (http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Noteworthy/Learners_Learning_Schooling/danj .asp.) asserts in this regard that parents do not like to deal with school staff who are overly businesslike, who appear patronising or who talk down to them, thus training in parental involvement is important for educators (Bermúdez & Márquez, 1996).

  Collins (1995) also reports that parents showing appreciation to educators, and educators showing appreciation to parents is another frequently mentioned factor in successful parental involvement, with parents providing a symbol of appreciation to educators, such as a "potluck" lunch or dinner and them being given a symbol of appreciation from the school, such as a craft made by children, or a small gift, as well as principals and educators individually thanking parents either verbally or by sending cards. In most instances, parents are often thanked publicly at assemblies or other gatherings as well as in memoranda or newsletters.

- Consideration of parents' *needs* is also directly linked to enhanced parental involvement. According to Collins (1995), when parents tend to be involved more directly in the school, the issue of accommodating their needs is considered as a key element and this includes scheduling certain events, such as interviews at times when it is convenient for parents; assigning tasks with which parents will feel comfortable, yet find meaningful; and giving parents a choice when suggesting activities. To this end, Bermúdez and Márquez (1996) advocate that the need for parental self-confidence provides a non-threatening environment for parents to become acquainted with the school and becomes a stepping-stone to higher levels of involvement.

  Collins (1995) points out that schools can serve the needs of parents in three ways namely, financial assistance; education programmes; and training programmes for orientation to work in the school. Some schools provide financial help to families in the form of assistance with the expenses of field trips or lunches, provision of clothes to needy families and provision of hot lunches for learners. Education programmes include parenting classes targeted at specific families, and sessions to help families and children learn to deal with, for instance, violence. At some schools, parents participate in a formal training session both on the use of school facilities and on school policies.

Rudolph (2000) advocates creating family-supportive schools that provide a wide range of family services on site as another strategy for increasing parental involvement, because when parents find that their various needs can be met by school-based services, they are likely to develop a more accepting opinion of the school and are also more comfortable with parental involvement activities.

Rudolph (2000) makes the point that creating family-supportive schools is based on the fundamental principles of providing "a focus on prevention and a recognition of the importance of the early years in child development, an

ecological approach to service delivery, a developmental view of parents, and a recognition of the universal need for support", which principles make educators acutely aware that a lack of basic services to families such as health care, food, clothing, safety, and shelter, detrimentally affects children, since children who come to school ill, hungry, tired, inattentive, restless, unfocused, or emotionally challenged, present serious barriers to learning". In response, some schools are partnering with family support organisations and offer services that historically were available only in state and local social-services offices. In South Africa, schools can, in collaboration with relevant Non-Governmental Organisations and state departments, offer such services as those relating to applications for state social services, like birth certificates, social welfare grants and application for identity documents.

Parental involvement strategies can be viewed in two ways. The first involves all those activities taking place at school. The second involves those activities involving structures external to the school. From an analysis of pilot projects of schools engaging in parental involvement, Ouimette, Feldman, Tung, Chamblin and Coyne (2002) report strategies for enhancing parental involvement as discussed in the next sections.

3.2.1 **Parent/family events at the school**

Ouimette *et al.* (2002:5) describe parent/family events at the school as opportunities for parents and children to spend time at school, which includes six types of events held by schools namely:

- *Parent-Educator-Learner conferences*

  Parent-educator-learner conferences give parents, educators and learners the opportunity to discuss learners' academic growth and progress, as well as challenges. Conferences usually include written educator reports and may include learners' written reflections on their own work and academic goal setting.

- *Exhibitions where parents/families look at learners' work*

  Exhibitions relate to showcasing the work of learners in a celebratory event at one or multiple opportunities during the school year, which provides opportunities for parents and families to view and share the work of learners and serves as a way to welcome parents into the school.

- *Participation in reviews of learners' work*

  This relates to parents acting as reviewers of their children's work, which unlike exhibitions in which parents act as observers, they become present during the grading process, so that parents also participate in the scoring of the work. While having possibilities, it can be said that this can seem like a daunting task for parents, who mostly are regarded as illiterate. But it could be asserted that well planned, this can work and can actually utilise parents' skills and expertise. However, much planning and care in this type of parental involvement would be necessary.

- *Engaging parents to support their children's learning*

  This implies that the school staff provides parents with the tools they will need to support learner achievement in learning and includes demonstrations of curriculum teaching and ways that parents can help their children do their tasks, like homework.

  According to Rudolph (2000), engaging parents to support their children's learning, includes parents helping their children with homework, encouraging them to set educational goals, and supplementing the instruction received at school. In this regard, Wherry (2008) contends that when schools and educators inform parents specifically, step-by-step, what they can do to help their children do better in school, parents will try their best to do it. However, Giles (1998) cautions that this kind of venture is labour-intensive, and requires the sustained efforts of many people, such as parents, educators, administrators and community members.

In terms of Epstein's typologies, this also involves the basic family's obligation of parenting in which schools assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding childhood and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level (Epstein & Salinas, 2004:15).

- *Engaging parents to develop their own knowledge/skills*

  This involves providing opportunities for parents to improve their own knowledge and skills, which includes opportunities for job skills and diverse training (Ouimette *et al.*, 2002:5).

- *Social events*

  This relates to holding social events for parents and families that may include time for celebrating learners' work, or perusing the curriculum, but are primarily social events and community building activities for families and children to come to school and spend time in a relaxed manner, where dinner may be provided either by the school or parents, after which there are activities for parents and children in which they could participate together (Ouimette *et al.*, 2002:5).

3.2.2 **Membership opportunities in parent structures**

Parent structures provide parents with opportunities to participate in advisory and/or decision-making groups in the school, through such structures as School Governing Bodies and School Development Committees. In South Africa currently, one most relevant structure is the School Governing Bodies.

The School Governing Bodies are comprised of school management members (principal), parents, learners (in secondary schools) and co-opted members who may include community members. According to the SASA (Republic of South Africa, 1996), which give a legal status to School Governing Bodies, parent members are in the majority of the governing body's membership and are elected

by other parents. According to Ouimette *et al.* (2002:7), parents have a direct voice in the governing body (by being members) or an indirect voice (by electing members). Participation in the governing bodies entails such issues as those related to the school climate, the school financial management, recommendations for hiring of staff and determination of school policies (cf. Ouimette *et al.*, 2002:2).

3.2.3 **Communication structures to keep parents informed**

Ouimette *et al.* (2002:8) list the following structures as being functional in keeping parents informed on school affairs:

- *School-to-parent liaisons*

  A designated person is appointed to maintain contact between parent structures and the school, with duties involving publishing newsletters and organising a helping plan and organise parent events.

- *Newsletters*

  The newsletter keeps parents informed about the school and is mailed to the parents (or dispatched *via* children). The newsletter should contain updates on school events, clarifications on school issues and reminders to parents about school policies. In some instances, parents can make contributions to the newsletter.

- *School website*

  Though expensive to maintain, the school website is an invaluable medium for school communication with parents and the community and contains in most instances, school calendars and handbooks, access to grades and educator contact details. The website can also serve to provide a "virtual tour" of the school, classrooms and the work done at the school.

The foregoing exposition discussed parental involvement as it relates to activities within and initiated by the school. There are, however, possibilities for enhancing parental involvement that are external to the school. Among other possibilities, parent social networks are considerably relevant.

3.2.4 **Parent social networks**

Sheldon (2002:304) cites Wesserman and Faust who define social networks as the set of social relationships and linkages one person has with other individuals, which in the context of parental involvement, may be an important factor related to the role parents take in their children's education. Sheldon points out that social networks are also referred to as social capital, which is important in children's educational development and that it is a resource that inheres within the social relationships parents maintain with other adults.

Coleman (*in* Lee & Bowen, 2006:196), describes three components of social capital namely, the obligations and expectations of reciprocity in social relationships, norms and social control and information channels, and describes social capital as a means by which parents can promote their children's school achievement and educational attainment.

Lee and Bowen (2006:196), assert that social capital obtained through visits to the school may take the form of information (for example, about upcoming events or available enrichment activities), skills (for example, how to help with homework and home reading, parenting tips), access to resources (for example, books, study aids, sources of assistance), and sources of social control (for example, school-home agreement on behaviour expectations and educational values), all of which can help parents promote their children's school achievement. Interactions with other parents while volunteering at school or attending parent-teacher association meetings can also help parents gain access to beneficial information, parenting skills, or resources available in the social network represented by those parents (Lee & Bowen, 2006:197).

Connard and Novick (1996) state that a family's social network grows out of interactions with people in different settings, such as the extended family, social groups, recreation, work, and ideally, this network of caring for others improves feelings of self-worth, mobilises coping and adapting strategies and provides feedback and validation. The family's informal social support network also provides services that are more accessible, culturally appropriate and acceptable than the services offered by formal support systems.

In terms of parental involvement, a point can be made that social networks provide an ecological source of information for parents and families. This can enhance involvement because parents in these circles are able to share and exchange information about the school and schooling (Sheldon, 2002:304).

Enhancing involvement through the various strategies outlined above seems to be the answer to schools' needs for heightened parental involvement. However, it is also important to consider parental involvement in practice so as to contextualise it within an understanding of a framework of factors related to it.

3.3 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRACTICE

Epstein (1995) asserts from research that, just about all:

- families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education;
- educators and managers would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programmes and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a "rhetoric rut," in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action; and
- learners at all levels want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting

communications between home and school. However, learners need much better information and guidance than most presumably receive about the way their schools view partnerships and about the manner in which they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions.

From these statements, Epstein (1995) remarks that caring communities can be built on purpose, that they include families that might not become involved on their own and that just about all families, learners and educators believe that partnerships are important in helping learners succeed across all grades. With this argument in mind, parental involvement can be seen to work in terms of the six basic obligations propounded by Epstein's typologies (cf. 2.4.1.2).

Epstein's typology of parental involvement presents the most widely used framework for facilitating parental involvement. The framework actually presents a typology of home-school relationships. Epstein (1995) indicates that the overlapping spheres of influence among the school, home and community, on interactional bases, underpin the parental involvement typologies.

Barge and Loges (2003:141) explain Epstein's types of parental involvement as the development of practices that facilitate families in establishing home environments to support children as learners. Mcwayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004:364) posit that the framework defines six main types of activities that connect families, schools, and communities namely, basic obligations of parents (parenting); obligations of schools (communicating); parental and community involvement at school (volunteering); provision of learning activities at home, participation in school decision-making, and collaboration with the community.

3.3.1 **Basic obligations of parents**

Travett and McMillan (1998:3) describe the basic obligations of parents as their responsibilities to ensure children's health and safety, child-rearing skills needed

to prepare children for school, the continual need to supervise, discipline and guide children at each level and the need to build positive home conditions that support learning and behaviour appropriate for each grade level. According to Epstein and Salinas (2004:13), this is seen as parenting, and assists families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level and also assisting schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures and goals for children.

Parenting includes practical practices that parents should exercise at home. Among other practices, Henderson and Mapp (2002:22) list the following:

- expressing expectations about the child's education;
- limiting television viewing ;
- supervising time use and behaviour;
- discussing interests, issues, and studies at school;
- doing things together (shopping, vacations, movies, meals);
- supervising behaviour;
- knowing what courses the child is taking; and
- supervising academic work.

It seems obvious that schools have a major role to play in terms of parenting. Mitchell (2007) advocates examples of school roles as including parent education workshops and support groups, family centres, home visits, and neighbourhood meetings. Workshops and support groups can be used by schools to help parents acquire skills and knowledge to help their children, to overcome their confusion about the school system, policies, and rules, to make them understand the modes of test taking and learning, and to learn strategies for helping children succeed academically; while parent support groups may focus on helping parents to establish strong emotional bonds with their children, to understand the

laws regarding child abuse and explore alternative strategies for discipline, and to understand the socio-cultural and psychological stresses children face in adjusting to the school culture and strategies and resources for helping their children manage these stresses.

It seems that the basic obligation of parents essentially has to do with establishing home conditions that help their children to learn and achieve at school. This involves helping children to be physically and psycho-socially prepared for school and to be able to cope throughout their schooling. How this works is dependent on the creation of effective partnerships between schools and parents so that schools can aid families in establishing such conditions in the home (Deakin, undated).

3.3.2 **The basic obligations of schools**

This according to Travett and McMillan (1998:3), refers to communications from school to home about the school's programmes and children's progress and is usually in the form of memoranda, notices, report cards and conferences, which according to Fege and Smith (2002:75), should be in an understandable format and language and, to the extent feasible, in their mother tongue.

Henderson and Mapp (2002:22) contend that constant communication helps to ensure that both schools and homes are responsive to learners' unique needs and therefore support their overall development, and list the following as activities aimed at the school's obligation to communicate with parents:

- school-initiated contacts about academic performance;
- parent-initiated contacts on learner's academic programme;
- parent-school contacts on post-school plans;
- parent-initiated contacts about academic performance; and
- school-initiated contacts about learners' academic programmes.

Epstein (1995) includes conferences with every parent at least once a year with follow-ups as required, language translators to assist families as needed, weekly or monthly folders of learners' work sent home for review and comment, parent/learner pickup folders of learners' work sent home for review and comments, regular schedule of useful notices, phone calls and other communications, clear information on choosing schools or courses, programmes and activities within schools and clear information on all school policies, programmes, reforms and transitions in communication activities.

Epstein (1995) makes the point that communication with parents will result in an understanding of school programmes and policies, monitoring and awareness of the child's progress, responding effectively to learners' problems and interactions with educators and ease of communication with the school and educators.

From the foregoing exposition, it seems that effective communication in terms of parental involvement works two-ways, from school to home and from home to school and involves the usage of available means of communication that are easy to understand and aim at bridging the gap between school and home.

3.3.3 **Parental involvement at school**

This refers to parent volunteering in assisting the school and educators, school management and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school and also refers to parents who come to school to support learner performances, sports, or other events or to attend workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (Travett & McMillan, 1998:3). According to Epstein and Salinas (2004:12), volunteering involves parents becoming involved at school and serving as an audience for school performances, which improves recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families and enable educators to work with such volunteers who support learners and the school.

According to Lunenberg and Irby (2002:9), volunteering includes such activities as parents helping other parents, mentoring learners and increasing family

attendance at school events. Epstein (1995) includes such activities as school and classrooms programmes to help educators, management, learners and other parents; volunteering in the parent room or centre; meetings for families; having annual surveys to identify all available talents, times and locations of volunteers; class parent, telephone tree or other structures to provide all families with needed information, and parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programmes.

Epstein (1995) states that volunteering helps parents to understand the educator's job, to experience increased comfort in schools and carry over activities at home, increases their self-confidence about the ability to work in school or with children or take steps to improve their own education, increases awareness that families are welcome and valued at school and helps them gain the specific skills of volunteer work. Tableman (2004:6) includes other activities such as parents accompanying classes on field trips, volunteering to extend the capacities of staff by tutoring or serving as a educator's aide in the classroom, bringing their talents, skills, knowledge, experiences, or unique culture to the classroom as guest instructors, volunteering to improve the school environment or equipment, teams welcoming and orienting new families at the beginning and during the year, volunteering to organise and manage resources, having the use of a room as a place for volunteers and monitoring in the cafeteria and on the playground during lunchtime.

After consideration of the aforementioned issues, it can be deduced that parent volunteering is beneficial to the school, learners and to parents themselves.

3.3.4 **Parental involvement in learning activities**

Travett and McMillan (1998:3) indicate that involvement in learning activities refers to parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help and ideas or instruction from educators for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home about learning activities that are coordinated with their children's class work. Epstein and Salinas (2004:12) describe this from a school perspective as

providing information to parents/families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning, which translate to parents helping learners at home. This includes assisting children with goal-setting and encourages educators to design homework that enables learners to share and discuss interesting tasks.

Tableman (2004:5) lists the following activities as parental involvement in learning activities:

- Parents are given information and orientation/training on required skills in all subjects at each grade, homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home, how to assist children with skills that they will be developing and how sufficient sleep, nutritious food, limited television viewing, discussion at meals together, and a quiet place to study can improve academic performance;
- Parents participate with educators in helping children set academic goals each year;
- Educators have a regular schedule of interactive homework that requires children to demonstrate and discuss with parents what they are learning at school; and
- Parents borrow books from the school library to read and discuss with their young children.

According to Appleseed (in Stevens, 2007:43), with the guidance and support of educators, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities. In this regard, Epstein (1995) lists helpful activities in enhancing learning at home as including providing information for families on skills required for learners in all subjects at each grade, providing information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home, providing information on how to assist learners to improve skills needed for various classes and school assessments, providing

regular schedules of homework that require learners to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning, providing calendars with activities for parents and learners at home, providing families with mathematics, science and reading activities at school, providing summer "learning packets" or activities, and providing family participation in setting learners' goals each year and planning for further education.

From the foregoing exposition, it can therefore be concluded that the partnership between the school and parents is necessary to ensuring that learning at home takes place effectively.

3.3.5 Parental involvement in governance

This refers to parents performing decision-making roles in school structures such as the Parent-Teacher-Association, advisory councils or other committees in the school, district or national level (Travett & McMillan, 1998:3). According to Epstein (1995), parental involvement in this instance involves including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives on boards and committees, including school improvement teams and parent organisations (Epstein & Salinas, 2004:12).

Tableman (2004:7) cites activities regarding decision-making as involving parents participating in the review of proposed school policies and curriculum as part of parent organisation committees or principal-appointed advisory committees and participating on all decision making and advisory committees and committees meet at times convenient for parents and use of technology permits parents to participate offsite. Included is such activities is the the school providing parents with an understandable, well publicised process for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems and providing training to staff and parents on shared decision making.

According to Epstein (1995), this level of parental involvement creates in parents an awareness of representation in school decisions, inputs into policies that

affect children's education, feelings of ownership of the school, awareness of parents' voices in school decisions, awareness of school parents' voices in school decisions, shared experiences and connections with other families as well as awareness of school, district and national policies.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) make the point that researchers and others have identified benefits other than learner achievement which have been found to emerge from involving parents in governance, which include the:

- elimination of mistaken assumptions parents and school staff may hold about one another's motives, attitudes, intentions and abilities;
- growth of parents' ability to serve as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children - with the potential for much longer term influence because of continued interaction with their children over time;
- increase of parents' own skills and confidence, sometimes furthering their own education and upgrading their jobs, thus providing improved role models for their children; and
- increase in parents serving as advocates for the schools throughout the community.

In South Africa, as alluded to earlier, parental participation in decision-making is a crucial aspect of parental involvement and school governance and is provided for by the South African Schools Act, which makes it mandatory for a majority parental representation in School Governing Bodies.

3.3.6 Collaboration with the community

Collaboration with the community means that community resources and agencies become integrated with school programmes fostering a shared responsibility for children, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organisations and colleges or universities (Epstein & Salinas, 2004:12). In fact, Epstein (1995)

postulates that collaborating with the community strengthens school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development.

Collaboration with the community can be achieved through, *inter alia*, projects aimed at acquiring community resources. For example, Giles (1998) cites a project where parents and staff at a school in Austin, Texas, worked with a local organisation to obtain funding and "cut" through bureaucratic "red tape" to establish a health clinic at the school. Children had often missed school because of illnesses and long waits for appointments at community health clinics, and once the school clinic opened, attendance increased significantly.

In South African township schools, cases of schools engaging local feeding scheme organisations to feed learners from poor families have seen an increase in attendance and an improvement in school performance. Before this had been achieved, learners from poor families would often be absent and when present, would perform poorly due to among other reasons, malnutrition and hunger (Human, 2003:44; The Public Service Commission, 2008:24).

As an example, a school in a historically disadvantaged township collaborated with the community in a "Collect-A-Can" competition, which earned the school a substantial amount of money over three years (Kamper, 2008:7). The project involved the community and culminated in a successful recycling and environmental cleanliness venture for the school and community.

Epstein (1995) suggests an array of activities meant to encourage collaboration with the community, which are:

- information for learners and parents on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and other programmes or services;
- information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programmes for learners;

- service integration through partnerships involving school, civic, counselling, cultural, health, recreation and other agencies, organisations and businesses;
- service to the community by learners, families and schools, for example, recycling, art, music, drama and other activities for seniors or others; and
- participation of *alumni* in school programmes for learners.

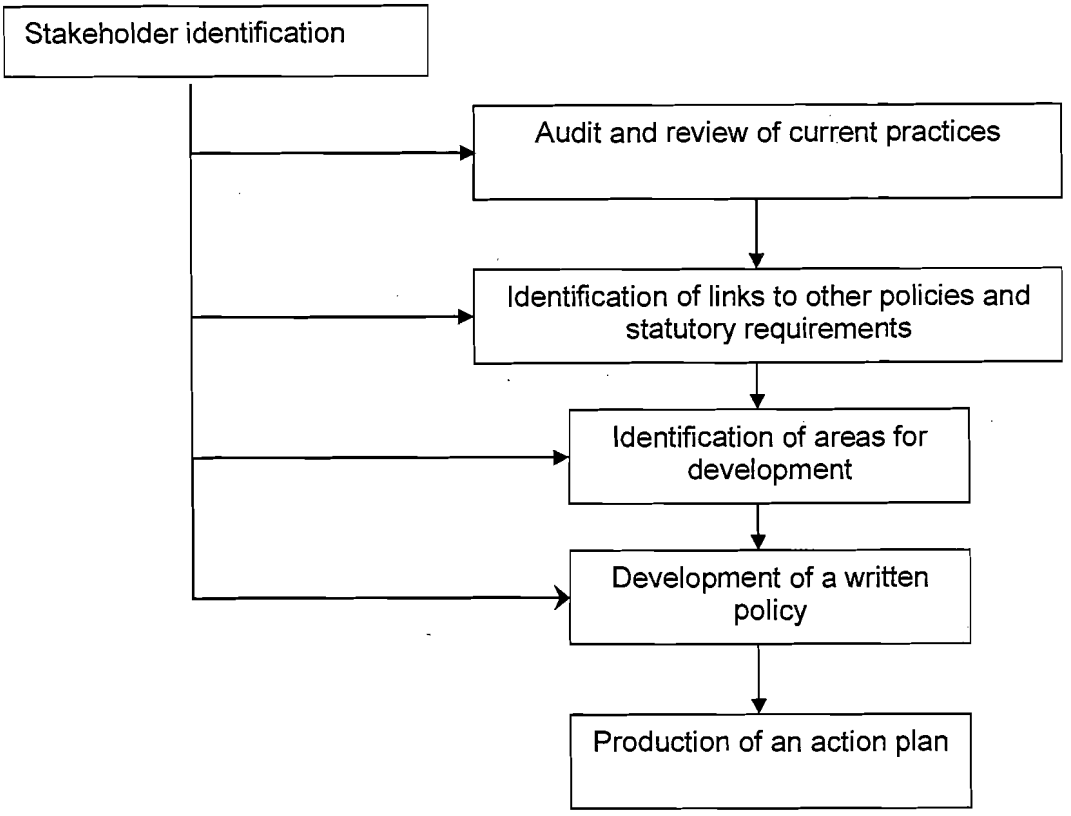
Apart from acquiring resources for the school, collaboration with the community enhances parental involvement in that they manage to interact with other community families and it also increases the awareness of the school's role in the community as well as the community's contributions to the school (Epstein, 1995).

The foregoing discussion reveals the various strategies for enhancing parental involvement at schools. However, it might seem like a daunting array of tasks and ventures. It is important for school and parents to be able to initiate programmes of enhancing parental involvement. The next section relates to what a school can do to achieve such programmes.

3.4 THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

For schools to enhance parental involvement, it seems imperative for school programmes to integrate and focus on the six typologies of parental involvement. This implies developing a framework that will entail the basic obligations of the parents and schools, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community. Phillips (2006:9) advocates an organised approach, which seeks to put parents at the "heart" of the school. According to Phillips (2006:9), by carrying out a systematic review, involving all stakeholders, including parents, simple, practical steps can be identified to enable the school to have a more effective partnership with parents. This approach is illustrated in figure 2.5 below.

Figure 2.5 **A whole-school parental involvement framework**



Adapted from Phillips, 2006:10

As illustrated in figure 2.5, the first step in a whole-school parental framework concerns *the identification of stakeholders.* In this regard, Phillips (2006:10) contends that it is vital that senior managers within the school recognise and endorse the need to develop a written policy and that they are involved in the process and it would equally be futile to think that the school could make all the decisions about parent partnerships without consulting parents, any more than a school would make decisions about teaching and learning without consulting educators.

Therefore parental involvement implies creating partnerships with parents and the community, including relevant community structures as alluded to elsewhere

in this text (cf. 2.4.6.4). Among others, stakeholders include the school principal, teaching staff, support staff, Special Educational Needs coordinator(s), governors, parents, learners, community structures with an interest in education, Departmental officials and state agencies, including Social Welfare, Health, Law Enforcement and Home Affairs (Phillips, 2006:9). This step will help the school to determine how it will forge partnerships with, for instance, local businesses, agencies, and colleges or universities to provide family services, which can include educational programming and a homework hotline, social services such as prevention of substance abuse and child abuse prevention, conferences and workshops, adult education, health services, refurbished school facilities, and refreshments for and transportation to school-sponsored events (Funkhouser, Gonzales, Moles, undated).

The second step concerns the *review of current parental involvement practices*. Phillips (2006:10) postulates that it is important to establish the current position in terms of parental involvement practices, and to identify what works well and which areas need improving and development. Phillips also asserts that it is important to ensure that the parent community is well represented in this process and that the included parents represent a range of families, for example, ethnic groups and parents of Special Educational Needs learners, as they will each bring a different perspective to the review. The team that will drive the review process should be a collaboration of educators and other school staff, administrators, learners, parents, and community members, who all bring their own perspectives, experiences and skills to the process (Caplan, 1998). Gianzero (1999:16) contends that this can be a six to twelve person team and its primary responsibility would be to identify the types of involvement that are needed to meet specified school goals.

According to Phillips (2006:11), the review stage should audit major parental involvement practices and lists, among others, the following parental involvement areas and audit questions:

- *Leadership and management*:
  - Does a senior member of staff have responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the school's work with parents?
  - Are parent governors used to their full potential?
  - Do senior managers and leaders within the school take a key role in developing parent partnerships?
- *Staff attitudes*:
  - Do all staff respect and value parents?
  - Do all staff display warmth and accessibility?
  - Are all staff willing to devote time to developing relationships with parents?
  - Do all staff respect the role of parents as partners in education?
- *Physical environment*:
  - Are signposts clear and are there signs in relevant community languages?
  - Is the school environment welcoming and accessible to all parents?
  - Is the reception area of the school welcoming?
  - Is there comfortable seating for parents?
  - Do parents have their own space and notice board?
  - Are displays attractive and regularly updated?
  - How do parents know that the school welcomes them?
  - Is there an explicit affirmation displayed for them, such as "our school welcomes parents as partners in learning" as part of a display, or visual images that portray parent and children's learning?
  - Are cultural differences acknowledged?

- *Curriculum aspects*:
  - How does the school communicate the curriculum and the way it is taught to parents and do parents find this information helpful?
  - Is information consistent across all subjects?
  - What support does the school provide for parents to help them assist with homework?
  - Ae there opportunities for parents to see classes in action?
- *Communication*:
  - Are letters to parents clear in content and friendly in tone?
  - Is written communication easy to understand and free of educational jargon and acronyms?
  - Is a range of strategies used for communicating with parents?
  - Are newsletters clearly laid out? are they too long or short? are they frequent enough?
  - Do parents receive all statutory information about their child's progress?
  - Is learner progress reported consistently between and across departments?
  - How accessible are annual reports to parents?
  - Are written communications made available in different first languages spoken by the parents?
  - Do parents know the appropriate staff to contact and how to contact them?

- Do all staff make themselves available to speak to parents when requested within twenty four hours or is the system clearly understood by parents?
- Is the school website kept up to date?
- What systems are in place to support learners and their parents with homework?
- How frequently are formal consultations held and do consultation times take into account the circumstances of parents, for example that they work?
- Are there opportunities for parents to meet staff informally and are all parents aware of this?

The third step of the framework concerns *the identification of links to other policies and statutory requirements*. In this regard, Phillips (2006:12) posits that since parents are affected by many school policies, they can have views that can help to shape and develop practice across the school. For example, the school behaviour policy is most effective when parents support it. Where parents have been involved in the development process of the policy they are more informed and are more likely to identify themselves as partners in the implementation process. To this end, the South African School Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) provides for active parental involvement in the development of school policies, including the policy on learners' code of conduct.

Caplan (1998) sees parental involvement in this aspect as giving parents and community members greater opportunities to determine options for school involvement, to participate in the wide range of involvement activities, and to assume key roles and responsibilities in school-improvement efforts, including participation in the school's decision-making processes.

The fourth step in the framework involves the identification of areas for development once the review has been completed. Phillips (2006:12) states that this is guided by the following questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know that we are there?

This step seems in essence to capture the whole process as a strategic practice aimed at seeing what the school does in terms of parental involvement to where it seeks to be, which is followed by *developing a written parental involvement policy* as the next step of the framework. Phillips (2006:12) states that writing a parental involvement policy formalises agreed decisions and is a process rather than an outcome that can bring about whole school change. In addition to stating the ethos and aims for developing parent partnerships with the school, the policy should also include clear guidance to ensure a consistent approach across the school for such activities as homework, parents' evenings, one-to-one contact meetings, written communications, induction for new staff, continuing professional development (CPD) for all staff, how and when curriculum information should be shared with parents, communication of statutory information, including annual reports and learner progress and how and when the policy will be reviewed.

The final step of the framework concerns *the process of action planning.* Phillips (2006:14) emphasises the importance of involving parents in action planning, which emerges through the process of audit and review. The areas to be considered in the action planning process essentially involve what needs to be done and how in terms of reaching parental involvement goals. Among others, Phillips (2006:14) cites communication of statutory information, informal

opportunities to consult with parents, a checklist for complaints procedures, and training processes that should be engaged in.

Clearly, from this exposition of the parental involvement framework, it can be seen that the entire process serves a strategic purpose for parental involvement at school. It is also clear that the process opens up a scope for continuous improvement and for that reason, should be included in the school development plan. To this end, Phillips (2004:14) advises as key factors to be considered in this whole process such aspects as ensuring that all school staff are involved and understand their role in promoting positive attitudes to parent partnerships, ensuring that parents are consulted as partners in policy decision-making, using formal and informal opportunities, having clear guidelines in place to support staff, planning for regular professional development and induction for staff in relation to working with parents, involving parents in as many practical ways as possible, ensuring that communication is clear, free from educational jargon and takes account of the needs of all parents and families and ensuring that parental involvement is integral to school improvement plans.

From the exposition on the role of the school in enhancing parental involvement, it can be deduced that activities involved in enhancing parental involvement relate to three levels namely, activities at home and family level, at school and at the community level. This agrees with the perspective of parental involvement, that takes consideration of the home and school as an ecological environment through which parental involvement can be promoted. As alluded to earlier in the text (cf. 1.5), this means that parental involvement is a function of parent, family and community partnerships.

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented what is involved in enhancing parental involvement in school by detailing strategies and exposing parental involvement in practice as contained in the context of Epstein's typologies. The school's role in enhancing parental involvement was also presented in terms of a whole-school approach.

The next chapter presents the research design and methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical research design and method. In this regard, a detailed description of this study's research process is given. This is done by outlining the research design, research method and ethical considerations. Included in the discussion are the empirical study, outlining participants and their selection, data collection and analysis, focus of the interviews as data collection mode and reliability and validity. The next section presents the research design.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:85) articulate that the research design provides the overall structure for the procedures the research follows, the data collection and analysis and is always done with the central goal of solving a research problem. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:32) advise that many factors must be considered in planning the research, *inter alia,* time and costs, and as such it is imperative for researchers to consciously and purposely select and use those research methods that would permit better, convenient and successful attainment of specific research aims. The research design details among others, what research approach will be used. In this research, the qualitative approach was considered appropriate for use in the empirical research.

The qualitative research method is mainly implemented in this study for the purpose of collecting data. This method allowed the researcher to be closely involved with the participants. In this regard, Charles (1995:123) posits that qualitative inquiry seeks to understand human and social behaviour from the 'insiders' perspective, that is, as it is lived by participants in a particular setting, like culture, school, community, group or institution. Charles (1995:123) further makes

the point that the researcher is interested in context, values, attitudes, emotions, experiences and social realities that affect human interaction. Therefore the enquiry becomes inductive in that the researcher builds concepts and theories from details and it involves fieldwork.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:133) state that qualitative research uses many approaches that are quite different from one another and all these approaches have two things in common namely, they focus on phenomena which occur in natural settings and they also involve studying these phenomena in all their complexity and have many dimensions and layers. Therefore qualitative research relies on researchers' abilities to interpret and make sense of what they see, which is critical for understanding any social phenomenon which makes up the researchers' instruments in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133). In this regard, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:395) state that qualitative research is an inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their setting. Therefore the qualitative approach combines social actions, beliefs, experiences, thoughts and perceptions of respondents (Hummevoll & Da Silva, 1998:465).

Qualitative research uses different strategies of enquiry including biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002:165; Fouché, 2002:272; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:23). In this study the phenomenological strategy was used. Phenomenology seeks to understand and interpret the meaning that people give to their everyday lives (Fouché, 2002:272. In this regard, Bogdan and Biklen (2003:23) state that researchers in phenomenology attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. In essence, this implies a study that describes the experiences a phenomenon, topic or concept has for various individuals. The researcher does this by entering the subject's "life world" or life setting, mainly by means of observing participants and interviews (with up to ten people) in order to analyse the conversations and interactions that the researcher

has with the participant (Fouché, 2002:272). In this study, the researcher sought to understand the study phenomenon from the participants' own perspective. Interviews were used for this purpose, since they ensured that participants could, as it were, speak for themselves and relate to their everyday lives. Therefore the phenomenological research strategy adopted in the study informed the research method and data collection technique. The intention was to "enter" parents' and principals' life settings in order to find out what parental involvement means to them and how they get involved in schools. This was achieved through a specific research method involving a theoretical and empirical research undertaking.

4.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method for this study involved both the literature review and empirical study.

4.3.1 Literature review

A literature review was conducted to enable this study to embark on the empirical study with a strong orienting framework of what will be studied and how it will be studied (Fouché & Delport, 2002:268). According to these authors, the literature study provides a general description of the study phenomenon through the eyes of people who have experienced it at first hand, and provides a theoretical grounding or paradigm before data collection. Mouton (2001:87) sees the literature review as being important in that it enables a researcher to learn from other scholars, that is, what they have theorised and conceptualised on issues, what they have found empirically, what instrumentation they have used and to what effect, which implies an interest in the most credible and relevant scholarship in the area of interest or study.

In this study, a literature review was conducted to examine the essence of parental involvement and ways of enhancing school parental involvement. For this purpose, a literature search for primary and secondary sources was engaged using the

DIALOG search and the EBSCOHost web as well as various other web-based sources. The following key words were used in the literature search:

parental involvement; parent participation; ecological perspective of parental involvement; parent-educator partnerships, *ubuntu*; typologies of parental involvement; approaches to parental involvement; community in parental involvement.

4.3.2 **The empirical study**

The empirical study sought to determine the nature of parental involvement in primary schools in the Free State Department of Education as informed by the parents themselves. As mentioned earlier in the text, the qualitative approach was used for this investigation and enabled the researcher, by virtue of its phenomenological orientation, to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation from the participants' perspective and also to enable the presentation of findings in a narrative form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:134).

4.3.2.1 ***Participants in the research***

The population for this study comprised all school principals and parents of primary school learners in the Free State Department of Education. However, due to the expanse of the province, it was practically uneconomic and would not be feasible to conduct the research in the whole province. Therefore it was decided purposively and conveniently to select the participants from the Lejweleputswa District's Welkom area. Non-probability selection was used to select participants for the study. This is described as the selectivity which is based on the researcher targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:102). In this regard, purposive, convenience and dimensional participant selection were used.

Purposive participant selection is entirely based on the judgement of the researcher, in that that the participants are composed of elements that contain the most characteristic or typical attributes of the population (Strydom & Venter, 2002:207). *Convenience* selection involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing the process until the required size has been obtained. According to Strydom and Venter (2002:207), *dimensional* sampling entails only a few cases to be studied in depth and ensures that each population dimension or stratum is represented.

In this research, decision for the participants to comprise principals and parents of primary school learners was informed by guidelines provided by Strydom and Venter (2002:207) that purposely, the researcher uses his or her judgement that those elements contain the most characteristics or typical attributes of the population. However, for purposes of saturation and informational considerations, the sample was sequential and was determined by data gathering up to a point of saturation (cf. Strydom & Delport, 2002:336; Merriam, 1998:65).

The number of schools in the Lejweleputswa district was obtained from the Free State Department of Education's website (http:www.fs.gov.za\educa tion.htm). There are 232 primary schools in the Lejweleputswa District of the Free State Department of Education. The schools (n = 8) from which participants were drawn, were conveniently selected from primary schools in the Welkom area. This culminated in the dimensional selection of primary school principals (n = 8) to be interviewed individually and parents (n = 64), arranged into eight groups of eight parents each. The parent interviews thus reflect group interviewing as a data collection technique.

Access to the selected population was gained through appointments made either telephonically or verbally. It was easy to move from one area to the other in the Lejweleputswa district as they were easily accessible and convenient to the researcher as she lives and works in the Lejweleputswa district. Being a principal

of a local primary school (excluded form the research population), it was easy to engender trust and gain access to schools and participants, due to healthy relations and mutual trust that exists with the population. This further facilitated the interactive process with participants during the process of the research.

4.3.2.2 ***Data collection***

Interviews were used to collect data on parental involvement in primary schools in the Free State Department of Education' Welkom area. The interview was chosen as the best data collection instrument in this study, because as described by various experts in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146, 184; Greef, 2002:291; Cohen *et al.*, 2000:260), interviews provide opportunities for gathering data through direct verbal interaction between individuals, gaining in-depth understanding of participants and following up where necessary for clarity purposes, fostering mutual respect and sharing of information with the participants, establishing rapport with participants and therefore gaining cooperation and conducting the interviews in natural and relaxed settings.

The interviews were therefore considered necessary for data collection in this study because of their uniqueness in that data is collected through direct and verbal interaction between individuals (Gubrium & Holstein 2002:88). Interviews were also considered appropriate for this study because they could reveal what the respondents know and feel about parental involvement in the primary schools and reveal their perceptions thereof.

The interviews were conducted in two ways namely, semi-structured one-to-one and group interviews. *Semi-structured one-to-one interviews* are used to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic (Greef, 2002:302). Being semi-structured implies that the interviews are conducted with an open orientation which allows for directed two way conversational communication and consists of a set of questions as a starting point to guide the interaction (cf. Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:184; Greef, 2002:303).

With regard to *one-to-one interviews*, they were conducted with eight school principals selected as participants. The interviews were of a semi-structured type with an interview schedule (cf. Annexure B) of open-ended questions so as to cover the relevant sections, as well as allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth (Greef, 2002:297 & 302).

In the case of *group interviews*, Cohen *et al.* (2002:287) point out that they can generate a wide range of responses than individual ones, might be useful in gaining an insight into what might be pursued in subsequent individual interviews, are often quicker, and involve minimal disruptions. Group interviews also allow sharing and comparing among participants and also allow people to self-disclose or share personal experiences (Greef, 2002:307).

The group interviews were held with eight groups of parents at the eight schools. The group nature of the interviews was most advantageous because it afforded parents, who, mostly are generally not very educated, the opportunity to express themselves freely in the mist of their "peers". The researcher observed that they could easily relate to each other and gained confidence as interviews continued.

The process of organising and conducting the interviews began by participants initially being informed about the nature of the research and what would be required of them. Due to the fact that they felt comfortable in their schools, they all opted to be interviewed at their schools after school.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher applied Greef's (2002:300) guidelines which are:

- The interview setting was arranged in terms of the time and date. The interview rooms used were prepared to be quiet, with no interruptions. Thus a private, comfortable, non-threatening and easily accessible environment was prepared. Some interviews were held in the evenings and some in the afternoons. In the case of group interviews, the seating arrangements were

of a round-table format to facilitate easy interaction, involvement and facilitation.

- In conducting the actual interviews, first, participants were welcomed and made to feel at ease through exchange of pleasantries. Second, the purpose of the interview was confirmed, its importance highlighted and the ground rules determined. Third, participants were reminded of their rights and were assured of the confidential nature of the research. For instance, participants were assured of complete anonymity and to ensure this, no coding was used prior to the collection of the data and in the actual report, fictitious names were used for all areas that could identify the participants (Macmillan and Schumacher 1993:426). Finally, it was explained that the interviews would be recorded for purposes of data capturing and analysis and consent was sought. Finally, the interview was initiated. Throughout the process, the researcher engaged the participants, took notes and observed trends in responses.

- The researcher ensured that her demeanour established rapport through attentive listening, showing interest, understanding and showing respect for participants' views as well asking by probing questions in a way that demonstrated a quest for clarity rather than argumentation or proving responses false or vague.

As advised by Cohen *et al.* (2002:279), the researcher also ensured that the non-verbal cues were noted. In this regard, the body language and facial expressions were noted during the interviews. Fortunately, the topic under discussion proved to be of immense interest to the participants, such that there was no need to work hard at generating interest and motivation. Participants were completely engrossed in the discussions. It was also interesting that in the case of parents, some views were expressed "off the record" after the interviews. This was accommodated because clearly, a number of parents could have felt intimidated in the group.

The interviews were followed by data analysis and interpretation.

4.3.2.3 *Data analysis*

All interviews were tape-recorded (with the permission of the participants), which allowed a much fuller record than note-taking. After every interview, impressions of the interview were immediately jotted down, which included both empirical observations and interpretations and included impressions of emotions, preconceptions, expectations and prejudices (cf. Greef, 2002:305).

The data analysis was preceded by the transcription of recorded interviews. The researcher first transcribed the data *verbatim* and during this stage, involved transcribing, *inter alia*, what was being said, the tone of voices of the participants, emphases placed on what was said, pauses and silences, the participants' moods, how many participants were speaking simultaneously (group interviews) and unclear and indecipherable responses (Cohen *et al.*, 2002:282).

Data analysis was done through the following process as advocated by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:150) and De Vos (2002:340):

- Data was organised into smaller units in the form of main concepts, sentences and individual words;
- The data was perused several times to get a sense of what it contained as a whole. Notes suggesting categories or interpretation were jotted down;
- General categories were identified and it was at this stage that the general impression of the study phenomenon began to emerge; and
- Data was then summarised and integrated into text for reporting.

The process was done every evening after the interviews and preliminary coding was initiated. This assisted in the determination of data saturation (cf. Greef, 2002:205). The final data coding involved sorting data into categories reflective of

Epstein's parental involvement typologies. This process led to the writing of the research report. The findings were then reported in a narrative form with identifiable categories drawn from the interview responses. Quotes were conceptualised and integrated into the report text and names that could violate confidentiality were altered.

4.3.2.4 *Focus of the interviews*

The focus of this research was on examining how parental involvement is currently promoted in primary schools. The same set of questions asked of principals, were also used with the parents (see Annexure B). The interview question focused on aspects relating to:

- The meaning of parental involvement;
- Parents' roles and responsibilities in terms of parental involvement;
- Level of parental involvement in schools;
- Examples of activities typical of parental involvement in schools;
- How important parental involvement is regarded in schools;
- Barriers regarding parental involvement in schools;
- How barriers are addressed;
- If parental involvement in schools is monitored;
- If parents understand the educational policies;
- If the school makes any special efforts to inform parents who do not understand the dominant language; and
- Strategies used to encourage parent participation and involvement in their children's education.

The focus of the interview formed the basis on which the reliability and validity was determined.

4.3.2.5 *Reliability and validity*

Reliability and validity in qualitative research seem to be challenging phenomena. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000:118), unlike quantitative research, which assumes the possibility of replication if the same methods are used with the same sample, qualitative research, whose premises include the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations cannot be replicated. Instead, Bogdan and Biklen (2003:36) suggest that in qualitative research, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data and tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations or situations.

Cohen *et al.* (2000:120) further note that qualitative research being holistic, strives to record the multiple interpretations of, intention in and meaning given to situations and events and thus for qualitative researchers, this involves member checks (respondents validation), debriefing by peers, triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation in the field, reflexive journal and independent audits.

According to De Vos (2002:352), the soundness or validity in qualitative research can be ensured by considering the following constructs:

- *Credibility*, which is an alternative to the internal validity, and aims to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject(s) was/were accurately identified and described. In this regard, the researcher identified the subject of study as stated in the problem statement, and further described through the variables attendant to parental involvement as described in the theoretical orientation and in Epstein's typologies of parental involvement (cf. 1.1; 1.5; 3.3).

- *Transferability*, which relates to being able to generalise to other settings. This was ensured by referring to the parameters describing parental

involvement as expressed in Epstein's typologies of parental involvement. This, De Vos contends will ensure that researchers who conduct policy or design research studies within those same parameters can then determine whether or not the cases described can be generalised for new research policy and transferred to other settings while the reader or user of specific research can see how research ties into a body of theory.

- *Confirmability*, which captures the traditional concept of objectivity. This is achieved by determining whether the data help to confirm the general findings and lead to implications. In this research, it was painstakingly determined whether the data did comply to this requirement. Indeed this was found to be so and enabled the researcher to recommend an approach for parental involvement based on the implications.

Furthermore, to ensure validity and reliability of the interviews, the interview measures were compared with other interview measures that had already been shown to be valid, which is called convergent validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2002:120). In this regard, various studies were used as points of convergent validity (Haack, 2007; Davis, 2004; Ball, 2001; Stevens, 2007; James, 2008). In addition, peer and expert consultation ensured that the measures or construct of parental involvement were identified and found to be consistent with those used in studies on the same phenomenon.

It was also ensured that the interviews, though semi-structured, had the same format and sequence of words and questions for all the respondents as articulated by Cohen *et al.* (2002:120). Furthermore, a clear paper trail was secured so as to address confirmability of results (Cohen *et al.* 2000:120). The time spent conducting interviews (three months) also served as a validation mechanism because it assisted in respondents' validation.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct the research at schools was sought and obtained from the Free State Department of Education, through following the prescribed official protocol. A letter granting permission (cf. Annexure A) was issued and was also produced at schools visited. Maximum cooperation was obtained, as advised by Creswell (1998:37) through articulating the topic and objectives to the participants beforehand, availing transcripts and interpretations to the participants before the actual textual reporting and considering participants' wishes for anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore the research report was compiled using fictitious names so as to guarantee participants anonymity.

Participants were apprised of their rights to withdraw at any time if they so decided. Most importantly, participants, being fully informed consented to taking part in the interviews. They were subsequently informed that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the process if they so wished. They were also informed that they did not have to respond to questions if they did not want to. They were also guaranteed of the absolute confidentiality with which their participation would be handled and that the final report would in no way contain text that could be used to reveal their identities or participation. Therefore participation in the interviews was absolutely voluntary on the part of the participants.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the empirical research design and the research method. This included an exposition of the phenomenological strategy and the qualitative approach used in this study as well as participants and their selection, data collection and analysis, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations. The next chapter presents analysis and interpretation of the empirical data.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical data analysis and interpretation. First, the views of principals and parents regarding parental involvement at schools are outlined. Individual interviews were held with eight principals of primary schools and eight groups of parents in the Lejweleputswa's Welkom area of the Free State Department of Education. This is followed by the analysis and interpretation of the interviews with eight groups of parents.

5.2 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

According to De Vos (2002:339), data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data, and is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. In analysing the responses from the tape recordings and transcripts of field notes, guidelines on qualitative data analysis, interpretation and reporting were noted and adhered to (cf. Delport & Fouché, 2002:356; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:150).

This section analyses collected data. The demographic profiles of participants are presented first, followed by data regarding aspects of parental involvement.

5.2.1 Demographic profiles of participants

Demographic data of the participants are presented in this section. This was included to elicit basic descriptive information about the participants. Such data is called demographics, which Mouton (2001:125) defines as an individual's biographical characteristics that have an impact on his/her involvement, participation and satisfaction. Many such variables are difficult to assess, but variables such as individuals' qualifications, gender, age, experience and marital status are definable and readily available.

For the purpose of this study, the variables selected for assessment with regard to principals were the participants' gender, age, enrolment, and experience and as well as participating parents' ages, gender, marital status, education level, employment status and specific roles at schools. In order to ensure anonymity, it was decided to use fictitious names for participants and schools' (cf. Cohen *et al.*, 2002:62).

- *The democratic profile of principals*

A profile of the participant principals is presented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 **Profile of participant principals**

Principal	Gender	Years[2]	School	Enrolment
Mokhoue	Male	32	Dirisa	380
Ndende	Female	20	Kamohelo	800
Ngoako	Male	4	Thokoza	843
S'thembiso	Male	10	Poloko	725
Thabo	Female	8	Paballo	540
Thomas	Male	3	Phomolo	390
Tshidi	Female	11	Reahile	868
Zandi	Male	15	Emboni	890

The analysis of the principals' profile indicates that, of the eight principals, two can be regarded as well-experienced with more than 20 years in their positions as principals, and three with ten or more years in their positions. This is important because it offered the researcher with opportunities for data collection that is rich in parental involvement experiences and therefore, a rich source of valuable data. The remaining three principals have been at their positions for relatively short periods – between three and eight years.

[2] Years as principal of school

It was also noted that most schools (5) have high enrolment figures, which could shed even more insights into the parental involvement activities that the schools engage in. The gender of the participant principals is predominantly male, which is an interesting aspect since primary schools are generally female-dominated. It is, however, recognised that this is not generalisable to all primary schools and could have been coincidental.

- *The demographic profile of participant parents*

The profile of the parents in the interview groups indicated on average, a mix of parents who are employed and unemployed, married, widowed and single, employed as professional and non-professional workers (cf. table 5.2). The majority of the parent participants are female (46) and there are a number of grandparents, who are also "parents" of learners in the schools. The majority of participant parents (49) have educational levels above the equivalent of the current grade 7.

Table 5.2 **The demographic profile of parents**

School	Demographic variable	Participants							
	Fictitious name	Disebo	Matabane	Thoko	Langi	Zanele	Modiehi	Mathabo	Matla
Dirisa	Marital Status	Widowed	Married	Single	Widowed	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Married
	Age	43	47	49	30	45	38	38	56
	Number of children at school	3	2	4	3	2	3	4	1
	Education level	Std 10	Std 8	Std 6	Std 8	Std6	Std 10	Std 9	Std 8
	Employment status	Clerk	Unemployed	Domestic	Unemployed	Domestic	Security Officer	Unemployed	Gardener
Kamohelo	Fictitious name	Mlungisi	Letebele	Palesa	Nako	Nelisiwe	Nonhlanhla	Sibongile	Nobuhle
	Marital status	Divorced	Divorced	Widowed	Widowed	Widowed	Single	Single	Single
	Age	33	46	52	71	38	45	50	42
	Number of children at school	3	4	2	2	1	1	2	1
	Education level	Std 8	Std 8	Std 10	Std 6	Std 10	Std 6	University	College
	Employment status	Gardener	Soccer coach	Cleaner	Domestic	Unemployed	Cleaner	Unemployed	Admin
Thokoza	Fictitious name	Dikeledi	Mamokete	Matlakala	Lanai	Nokukhayo	Pontsho	Mafusi	Busisiwe
	Marital Status	Single	Divorced	Widowed	Married	Single	Divorced	Married	Divorced
	Age	39	46	58	30	39	43	51	36
	Number of children at school	2	3	3	2	1	3	2	1
	Education level	Std 10	University	Std 8	University	Std 9	Std 5	Std 10	Std 9
	Employment status	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Poloko	Fictitious name	Thina-bakho	Lesego	Khawalethu	Ntombizodwa	Qondi	Keletso	Kekeletso	Limakatso
	Marital Status	Married	Married	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Divorced	Single
	Age	34	45	38	49	52	63	43	33
	Number of children at school	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	3
	Education level	Std 8	University	Std 8	Std 10	Std 10	Std 8	Std 5	Std 7
	Employment status	Unemploye	Unemploye	Domestic	Unemployed	Car guard	Unemploye	Unemployed	Hawker

		d	d				d		
Paballo	Fictitious name	Mpho	Nthabiseng	Moselantja	Mantsho	Tlhokomelo	Tseliso	Boysie	Matseliso
	Marital Status	Married	Widowed	Single	Married	Divorced	Single	Married	Single
	Age	46	43	31	33	46	39	35	37
	Number of children at school	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	1
	Education level	Std 8	Std 10	College	Std 6	Std 5	Std 6	Std 10	Std 10
	Employment status	Hawker	Educator	Domestic	Domestic	Unemployed	Gardener	Pensioner	Clerk
Phomolo	Fictitious name	Moso	Refilwe	Geraldine	Elizabeth	Lebohang	Thoto	Thabo	Mohau
	Marital Status	Divorced	Widowed	Married	Single	Single	Divorced	Married	Divorced
	Age	38	50	47	36	48	31	60	55
	Number of children at school	4	2	2	1	1	3	5	3
	Education level	Std 9	University	Std 5	Std 8	Std 10	College	Std 8	Std 10
	Employment status	Hawker	Educator	Domestic	Domestic	Unemployed	Foreman	Pensioner	Clerk
Reahile	Fictitious name	Patience	Tsholofelo	Puleng	Dipuo	Thokozile	Mamissi	Ntombi	Khumbulani
	Marital Status	Married	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Divorced	Single	Single	Widowed
	Age	40	42	37	48	50	39	43	35
	Number of children at school	4	4	3	2	5	1	3	3
	Education level	Std 6	Std 8	Std 8	Std 6	Std 4	Std 10	Std 8	Std 7
	Employment status	Cleaner	Gardener	Gardener	Unemployed	Unemployed	Hawker	Tea lady	Cleaner
Emboni	Fictitious name	Reabetswe	Kgonotso	Dimpho	Phumla	Mtshezi	Bongani	Malebo	Fako
	Marital Status	Married	Divorced	Single	Single	Single	Divorced	Widowed	Married
	Age	33	47	36	31	40	48	69	39
	Number of children at school	2	4	1	2	3	3	4	1
	Education level	Std 8	Std 6	Std 7	Std 10	Std 8	Std 10	Std 5	Std 10
	Employment status	Domestic	Car guard	Cleaner	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Pensioner	Domestic

5.3 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Participants' views on parental involvement are presented in terms of questions listed in the interview schedule (see Annexure B). However, because the questions were open-ended, this allowed for more interaction on the aspects discussed and thus some aspects were derived from probes and prompts as well as from answers given to subsequent questions.

5.3.1 Perceptions on what parental involvement means to participants

Participants' responses indicated varying views between principals and parents on what parental involvement means to them. This is significant for this research because it indicates their understanding of what parental involvement really entails.

5.3.1.1 *Principals' perceptions on what parental involvement means*

From the participant principals' responses, it was apparent that while parental involvement was perceived to mean participation in children's education, different emphases and meaning were attached to what this entailed. Most principals expressed views that implied parental involvement related to responding to calls at school, attending meetings and being involved in children's problems and ensuring that children attend school and do their work. To this end, Ms Thabo, the principal of Paballo Primary opined:

> "... parental involvement is when parents respond when the school calls them to discuss learner problems",

while Ms Tshidi, principal at Reahile Primary felt that parental involvement refers to:

> "when parents are called to school to be involved in the education of their children by discussing children's behaviour and attend meetings".

and Mr Zandi, principal at Emboni Primary School opined:

> "parental involvement means parents see to it that children come to school everyday, check books after school, attend meetings and help the school when in need".

Mr Thomas, principal at Phomolo Primary School indicated that parental involvement is "when parents attend meetings, pay school fees, come to school when they are called to school concerning their children's behaviours".

Perhaps the most remarkable views were expressed by Mr Ngoako, principal of Thokoza Primary, Mr Mokhuoe, principal of Dirisa Primary and Mr Ndende of Kamohelo Primary who respectively stated views about parental involvement that indicated a partnership with the school as well as involvement in much more than views expressed above. They stated:

> "Parental involvement means involving parents in all spheres of education, academically, spiritually and emotionally. We should become partners as a whole in the development of the children".

> "Parental involvement is when parents participate in the education of their children, they belong to the school system and they have a say in the safety and development of the school and all school structures".

> "Parental involvement in children's schooling involves the full participation of parents towards issues influencing their children's schooling, showing full support by coming in numbers to meetings".

5.3.1.2 *Parents' perceptions on what parental involvement means*

Parents' views on what parental involvement means to them also revealed agreements about the phenomenon. Most responses indicated that parents saw their role as having to do with making sure that their children were equipped for school, mostly materially in terms of uniforms, school fees and food. They also

indicated that parental involvement means attending meetings and responding when called to the school. The following responses were given:

"Parental involvement is to help my children with homework and school projects. I must also attend school activities when I am requested by the school" – Thoko, a widowed domestic worker and mother of three children.

"Parental involvement means assisting the school each time I am requested. Paying school fees, attending school activities and meetings, buying school uniform and books" – Zanele, a domestic worker and mother of two children.

"Parental involvement means playing a role of being a partner in the education of your child" – Matla, a gardener and father of one child who is an active member of the Community Policing Forum.

"It means taking care of the children's need at home while the teacher takes care of all her/his school needs" – Mathabo, an unemployed, divorced mother of four children.

"I must pay my child's school fees, see to it that he or she has full uniform, lunch box. I should be a parent at home and play my full part there" – Matabane, a married unemployed father of two children.

"Parental involvement means coming to school meetings, paying school fees and responding when I am called at school" – Langi, an unemployed, widowed parent of three children.

"Parental involvement means taking care of physical, spiritual and emotional needs of a child while the school takes care of the academic and educational side" – Disebo, a widowed clerk and mother of three children.

"The first thing that comes to my mind is being involved in all the spheres of the child's education, sports, academic, uniform, fees and the food" – Modiehi, a widowed security officer and mother of three children, with a grade 12 equivalent education level.

The last two responses indicate that some parents have an understanding of what parental involvement involves.

5.3.2 Perceptions of parental roles and responsibilities at schools

Responses about perceptions on roles and responsibilities of parents indicated the main thrust as being assistance offered to the school.

5.3.2.1 *Principals' perceptions on parental roles and responsibilities at schools*

Principals largely expressed the opinion that parents must be involved in helping the school where necessary by cleaning, maintaining and keeping the school property safe. In this regard, Mr Thomas felt that "parents must clean the school" while Ms Thabo insisted, "parents should maintain the school, keep school property safe and clean". Mr Mokhuoe felt very strongly about attendance of meetings and stated that "parents should attend meetings, help with fundraising projects and ensure that their children do what is expected from them". Mr Ndende felt that parents should help with fundraising and ensuring their children do what is expected from them.

It was also clear that parental roles also related to helping children at home. Ms Tshidi indicated:

"Parents (should) help learners with homework, instil good morals and manners in their children".

Mr Zandi expressed a similar opinion and asserted:

"We expect parents to buy uniform and instil manners, teach children morals. We expect parents to assist learners with homework and projects although we know and understand, it is a lot to ask, especially from semi-literate parents".

5.3.2.2 *Parents' perceptions on their roles and responsibilities at schools*

Views from parent participants on their roles and responsibilities seem to suggest that some parents do not really know or are not sure of what their roles and responsibilities are. Thoko, explained that she does what the school requests her to do, "... otherwise, I am not aware of any (other) roles and responsibilities. Whatever the school requests, I do wholeheartedly". Matabane explained "I expect the school to tell me what to do with my child at home and what they do with him/her at school because alone I cannot do both, at home and school".

Some parents seem to have an idea of what their roles and responsibilities are. Zanele described parental roles as embracing everything that has to do with the child. She explained:

"I expect us to work hand-in-hand with educators concerning school work, actually everything that concerns the child's growing up. The department should give guidelines that we should follow".

Matla, in support explained:

"Parents roles and responsibilities include to share their different expertise with the school, be it sports, finance, administration or whatever expertise they have. But for us to succeed, we need guidelines on how to do what".

Mathabo saw parental responsibilities as relating to supporting children to be prepared for school in all respects and reasoned:

"We expect parents to buy uniform, pay fees and see to it that children attend school daily, other than that we expect the school to tell us what to do, when and how".

Modiehi who is also a member of the school's SGB, seemed to understand what parental involvement entails. She expressed the following view concerning parental roles and responsibilities:

"I expect parents to be (the) other educators although this is difficult because of language. I heard that SASA and the country's constitution demands schools to use eleven official languages but in our school, our language is minimally used and most of the meetings are addressed in English and most correspondence is in English, but English is a major problem to us as we cannot respond as expected. At least if they can make use of an interpreter in the meeting and translate correspondence in the language that we fully understand. To me and other parents who are not literate enough but who want the best for their children. It is very much unfair".

5.3.3 Perceptions on the average or typical level of parental involvement in the school

This question sought to find out what the level of parental involvement is at schools. Responses indicated that the level of parental involvement, while high in some schools is generally not satisfactory.

5.3.3.1 *Principals' perceptions on the average or typical level of parental involvement in the school*

From principals' responses, it was clear that involvement levels varied, ranging from very low to average. Mr S'thembiso indicated that parents were somewhat involved, and pointed out that the parents of the well-behaved children are very involved in the education of their children and also that they are determined and prepared to accommodate the school in which ever way possible.

Mr Ngoako indicated that parental involvement is average and pointed out that:

> "Most parents who come are mothers and parents of children who behave well. Few fathers do come to school when invited and parents of ill-disciplined and bad behaving children barely come to school".

Ms Thabo indicated that parental involvement is average and pointed out that parents liked to use means of transport as an excuse "but about fifty percent do attend the activities that we invite them for, although as the school we would like to see more". Ms Tshidi similarly commented:

> "Very low (parental involvement), parents always have excuses for not attending, although most of the learners in my school stay with foster parents, some families are child-headed and some learners stay with their grannies".

Mr Mokhuoe felt that involvement was average (60%). He also stated:

> "... but (at) the last meeting after sending letters, we used "Lesedi Stereo" with Chomane.[3] Parents came in numbers. Our school is in the old township where most children stay with grannies but in the last meeting they came in numbers".

Mr Zandi expressed a disconcerting aspect of parental involvement at his school. He mentioned that the level is average because:

> "... parents feel inferior and threatened by the school as most of them are not well educated. They feel it's the educators work to see to the education of their children".

Two principals, Mr Ndende and Mr Thomas indicated that parents were very involved and respectively commented:

[3] A FM radio presenter who programmed is popular and has a wide listenership.

"... parents are participating in ensuring the children get the best out of the education system, they are checking homework and assisting in the work, (if the child doesn't understand) signing books and asking for teachers' influence in matters they can't handle. They communicate in African languages so that everyone can understand".

"Our school is a pilot school in inclusive education. It is about 80% - 90% involvement. We always notify them on time and we choose a suitable time for them like Sunday mornings".

5.3.3.2 *Parents' perceptions on the average or typical level of parental involvement in the school*

Participant parents' responses indicated an acknowledgement of the low levels of involvement. Thoko indicated that she thought it is average and gave the reason for that:

"... because going to my child's school, I need transport which I do not have because of poverty. Sometimes you try your level best to be at school when you are called, only to find that you are not going to discuss, but to be told what to do and you are only called when money is needed".

Zanele indicated that "it is low because personally I do not attend every activity, I rarely go to school and I can hardly assist them with their school work. We as parents expect learners to be in homes doing homework before the sun sets, but because of poverty we are not there to check whether the children are following our instructions, as we get back from work very late. Then we become irresponsible parents, yet we (are) trying to make ends meet for the very same children's education".

Mathabo indicated that the level of parental involvement is average because most schools still use English in all their documents, despite the fact that the department encourages the use of all official languages. She, however, pointed

out that in her school, "policies, codes of conduct and all relevant documents are translated into our native languages, even communication is well understood because we understand what is required and we respond accordingly".

Matabane highlighted that parental involvement is low, "because I see no reason why we should help educators, while educators do not help us with parenting. If as a parent, I see to it that my children are clean, have school uniform, lunch boxes and pay all required fees, why am I expected to help the educator who does not help me at home. Let us, as parents, leave educators to do their job and we concentrate on parenting".

Langi pointed out that the reason for a low level of involvement was because "parents have a lot of responsibility in signing school books, assisting with projects, control and maintain discipline to these rude, bullying and unruly children. Educators' influence still plays a role in bringing these children to listen".

Disebo articulated the reason for a low parental involvement level as emanating from many parents being single, some families being child-headed and some orphans having no one to care for them. She stated:

> "Personally I feel it is difficult to help children with homework because we use the time in our hands to look for jobs so that we can clothe and feed the very same children. If we do not do that, how are we going to live, what are they going to eat? To me, poverty is an obstacle, because I cannot assist a hungry naked child with school work. I must feed and clothe them first".

Modiehi commented that parental involvement is low and parents only turned up in numbers for meetings when there are certain celebrations. She pointed out that because parents are mostly illiterate, language becomes a problem, which explains the poor attendance of meetings. She reiterated the use of English as a stumbling block as it is used for addressing meetings and conferences, including correspondence to parents. However, despite the perceptions of low levels of

parental involvement, Matla remarked that parents of well-behaved children were highly involved in schools. This was with reference to the attendance of meetings.

The rate and extent of parental involvement has a bearing on the types of activities parents get involved in.

5.3.4 **Perceptions on the types of activities parents get involved in**

Views expressed on the types of activities parents get involved in indicated a few activities which basically seem a response to what schools expect or determine for parents. Views in this regard seemed similar in most cases for principals and parents.

5.3.4.1 ***Principals' perceptions on the types of activities parents are involved in***

Principals generally indicated that parents get involved mostly in terms of attendance of meetings, functions and mostly when children experience problems or behave badly.

Mr Ngoako stated that parents only attend meetings and tend to blame language and illiteracy and complain about many changes in the curriculum. He further pointed out that non-involvement was caused by parents who were not educated enough to help their children and the school. Ms Tshidi commented parents attended meetings, paid school fees and attended prize-giving or celebrations of special days, "like last year when we were celebrating ten years anniversary of the school. Otherwise they are always busy, do not understand school work and curriculum that changes time and again and are illiterate". Mr Zandi also confirmed this view and commented:

> "When we celebrate special days and do fundraising, they do come to school. They serve in other School Governing Bodies and committees although they play minimal roles here".

It was also found that parents came to school only when there were problems with their children. Ms Thabo remarked:

> "Only when their children misbehave, then they come to school to tell you to use corporal punishment even though they know it is banned, for disciplinary hearings they do become involved".

Mr S'thembiso also indicated that "they (parents) only become concerned when their children's behaviours are bad, usually when there's disciplinary hearing and so on, you will see the parents in numbers. Not very involved. Parents feel inferior and threatened by the school as most of them are not educated and feel it's the educators work to see to the children".

Mr Thomas mentioned activities concerning children's work at school. He commented:

> "Parents sign books, check the work that has been given to the learners. We invite them regularly for updating them on this pilot (inclusive education). We communicate on learner progress and give them clear instructions on what to do".

Mr Mokhuoe stated that in their case, parents attend meetings, are welcomed and informed of their roles and educators' roles. They are also invited on prize giving days as they enjoy seeing children receive prizes. Mr Ndende indicated that parents sign books and check the work that has been given to the children and stated that parents enjoy seeing their children get prizes and awards and surprisingly remarked: "More than half of the parents attend the school activities, plus minus eighty percent. Yes, parents see the change in the curriculum as fun and are happy to be involved".

5.3.4.2 *Parents' perceptions on the types of activities they are involved in*

Parents' perceptions regarding activities they get involved in largely included attending meetings including sports activities, signing children's books, helping

them with homework and projects and responding to issues relating to their children's problems. Mamolilo remarked:

> "We attend meetings and school activities like sports. Other activities are done by educators as it is their job. We do our part at home".

Mpho, a mother of three children, remarked: "We sign books, assist with homework and school projects although this is difficult. I even think of sending them for afternoon classes so that he/she can be helped with homework". Matabane indicated that they only become concerned (involved) "when our children misbehave or when we are called in for disciplinary hearing. This high level of involvement scares us because we are not used to it".

There was also a general agreement that parents only became involved when told to do so, and only became involved in activities determined by the school. Perhaps that is the reason for the relatively low variety of activities they engaged in at schools. Mamolilo parent stated:

> "Mostly we get involved when we are told or requested to do so. We wait for the school to give us activities to perform. I only hope there were guidelines explaining to us what is to be done and how, by when".

A number of reasons were given for this state of parental involvement in school activities. A prominent reason stated several times, was lack of knowledge and illiteracy as impediments in being involved in other activities. Some parents felt that the school was burdening them with too much work. One parent, Nelisiwe bemoaned what she perceived as doing too much or being too involved in school activities. She commented:

> "In the past we just took our children to school and educators took it from there, but today we must do so much at school and home. I only wish we could be guided on all these activities".

Some parents indicated an understanding of the essence of parental involvement and that, while they were involved in a few activities, they wanted to be involved in more than the current activities. Refilwe surmised this view and stated:

> "In my children's school we just attend meetings, sign homework books and go for class consultation and I cannot call that involvement, I need to be more involved from the planning stages of all activities. We want to be involved in activities such as to maintain the school surroundings and buildings, work as committee members in different school committees like disciplinary committees, SGB, safety and security".

She indicated that they also attend to fundraising and meetings, "... but personally I think this is not effective because we are not trained. We use our experiences and this does not have impact on positive results". She continued:

> "Attending concerts, meetings and sports activities are the best that we can do at school. For these activities you do not need to be trained but for real stuff like being a member of a committee, for helping children with homework and projects, you need to be trained, otherwise you will end up doing the whole homework or project for the child or stepping on other committee members' toes by taking their roles and responsibilities".

Another parent, Nthabiseng added:

> "Yes, it is true that we are not educated that much, but for our children, we are really prepared to go an extra mile, yes poverty, illiteracy, unemployment are the main problems but my child's education is priority number one. Workshop and train us, then you will see the difference".

These reasons are discussed in the section dealing with barriers to involvement. However, it was clear that parents generally wanted to be more involved and to

be engaged in more activities, only if they were to be capacitated in doing so. This is also indicative of how much of a priority parental involvement is regarded.

5.3.5 **Views on how much of a priority parental involvement is considered**

Principals' responses suggested that parental involvement is considered a high priority while parents expressed differing views. This is an interesting finding when the types of parental involvement activities are considered.

5.3.5.1 ***Perceptions of principals on how much of a priority parental involvement is considered***

All the principals indicated that parental involvement was considered a high priority. They conceded however, that in practice, it was not and they were striving for it to be. It was also pointed out that while for the school parental involvement was considered a high priority, parents did not seem to regard it as high a priority. Mr Ngoako remarked that parental involvement is considered a high priority by the school, "... but still (only) grannies and mothers come in numbers, especially those of children that misbehave", thereby hinting that parents, and especially fathers did not regard involvement as a high priority. Ms Thabo indicated that while parental involvement was regarded as high priority, involvement itself was only minimal, but that they wanted to see it go up to ninety to hundred percent in the future. She stated:

> "We are trying to involve them in many school activities. Though most parents say we don't appreciate their involvement and the school does not recognise their efforts".

Mr Ndende also indicated that parental involvement was highly prioritised and offered a reason for that. He commented:

> "Parental involvement is a high priority, because when parents are exposed to their children's education, they assist the school. They promote and enhance the child's needs in education and become more

active in school. Some goals have been set, such as getting 90% attendance to meetings and enhancing communication between the school and the parents. The school has even gone as far as explaining the roles of the educators and parents, giving parents the freedom to communicate with educators regarding learner problems".

Ms Tshidi indicated that parental involvement was regarded as high priority at her school and commented: "... we use special days to celebrate with them. We want 80% - 90% percent involvement".

Mr Mokhuoe indicated that parental involvement was prioritised very highly to an extent that:

"... as I indicated, we resorted to the media to invite them. Our goal is 80%-90%. Use special days, cards made by the children to encourage them to come to school. We always thank and congratulate them for every positive effort".

Mr S'thembiso commented that parental involvement is a priority but:

"...It's not amongst the high ones, not as high as ensuring children's education. Parents don't feel that their participation is noted. The school has set up activities like bringing parents to school to learn with the children for a day so they can see what is done by the children at school".

Mr Thomas stated that parental involvement was regarded as a high priority and stated that they want parents to know what is happening at school. He continued: "We have parents' consortiums, we have trainings, we involve the SGBs for training, because we want this project (referring to the inclusion project being piloted at the school) to succeed. Still mothers attend in numbers, about eighty percent, but very few fathers attend". Mr Zandi felt parental involvement was averagely prioritised because, "parents feel inferior and threatened by the school as most of them are not well educated. They feel it's the educators work to see to

the education of their children. They blame schools and government of using English in meetings".

The principals seemed to suggest that for them, ensuring that children were taught, was much more important that expending effort on maximising parental involvement.

5.3.5.2 *Parents' views on how much of a priority parental involvement is considered*

Parents seemed to have mixed perceptions regarding the priority with which parental involvement is considered. What seemed also peculiar, was that parents seemed to see parental involvement as having to be an initiative of the school and thus expected to be told what to do. Some striking and common remarks included:

> "I would say high but that it is impossible without the department doing proper planning and implementing parental involvement programmes. Everything is done or we are called on the eleventh hour as if everything was not planned", – Tseliso.
>
> "I am not sure, but I think it should be high, considering the behavioural problems that we as parents experience from our children at home". Matabane.
>
> "I hope high, but because we as parents still have doubts of being judged, low self-esteem and low self trust, we are still afraid of maybe the school is having hidden agenda, or maybe they want to expose our illiteracy", – Lesego.
>
> "It is not a priority, I think. If it was a priority, we would be employed by the government for us to be able to help schools with other duties, so that educators would do more", – Nelisiwe.

These responses from parents indicate generally that they do have a sense of the importance of their involvement at schools. However, it is also clear their understanding of what parental involvement entails varies. This actually indicates that there are possibly many barriers to their involvement.

5.3.6 **Perceptions on barriers to parental involvement at schools**

Principals' responses on what they perceived as barriers to parental involvement indicate various factors. However, what is astounding is that principals see barriers to parental involvement as emanating from the parent or family side.

5.3.6.1 ***Principals' perceptions on barriers to parental involvement at schools***

Poverty, unemployment and illiteracy seem to be the main factors identified as barriers to parental involvement. The following views were articulated:

> "Parents are not prepared to bring suggestions and decisions that will help improve conditions in schools because they feel inferior, they think principals underestimate them because of their illiteracy, poverty and lack of know-how concerning school matters". - Mr Ngoako.

> "Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and child-headed families are barriers. We expect children to take parents' responsibilities as they are orphans and some head families. Presently we are trying to have parenting workshops, encourage ABET classes to our parents, so that they can understand their roles and responsibilities". – Ms Thabo.

> "They always complain about poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and do not have time to come to school", - Mrs Tshidi.

> "We have tried to bring our parents closer, so that we can work together, but they always talk about how illiterate they are, how difficult it is to come when they should be looking for employment so as to feed and clothe their children. (We are) Trying to interpret policies and

curriculum terms to mother tongue so that they can understand, but (it is) still difficult as we cannot find suitable words from the new curriculum that mean exactly what is said in English". - Mr Zandi.

Three principals expressed particularly different views in addition to the views outlined above. Mr Mokhuoe felt that parental involvement was inhibited by political interferences and lack of interest in children's education. Ms Tshidi and Mr Ndende also articulated lack of interest as a barrier. They respectively remarked:

"They lack interest, because even if they are supposed to come and help clean grade-R classes, they don't come. When they are requested to come and cook for their children, they always give excuses".

"Parents lack interest in the children schooling, either due to illiteracy or because of unemployment. They feel that school uniforms and the little they take out is too much. The school has measures in place such as feeding schemes, no-fee schools (a new grading of schools in quintiles that determines that parents do not pay school fees) but still they feel that is not enough".

One of the barriers related to learners who were orphans as well as children who headed families, where both parents had died or had left children on their own. In some cases, parents who left children alone did so in search of employment and only came home periodically, mostly at the end of the month. Ms Tshidi blamed the government for child headed families. She explained:

"You cannot expect a child to look after other children, this child is expected to attend school, play, then switch off to be a parent in the afternoon to cook and assist other children with their homework and school projects. It's also difficult to detain or punish learners for something beyond their control. The government and relatives should see to it that a responsible adult stays with the children".

Ms Thabo was also touched by the situation that most orphans find themselves in and she pointed out:

> " Most foster parents are not interested in the orphans' well-being, but on the foster grant that they receive. This foster grant is for the foster parents commitments, as some of these orphans do not even come to school, some do not have school uniform nor anything to eat. Some foster parents come to school only to fill in forms for social departments for foster care grant, otherwise if you invite them to school for the education of the learner, they never show up. It is also difficult to refuse to fill these forms as this will be denying an orphan something to live on".

Mr Mokhuoe also blamed the government for the children staying with grandparents and said:

> "Grannies are old enough to take care of themselves, now having another responsibility of taking care of grandchildren is a burden. They must do chores at home, attend school activities, then they are expected to deal with homework. Let alone to discipline children who are unruly and misbehave a lot. Attending to school activities in this case is certainly out of question".

Mr Zandi expressed his disappointment on the curriculum that is forever changing as a barrier and said:

> "Curriculum changes day and night. As principals, we struggle with it. Now think of a parent who was never trained on these changes. Educators and learning facilitators are also not sure of what they are doing as they always complain to us principals about these regular changes. In meetings when parents complain about how to help their children with homework in such difficult times, we explain what we are

sometimes not even sure of. Not that we are against changes, but this is too regular".

Mr Zandi added:

"We have tried to bring our parents closer so that we can work together by phoning them, sending letters though children, using the Internet, interpreting policies and using the mother tongue in all correspondence and meetings, as the SASA and the South African constitution require. But they always put illiteracy and poverty as excuses".

Mr S'thembiso, echoing the aforementioned colleagues' suggested that:

"Personally I feel it can help if we can have language experts to translate some policies, because some English words are not found in our black languages, because these terms were not there in the past and it is very difficult to find the word that means exactly what you want to say, whether it is in the curriculum, government gazette, policies or other school documents. These experts should work hand-in-hand with educators who are always in contact with parents, learners and the community".

5.3.6.2 *Parents' perceptions on barriers to parental involvement at schools*

Parents expressed a variety of issues they considered barriers to their involvement. One barrier highlighted during the interviews related to methods of communication and identified language as a barrier to effective and efficient parental involvement in primary schools.

Pearl, a professional maintained that language is still a problem during teaching and learning because it is difficult for these learners to carry out instructions and take messages to their parents. She stated:

"... in turn, parents have difficulty in assisting learners with homework and projects, which also highlights the language and communication problem. They (parents) are passive in meetings because they do not understand what is being said and they cannot respond".

Nthabiseng an unemployed parent of three children, alluded to communication being a problem and said:

"Communication with the school is very difficult because as parents we are afraid to air our views to the educators due to illiteracy. We always think they will judge us on the basis of our education level".

Dikeledi and Mamokete, mothers of two and three children respectively, felt that regular changes in the school curriculum are a problem because towards the end of each year, they are called to school and new terms are used in progress reports. This also happens when the new curriculum is explained, they cannot understand the language that is changed time and again.

Mafusi, a mother of two children, with a grade 12 equivalent education level added:

"One way communication is a big problem. We cannot communicate effectively and efficiently with the educators. Communication is the basis that can empower and inform us as parents, (so as) to talk and explain to the school the problems we encounter so that they in turn can help us to solve those problems. Now the schools must come down to our level so that we can understand one another and communicate freely".

Bongani, a hawker and father of three children, indicated that parents are not prepared to bring suggestions and decisions that will help conditions in schools because they feel inferior, they think the language problem and illiteracy is the yard-stick that principals use to under-estimate (judge) them.

Puleng, a divorced mother of three children, felt strongly about this communication barrier and emphatically suggested a solution to this problem.

> "Training on all school activities and how to communicate with the school can alleviate most problems, including those of implementing policies. Parents and schools should strive to find a common ground where barriers like illiteracy, communication and language problem can be resolved. SASA and the South Africa constitution has put the language issue categorically clear that all eleven South African languages should be used and treated equally. Schools should respect this, translate to our language and find interpreters for the meetings".

Lebohang, a mother of one child, also with a grade 12 equivalent level of education, added in support:

> "It is high time that we as parents tell the schools to use the language that we understand if we are to participate fully in the education of our children".

Nobuhle, a mother of one child, with a college diploma, complained and said:

> "Schools should spend more time advising and encouraging parents to attend ABET (adult basic education and training), and train them about all schools regulations, laws and policies, as the government and the department requires. Parents should also show interest and commitment, because since they cannot manage their time effectively and are not fully committed, they put on excuses".

Thoto, a college graduate, explained the use of modern technology as a barrier and explained:

> "Using the Internet, computers, cell phones, is another way of communication with parents, but most parents are so poor that they can not afford computers and cell-phones. They have difficulty in accessing

the Internet. Poverty stricken communities are affected, because technology is another problem in that illiteracy and the absence of technological skills and equipment make it even worse for them to communicate through technology".

Letebele, a soccer team coach and father of four children, also indicated communication as a barrier and suggested:

"There are simple ways of communication, like giving letters or messages to children to and from schools. This method is easy and inexpensive. As parents and schools, we should train our children to deliver messages on time and precisely as it is expected of them. Technological equipment and skills should not be used to deny us (parents) to be involved".

Other problems highlighted as common barriers and having a negative impact on parental involvement in schools were violence in schools, lack of guidelines and lack of know-how, lack of and poor planning of activities to involve parents in the schools and the Department of Education. Tseliso, one of the few male parents from one group pleaded:

"If only parents can be given guidelines and the know-how of helping children. I feel that knowledge can make a huge difference, since parents will not fear to help or always make excuses when they are supposed to be involved in any way, even in assisting learners with projects or homework".

Lack of time was also cited as a barrier to parental involvement. Lesego, an unemployed university graduate, pointed out that poverty is regarded as a barrier "because we work far from home the whole day. No one is there to supervise and to remind our children to do projects and schoolwork. We need the small (little) money that we get from these jobs to feed and clothe them, otherwise, how can we pay for their fees?"

In this regard, Nelisiwe, an unemployed mother of one child remarked, alluding to poverty and lack of time:

> "We elected School Governing Bodies because we cannot afford transport to go to school regularly, the little time we have, we use for other things like gardening, washing and cleaning for the same children. Parents that were elected are supposed to tell schools to create jobs for us poor parents, to cook, clean, and coach children for remuneration and not for free. Educators are paid for the jobs they do, they should not expect us to volunteer services for free because we relieve them of their heavy duties!"

Violence in schools seems to be another problem. Schools and parents expressed frustrations on learners being bullied, unruly and ill-disciplined, which was perceived as causing schools to blame parents for poor parenting skills, orphans not having adult supervision, and child-headed families not having parents as role models. Qondi, a mother of two children, referring to the abolishment of corporal punishment and expressing their feeling of helplessness and consequent reluctance to be involved at school, pointed out:

> "Shifting of responsibility and lack of commitment shows that people have lost *ubuntu* because before *apartheid*, parents punished every child who misbehaved without asking who is the parent, parents volunteered to work in the *letsema* schools and fields without expecting remuneration".

Mpho added in suggestion of a solution:

> "Corporal punishment used to solve our problems. The ill-discipline, unruliness and learners not taking responsibility for their actions, not carrying instructions and not taking messages to and from school were dealt with accordingly. Moral regeneration will help bring *ubuntu* back,

where parents will like to take charge of all community children and not biological children only".

One parent, Limakatso, a mother of three children, actually reasoned that parents are reluctant to support schools to maintain discipline "because although there are alternatives to corporal punishment, they feel alternatives are not as effective. No wonder parents and principals are demotivated. Principals and parents are also threatened by their children, that they will take them to police to be arrested (apparently for child abuse)".

Some parents who were professionals identified barriers in the way things were done at schools. One parent, a professional, remarked off-the-record[4], after the group interviews:

> "My problem is lack of time. I have a busy schedule. Most times we are called to meetings and the only things mentioned are 'school fees', 'the school has no money', parents are not paying'. Imagine, I have paid my dues and I have to listen to that at every meeting. Secondly, in discussing children's academic progress, we hear the same story every time - he must work harder; he is doing well; he is well behaved; I'm not interested in that. I want to know areas where my child struggles and how I must support him. What is the meaning of 'he must work harder?"

Another parent, also off-the-record, commented that meetings were not beneficial to them. She explained that mostly, decisions have been taken and the meeting is a mere formality to legitimise such decisions. She stated:

> "If you raise an objection, first the staff becomes negative, then other parents join in because they are intimidated, fear educators, or think you want to 'shine'. But the reality is, your word as a parent does not count. Otherwise you are labelled as being influenced by politics. So you see, such meetings are a waste of time really".

[4] Off-the-record comments are reported anonymously, even with no fictitious names, as *per* agreements with parents who expressed them.

Much as parental involvement is important, the monitoring thereof is equally important.

5.3.7 **Perceptions of whether parental involvement is monitored**

Views expressed with regard to monitoring of parental involvement evoked different reactions. While principals expressed the view that monitoring was done, albeit through registers, parents expressed mixed reactions, seemingly from their observations. It was not clear why this was necessary and if it assisted schools in improving the rate of involvement, or the quality of involvement.

5.3.7.1 ***Principals' perceptions on whether parental involvement is monitored***

Monitoring of parental involvement seemed to involve the keeping of registers of meeting attendance. Monitoring of parental involvement activities also allude to the importance with which parental involvement is considered. This was clear from the following responses by principals:

> "We do, we keep an attendance register and check which parents came and those who did not. Sometimes we tell learners to bring their parents with them and promise to punish them if they do not. Sometimes we put unnecessary pressure on innocent children for irresponsible parents". - Mr Ngoako.

> "Yes, we do keep attendance registers, but most learners stay with foster parents who are not interested in the well-being of these learners, but only the grant that they receive for looking after the children. They do not come when invited, but only when they want to fill in foster care grant forms" – Ms Tshidi.

> "Yes, we always keep an attendance register. Sometimes it is just for record keeping, not monitoring as such, because there may be 800

parents, but those who really participate in discussions are few" – Mr Zandi.

"Yes, we keep registers, but as I said earlier, most children stay with grannies who sometimes cannot attend, we sometimes invite them during tuition time to come and observe, but because of child headed-families, orphans and children staying with grannies, it is difficult to have them all", – Mr Mokhuoe.

"Yes, we always keep attendance register and the diary of who did what and when", clarified Mr Sthembiso.

"Yes, we keep attendance registers for all activities but we have a problem as some parents come but are passive because they say they are afraid to air their views as they are illiterate and complain about not knowing English and their coming to school is useless", said Mr Thomas.

"Yes, we keep records of parents who attend school activities and we make follow-ups on those who did not and try to find reasons why", said Mr Thabo.

5.3.7.2 *Parents' perceptions on whether parental involvement is monitored*

Parent participants' views differed from those of principals. Lack of parental involvement monitoring is alluded to as a contributing factor towards low level of parental involvement in the primary schools. Parents felt that no one encourages them or takes note when they have done something good for the school. Ntombizodwa, a mother of one child, with a grade 12 equivalent level of education, spoke out:

"Everything that a parent does, should be written on the notice board or be included in the school records, because that will make us feel

noticed and important. The other day I came early to a meeting and found educators struggling to decorate the hall. I rushed home, brought my table-cloths and flowers, since that is my expertise. I decorated it quickly and so beautifully that everybody was admiring it. But what happened thereafter? It was mentioned in passing, not recorded anywhere. No matter how small a deed, we all need recognition. Signing an attendance register when visiting the school or while attending a meeting, is the only monitoring tool used in my child's school. I feel the school must do more by telling us or by giving us feedback on a quarterly basis, that Mr So-and-So did this, and Mrs So-and-So did that. ... Even passive parents should be recognised by thanking them, even it can be for attending school activities".

Some parents indicated that they were not sure if any monitoring took place. This was mainly based on lack of feedback. Thoko indicated that maybe they (schools) did "because sometimes you are asked why you did not turn up for a certain activity". Zanele also expressed a similar view " ... because if you do not attend a meeting or activity, the school would like to know the reasons why you did not attend". Two parents, however, emphatically stated that they did not think monitoring of parental involvement was done. Matabane and Disebo respectively commented:

"I do not think it is monitored, because we would be given feedback all the time after every event".

"I do not think so, because they would be knowing our problems and they would have helped us solve them so that we can be more involved".

An interesting view was expressed by Matlakala, a mother of three children, who said:

"When we attend sports activities, who goes around in the stadium to see who is present and who is not? Who is assisting with discipline and keeping order? These may seem small issues, but as parents, we want our children and the school to be proud that we are doing something. We expect even a small token of appreciation, even if it is a card saying "thank you". We are like children who like to be praised. It is not a sin to be childish sometimes".

The responses from participants thus far indicated mixed perceptions on a number of issues. Understanding educational policies is one aspect that makes parental involvement a crucial aspect of school effectiveness.

5.3.8 **Perceptions on whether parents understand the educational policies**

Several differing views were expressed concerning understanding educational policies. It seemed as if languages used for communication, were largely responsible for the level of understanding. Views between principals and parents did not differ much.

5.3.8.1 ***Principals' perceptions on whether parents understand the educational policies***

Principals' views on whether parents understand educational policies indicated two positions – that some do, while others do not. For example, Mr Ngoako pointed out:

"Parents do not understand policies as they say the language used there is difficult. Policies that are translated are also difficult to understand. Words used do not mean exactly what is implied. Roles and responsibilities of parents are not clearly outlined in policies except for those of committee members and SGBs".

Mr Ngoako, however, added another dimension. He seemed to be of the opinion that parents do understand policies, but pretend not to, because if a policy suits

them and address their rights, they can even explain it better to you as a principal. He, for example pointed out:

> "A teacher used corporal punishment today, the following morning the parent is in the principal's office to ask why that teacher did that, what does the policy say, and if you as a principal ask them to donate something for the school maintenance or any school need, parents will explain to you that they know that their school is a "no fee" school, because it falls under quintile one or two. Now one begins to wonder exactly when policies are difficult to understand and when are they not".

In indicating that parents do not understand policies, Mr S'thembiso pointed out:

> "Parents are not aware of their roles and responsibilities towards the education of their children. Policies are about schooling and school activities, which are impossible without parents knowing and understanding their roles and responsibilities".

Ms Thabo indicated that parents understand policies to a limited extent. She supported her assertion:

> "... when you discuss certain issues from the policies, they seem to understand, but when you move to other things from the same policies, they are in the darkness".

Ms Tshidi indicated that some parents do understand policies while some forgot the policies. Mr Zandi pointed out that parents seemed to understand policies to a certain degree. He stated:

> "Parents understand policies only up to a certain degree. When you discuss a certain issue, it is only then that you realise that other policies need to be explained and discussed in depth, as parents show no understanding at all in them. As a case in point, parents still keep pregnant learners at home and want to bring them back immediately

after the babies are born. They do not bother to report when learners are absent. These are signs that they do not understand policies".

Mr Mokhuoe indicated that parents do understand policies, "because we try to translate and explain them clearly. We sometimes invite the Department to organise workshops. There's also a project called "valued citizen" that is very good in building good citizens and encourage good parenting".

Mr Thomas seemed to hold the same view that parents do understand policies. He commented:

"Parents understand policies, although most of them blame the Department and the Government for not assisting schools to workshop parents in planning and implementing these policies. On paper, policies are there, but implementation is not monitored at all".

5.3.8.2 *Parents' perceptions on whether parents understand the educational policies*

Parent participants indicated several opinions about the issue of understanding educational policies. Some of the reasons raised by the participants included the lack of planning from both the schools and the Department, language used, poor management and lack of training for both the schools and parents. Many participants cited the language problem, because in schools where their children attend, only English is used during meetings and in the correspondence. Mamolilo remarked:

"As parents we do not understand policies, as the language used there is difficult to understand as words used do not mean exactly what is implied. Roles and responsibilities of parents are not clearly outlined in these policies".

Three parents, Tlhokomelo Pontsho, both mothers of three children and Busisiwe, mother of one child, respectively commented:

"Every parent would like to see his/her children prosper, but how do you help them if you do not know (policies) how, because at the end you will find that you are stepping on the principal's toes by taking his/her responsibility".

"I believe that in most cases, parental involvement in the primary schools is dependent on both the school and the parents. Parents are not trying enough to know how to be involved. Parents and schools should be trained on partnerships and on how to complement one another as the child is with the educator during the day and with the parents in the evening".

"If both the school and parents can build a good relationship and partnership, children will understand that both parties want what is best for him/her and there is no way that he/she can hide behind the weakness of one of them. Planning and implementation of policies should be done jointly, monitoring and feedback be a two-way street. This can eradicate most of our problems".

Thina-bakho, a fifty year old grandparent alluded to the fact that, if they did understand the policies, there would be no problems like discipline, violence, teenage pregnancies and low grades. He added by saying that grandparents, orphans and child-headed families are more disadvantaged as they have to deal with many different policies simultaneously in their lives, and he also mentioned that their low level of education was another obstacle.

Mohau felt that if the school and the department could focus on planning together with the parents, parents would be able to manage their time and have time for school activities. He emphasised:

"As long as the schools and the Department do not plan with the parents, their planning is a futile exercise, because parents feel like these policies are imposed on them, they do not own them as their own.

Workshops and training should be planned well in advance so that even working parents can make arrangements at work".

The views expressed by both principals and parents on the understanding of educational policies, prompt an understanding of strategies used to encourage parental involvement.

5.3.9 Perceptions on strategies used to encourage parental involvement in their children's education

A number of activities were mentioned by principals with regard to how schools attempt to encourage parental involvement. It was clear, however, that these were *ad hoc*, depending on the nature of the problem at hand. Such strategies address attendance of meetings, provision of social services at schools and basically advising parents on what to do regarding their children. Parents, while expressing differing views, also mentioned activities similar to those expressed by principals.

5.3.9.1 *Principals perceptions on strategies used to encourage parental involvement in their children's education*

The views expressed below capture what generally applied to principals' responses.

Mr S'thembiso, for example, explained that their strategies involved "inviting different departments and NGOs to school, which has proved to be more effective as most problems surrounding birth certificates, identity documents, grants and crimes happening in schools and townships are solved here at school, where their children are schooling". This, however, did not explain the impact on parental involvement at school.

Mr Zandi explained that they give parents a platform to talk to other parents about what they know best, allow them to view their problems and offer solutions. They also invited Home Affairs' staff, Social Development, South African Police

Services and Correctional Services to come and advise them where they encounter problems.

Mr Thomas indicated a variety of activities they engaged in. He stated that they start by giving responsibilities to parents and ill-disciplined learners, "so that others can see change and should have a better self-esteem. We keep all lines of communication open for them to bring any solutions or problems to school without any fear. We keep our meetings very short and to the point. We try to use mother tongue as much as possible".

Ms Thabo indicated that they appealed to parents' sense of integrity. She commented:

> "We encourage parents to revisit *ubuntu* where children belonged to the community. They should take responsibility for their own children and for all the children in the school or in the community. We encourage them to do good so as to be examples to other parents and their children. Motivate them to take part in all school activities".

Mr Ngoako responded that as a school, they acknowledge parents' presence in meetings, and other school activities, "... publish and give recognition where they did well. We also encourage and motivate them by inviting motivational speakers to motivate them". Voicing similar sentiments, Mr Mokhuoe added:

> "We give parents quarterly reports, make follow-ups to those who are involved and follow-ups of finding out why to those who are not taking part. Encourage them to sign their children's work. On special days we request their children to make beautiful cards and send them to parents. We congratulate, thank them where necessary".

5.3.9.2 *Parents' perceptions on strategies used to encourage parental involvement in their children's education*

From the parents' responses, it appears that strategies used to encourage their involvement, are generally aimed at encouraging attendance of meetings and responding to calls to schools. Palesa, a mother of two children, indicated in this regard, "Our school calls us again and again for meetings, misbehaving children, pregnant girls, crime and vandalisation of schools". Moso stated in support:

> "In our school, those who live far are provided with school transport. There are always some cakes and tea and educators are so friendly and talk to us even with other life matters. We feel so important that we wish to come and participate in school activities more. The school respects us and shows appreciation to our participation".

Zamokuhle commented that their school sought to use their skills and said that they are given different responsibilities "according to what we know, and request us to account for what we did. This makes us feel responsible and wish to do more. Given a task of what you know or of your expertise, is the best motivation, I think".

Geraldine, a mother of two children, indicated that their school uses external state organs and other organisations to assist parents. She explained:

> "Our school invites other community organisations like South African Police Services, Home Affairs, nurses and Social Development, to address parents on problems facing schools and solutions, but this is not enough, since it is done once in a quarter and in a very short time".

Kgomotso mentioned activities that included actual children's learning. He stated:

> "In my children's school, we are always invited to classes to see our children's progress, to clean their classrooms. Even when your child has performed well, you are called to school. Our achievements as

parents and children are published in school magazines and local newspapers".

Reabetswe, a mother of two children, indicated that their principal writes letters to invite them to quarterly school meetings, even when their children were misbehaving. He categorically stated: "More than that I will be lying", giving an indication that there are not too many activities aimed at encouraging parental involvement. Similarly, Nobuhle indicated that in their school, they are called to meetings and other school activities. However, she indicated "but I feel that this is not enough, more can still be done".

Moselantja, an educator and parent of three children, stated that their school uses workshops, training and conferences, where critical issues are discussed and emphasised: "This produces positive results as, we all want to learn".

The responses on strategies schools used to encourage parental involvement seem to reveal lack of focused strategic processes and approaches. This calls to for a scrutiny of the effectiveness of such "strategies".

5.3.10 Perceptions on the effectiveness of strategies schools use to encourage parental involvement

Views expressed on the effectiveness of strategies schools use to encourage parental involvement, indicated that there are preferred activities and suggestions on how to improve them. It was not very clear if the strategies employed were effective or not.

5.3.10.1 *Principals' perceptions on the effectiveness of strategies schools use to encourage parental involvement*

Principals showed a preference of several activities as being effective in encouraging parents to participate. Mr S'thembiso, without indicating how effective, stated that all their activities could be effective if they could be implemented by all schools with committed parents and educators. Mr Zandi

indicated that it was best using external organisations and the state departments to assist parents in some of their social needs. He stated:

> "Inviting different departments and NGOs has proved to be more effective as most problems surrounding birth certificates, identity documents, grants and crime happening in schools in the townships are solved here at school where their children are schooling".

Mr Thomas maintained that all the strategies he had mentioned were working but indicated: "... but it is going to take time for us to reach our target of 80%-90% since some obstacles are social, emotional, spiritual and environmental, but I am confident that we shall overcome all of them".

Ms Thabo explained that effective activities included assisting parents in various ways as well as allowing parents with certain relevant skills and expertise to lend a hand at school. She commented:

> "When they come to school events, those with cars assist those with no means of transportation, those with sports expertise, coach all school learners, not their children only, and those unemployed, do come and feed all learners, not only their children. We sometimes see them helping by translating for other parents"

Mr Ngoako describes effective strategies as those that include giving recognition to parents for their contributions. He explained:

> "Praising them where they did well, publishing their positive contributions seem to be working for us, because soon after doing that, they contribute more, ask for what else they can do to assist the school. Therefore giving credit where it is due, makes them feel useful".

Mr Mokhuoe referring to a project they have undertaken, which consists of partnerships between parents and educators, where parents are empowered in such skills as parenting, said:

"I prefer the "valued citizen project", because it involves values and morals, it encourages teachers who work as police and social workers daily, who deal with behavioural problems, peer pressure, violence and teenage pregnancy. This project also assists with healthy dialogue between parents, educators and learners".

5.3.10.2 *Parents' perception on the effectiveness of strategies schools use to encourage parental involvement*

Parents' views regarding the effectiveness of strategies aimed at encouraging them to be involved, generally indicated suggestions for improvement rather than actual effectiveness of strategies. This suggested that strategies being used were not seen as being too effective. Thoko for instance, suggested:

"I think if they can call the police for crime and vandalism, Health Department for pregnant girls, Social Development for grants and Home Affairs to give our children birth certificates, identity documents. They should have one big meeting for all that I have mentioned in one school. Then they will see more of us getting involved, because they would also be helping to solve our problems".

Puleng also offered suggestions, mentioning for the first time the notion of community involvement:

"All strategies would benefit schools if only they were planned properly, if there were programmes understood by all stakeholders and that would be known and followed by all schools. If only all community organisations were involved, our goal would be one, and we would all work towards it".

Langi also suggested that every strategy used at school should be effective. She hinted: "the problem is: it (strategy) is not owned by all stakeholders. That is why even good strategies fail. Planning together, can eliminate all problems and doubts".

Thoto indicated that "school visits and grouping of parents into 'houses' produces positive results, because no parent can hide behind other parents, so that everyone has his/her turn in a group".

Tseliso indicated that training on policies, involvement and participation is the best, but that it is so minimal. He reasoned and suggested:

> "Some of the problems are from home, like poor parenting, ill-disciplined learners who fail to deliver verbal messages, or notices from the schools to parents. Schools really try to communicate to parents in a manner that is convenient, that is giving learners messages in a language that we all understand. It is for us as parents to take an initiative to ask our children as to whether there are any messages or even visit the school and talk to class educators, and ask them as to whether there are any messages. This will in turn, also make our children aware that we communicate, and even if they hide some things from us, the educators will tell us".

Matabane was much more forthright concerning strategies to enhance parental involvement and their effectiveness. He candidly pointed out:

> "I cannot say much about the effectiveness. As I have said, we rarely get the feedback on activities".

Disebo also came out forthrightly and offered a suggestion:

> "All strategies are effective. The problem is that the school and the parents should come together with a common understanding in a language understood by all. Then parental involvement will be massive".

Having analysed both principals and parents' perceptions of aspects of parental involvement, it can be questioned what these responses mean. The next section discusses the findings and contextualises them into parental involvement typologies.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings reported in the foregoing section reveal some interesting and important aspects regarding the essence of parental involvement in the area of study.

5.4.1 Implications regarding the meaning of parental involvement

Various meanings were assigned to the parental involvement concept. However, it is clear that principals regard it as related to what parents have to do and as defined by the school. Consequently, parental involvement was perceived as meaning:

- attendance of meetings at school;
- responding when called to the school;
- seeing to it that children come to school every day;
- paying school fees, checking children's books; and
- helping the school where needed.

Only three principals alluded to involvement of parents in all aspect of the child's schooling or the full participation of parents in children's education. Even then, one could not help, but sense that in practice, the notion of partnership with parents was relegated to the background in favour of expecting parental responses to school requests and or demands. This is evident in responses to subsequent questions that indicate the practical side of parental involvement at the participants' schools.

It is also clear that parental involvement is viewed as a response from parents when the school needs them and not as a partnership that transcends all aspects of schooling. For example, there were no responses relating parental involvement to curriculum and strategic planning issues of the school. It can then

be inferred that the perceptions regarding the meaning of parental involvement indicate a simplistic explanation.

Parents' responses similarly locate the meaning of parental involvement in the domain of doing what the school expects, that is, respond to calls from the school. This was indicated mainly as attendance of meetings, paying school fees and ensuring that children are ready for school.

It could be that a more in-depth and longer probing interview process could elicit more information. Be that as it may, it can be accepted that the first area for addressing this, would be a much more comprehensive definition and understanding of really what parental involvement entails.

5.4.2 **Implications regarding parental roles and responsibilities**

Findings regarding perceptions on parental roles and responsibilities reinforced findings on the meaning of parental involvement. Views expressed by principals indicated roles and responsibilities mainly as:

- helping the school where necessary;
- carrying out maintenance tasks at school;
- attending meetings;
- fundraising for the school; and
- ensuring that children are obedient and do what is expected of them.

Other views encouragingly included some important aspects of parental involvement, which are expressed by the ecological perspective of parental involvement (cf. 1.6 & 2.3.1.1), *inter alia*:

- assisting learners with school work; and
- instil good morals and manners in their children.

While some parents seemed unsure of their roles and responsibilities, many of them expressed a much more incisive understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The following views represent this understanding:

- working together with educators on children's school work;
- sharing their expertise with the school;
- supporting children by ensuring their well-being in terms of material needs and school work; and
- being "other" educators for children.

It is, however, clear that parents do not know how to do all this. This was expressed as much by parents repeatedly mentioning the need for guidelines and the know-how of supporting children and the school.

5.4.3 Implications regarding the level of parental involvement and the activities parents engage in

Findings regarding the level of parental involvement and the activities parents engage in, seem to confirm the implications of earlier findings regarding the meaning of involvement, as well as the roles and responsibilities of parents.

While parental involvement was indicated as being high by some principals and parents, it seems that the most common activities relate to parents being expected to and responding to calls to school. In this regard, the most pertinent activities cited include:

- attending meetings and school functions mainly for fundraising; and
- responding to calls when children misbehave.

It seems that parents are generally expected to do as the schools dictate to them. With barriers like low literacy and education, it seems to have been accepted that parents' roles should at least revolve around a "checking" function, for example, checking homework and children's behaviour. Intriguingly, very little

comes through in terms of involvement in the form of parental obligations (cf. 3.3.1); basic obligations of schools (cf. 3.3.2); parental involvement at schools (cf. 3.3.3); parental involvement in learning activities (cf. 3.3.4); parental involvement in governance (cf. 3.3.5); and collaboration with the community (cf. 3.3.6). These activities can be coupled with parent events at schools, such as parent-educator-learner conferences, exhibitions of learners' work, reviews of learners' work, developing parents' own skills and knowledge (cf. 3.2.1); membership opportunities in parent structures (cf. 3.2.2); communication structures to keep parents informed (cf. 3.2.3); and parent social networks (cf. 3.2.4).

These findings imply that there is a gap of actual knowledge of what parental and family involvement entails. The parental involvement roles and responsibilities cited, indicate a loose and casual understanding of the parental involvement phenomenon.

5.4.4 Implications regarding barriers to and strategies to encourage parental involvement

The findings on perceived barriers to parental involvement and the strategies used by schools to encourage parental involvement, perhaps articulate the essence of this study. The following were cited as barriers to parental involvement by both principals and parents:

- parental illiteracy and low levels of education;
- poverty and unemployment;
- poor and low self-image and inferiority complex displayed by parents;
- inability to understand and interpret education policies;
- lack of interest shown by parents;
- orphans and child-headed families;

- families headed by grandparents, whose ability to be involved is limited by many factors;
- difficulties in dealing with various curriculum changes;
- poor communication caused by the use of English in communication correspondence and addressing meetings;
- difficulties in assisting children with their school work;
- poor or lack of training in relevant legislation;
- lack of time due to having to earn a living; and
- negative attitudes displayed by staff at schools towards parents.

These barriers are compounded by parents generally not understanding educational policies (cf. 5.3.8). The main issue raised in this regard from the side of the parents, related to the language in which policies are communicated as well as training in such policies.

What was found remarkable from the findings is that almost all barriers were attributed to parents. In the light of parental involvement implying a partnership between school and parents, this is a serious gap in the enhancement of parental involvement. Comments made off-the-record by some parents reveal the seriousness of this gap (cf. 5.3.6.2). These comments seem to suggest that being involved is futile because there is no value gained or added by being involved. In addition, they suggest that getting involved gets a hostile and negative reaction from school staff.

The findings also indicated the aspirations of both principals and parents. First, there is an acknowledgement of the need for and importance of parental involvement. Second, it is clear that there are various barriers to parental involvement as articulated in various research studies (cf. 2.3.4). Third, there is a need for the empowerment of parents and school staff in terms of what parental involvement entails. Finally, enhancing parental involvement needs an approach

that embraces programmes aimed at addressing the various issues gleaned from these findings.

The findings of this study also point to a necessity of looking at school-family-community partnerships. The comments relating to a child belonging to the community are important in this regard. The observations during group interviews clearly indicated the comfort parents enjoy in being in a group or communal company of "like" people.

Based on these implications, this study seeks to present an approach to parental involvement that addresses the findings of this study. Firstly, Epstein's typologies of parental involvement (cf. 3.3) adequately address this area. According to these typologies, this can be located and contextualised into:

- *Basic obligations of parents*, which relates to the parenting skills of parents. This implies assisting families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level as well as assisting schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures and goals for children (cf. 3.3.1).

  The basic obligation of parents essentially has to do with parents establishing home conditions that help their children to learn and achieve at school. This involves helping children to be physically and psycho-socially prepared for school and to be able to cope throughout their schooling. How this works is dependent on the creation of effective partnerships between schools and parents so that schools can aid families in establishing such conditions in the home (cf. 3.3.1).

  To this end, workshops can be used by schools to help parents acquire skills and knowledge to help their children, while parent support groups may focus on helping parents, to establish strong emotional bonds with their children, to understand the laws regarding child abuse and explore

alternative strategies for discipline, and to understand the socio-cultural and psychological stresses children face in adjusting to the school culture and strategies and resources for helping their children manage these stresses (cf. 3.3.1).

- *Parental involvement at school*, which relates to communications from school to home about the school's programmes and children's progress and is usually in the form of memos, notices, report cards and conferences, which should be in an understandable format and language and, to the extent feasible, be in their mother tongue (cf. 3.3.3). Activities included in communications include conferences with every parent at least once a year with follow-ups as required, language translators to assist families as needed, weekly or monthly folders of learners' work sent home for review and comment, parent/learner pickup folders of learners' work sent home for review and comments, regular schedule of useful notices, phone calls and other communications, clear information on choosing schools or courses, programmes and activities within schools and clear information on all school policies, programmes, reforms and transitions (cf. 3.3.3).

- *Basic obligations of the school*, which relates to parents volunteering in assisting the school and educators, school management and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school and also refers to parents who come to school to support learner performances, sports, or other events or to attend workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (cf. 3.3.2). Volunteering also involves parents becoming involved by volunteering at school and serving as an audience for school performances, which improves recruitment, training, activities and schedules to involve families and enable educators to work with such volunteers who support learners and the school (cf. 3.3.2).

- *Parental involvement in learning activities*, which relates from a school's perspective, to providing information to parents/families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning, which translate to parents helping learners at home and includes assisting children with goal-setting and encourages educators to design homework that enables learners to share and discuss interesting tasks (cf. 3.3.4).

- *Parental involvement in governance*, which relates to including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives on boards and committees, including school improvement teams and parent organisations and creates in parents, an awareness of representation in school decisions, inputs into policies that affect children's education, feelings of ownership of the school, awareness of parents' voices in school decisions, awareness of school parents' voices in school decisions, shared experiences and connections with other families and awareness of school, district and national policies (cf. 3.3.5).

- *Collaboration with the community*, which relates to community resources and agencies become integrated with school programmes fostering a shared responsibility for children, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organisations and colleges or universities and thus strengthens school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development (cf. 3.3.6). This can be achieved through, *inter alia*, projects aimed at acquiring community resources.

Secondly, the findings illustrate the need to consider parental involvement in an ecological context, which implies viewing it as a whole in order to identify problems and find solutions and takes the child's ecology as a point of departure as articulated by the micro-, and meso-, exo- and macro-systems of the school-family environments (cf. 1.5 & 2.3.1.1), and can be achieved through the creation of parent centres at schools, *a* family involvement policy, effective

communication between the school and parents, the provision of ongoing profession development in family involvement for all school staff, and consideration of parents' needs (cf. 3.2).

Thirdly, the findings illustrate the benefits of communality in enhancing parental involvement. In this regard, the concepts of *zenzele* and *masakhane*, which relates to group-based practices, whose importance is the collective ability and sharing and involves practices involving communicating, volunteering, decision-making and collaboration with the community (cf. 1.5). The implication, especially of *masakhane* is located in the need for creating parent social networks and actually considering all parents, regardless of their children's schools, as parents of all children in line with the adage that states that "it takes a village to raise a child" (cf. 1.1 & 1.6).

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the empirical research findings, analysis and interpretation in terms of the demographic data, participants' perceptions on the various aspects of parental involvement. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary of this study by focusing on important aspects which emerged from the literature study regarding the essence of parental involvement in the primary school as well as conclusions from the empirical study and recommendations. Findings and recommendations are also presented. The Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement is proposed for the primary schools in the research area. This chapter is rounded off with the presentation of recommendations for further research and concluding remarks.

6.2 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 presented the general orientation to the study. The problem statement highlighted the rationale behind an investigation of parental involvement in the primary school (cf.1.1). The research questions stemming from the problem statement were then exposed and culminated in the explication of the research aims (cf. 1.2 & 1.3). The chapter then outlined the theoretical orientation, which described the study within the ecological perspective and included the basic obligations of the school and parents as well as the African principles of *zenzele* and *masakhane* (cf. 1.5).

Chapter 2 focused on the essence of parental involvement. The rationale of the investigation (cf. 2.2) revealed that parental involvement is crucial because children at this level are at their most formative years and require support and care to develop academically. The concept of parental involvement was then discussed (cf. 2.3), detailing models of parental involvement (cf. 2.3.1) in terms of the ecological perspective (cf. 2.3.1.1), Epstein's typologies of parental involvement (cf. 2.3.1.2), Price-Mitchell and Grijalva's model of parental involvement (cf. 2.3.1.3) and Shepard and Rose's empowerment model of

parental involvement (cf. 2.3.1.4); the meaning of parental involvement (cf. 2.3.2); the effects and importance of parental involvement (cf. 2.3.3); and barriers to parental involvement (cf. 2.3.4) were discussed. The chapter then outlined parental involvement in South Africa in terms of the *apartheid* period and the democratic era (cf. 2.3).

Chapter 3 focussed on the enhancement of parental involvement (cf. 3.2) and pointed out strategies for doing so. These strategies included parents events at the school (cf. 3.2.1), membership opportunities in parent structures (cf. 3.2.2), communication structures to keep parents informed (cf. 3.2.3), parent social networks (cf. 3.2.4); parental involvement in practice (cf. 3.3), which exposed Epstein's parental involvement typologies, *viz.*, basic obligations of parents (cf. 3.3.1), basic obligations of schools (cf. 3.3.2), parental involvement at school (cf. 3.3.3), parental involvement in learning activities (cf. 3.3.4), parental involvement in governance (cf. 3.3.5) and collaboration with the community (cf. 3.3.6). The chapter rounded off with a discussion of the school's role in enhancing parental involvement in terms of a whole school approach (cf. 3.4).

Chapter 4 exposed the empirical research design and method. This involved a discussion of the research design and the qualitative research method (cf. 4.2). The research method included a discussion of the whole process involved in the empirical research namely, the literature study (cf. 4.3.1), the empirical study (cf. 4.3.2), description of participants in the research (cf. 4.3.2.1), data collection (cf. 4.3.2.2), data analysis (cf. 4.3.2.3), focus of the interviews (cf. 4.3.2.4), reliability and validity (cf. 4.3.2.5) and the ethical aspects considered in the empirical research (cf. 4.4).

Chapter 5 presented the research findings. The data analysis (cf. 5.2) presented the demographic data, participants' views on parental involvement and the implications of the findings (cf. 5.4).

The next section presents the conclusions drawn from the findings of the research.

6.3 FINDINGS

The main findings of this research are presented in terms of the research aims outlined in Chapter 1 (cf. 1.3).

6.3.1 Findings with regard to the essence of parental involvement in schools and how parental involvement can be enhanced

The literature review revealed that there is evidence indicating that parental involvement is related to an improvement in learner achievement in terms of higher grades, test scores, graduation rates, better school attendance, increased motivation, better self-esteem and lower rates of suspension (cf. 2.2).

Parental involvement in South Africa is currently informed by the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, which introduces the democratic principles of participation and collaboration with stakeholders in education. The role of parents is therefore given recognition and the Act stipulates that through school structures like the School Governing Body, parents must be encouraged to participate and be fully involved at schools (cf. 2.2).

Through the recognition of the ecological environment of the child, which comprises the school, home and community, parental involvement describes a situation where school stakeholders create an environment wherein there is collaboration in creating the agenda, making decisions and taking actions for improved learner achievement and well-being as outcomes (cf. 2.3.2).

While there are numerous barriers to parental involvement (cf. 2.3.4), parental involvement can be enhanced by the promotion of school and parental obligations, which in essence describe their obligations (cf. 3.2). These are obligations of parenting, communications, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community (cf. 3.3), which can be achieved through various activities like the creation of parent centres, family involvement policies, ongoing professional development in family involvement for

school staff (cf. 3.2) as well as various parent and family events at schools (cf. 3.2.1).

The school's role in promoting parental involvement requires a framework that addresses the whole school so as to ensure that the *zenzele* aspect of school parental involvement is realised. In this regard, a strategic process that involves identifying school stakeholders, conducting an audit of the school's current parental involvement practices and the identification of links to other policies and statutory requirements, identification of areas for development, developing a written parental involvement policy and producing an action plan (cf. 3.4). It also requires collaboration with the community so as inculcate the *masakhane* principle for the benefit of all children in the "village" (cf. 1.5 & 3.3).

Parental involvement was therefore found to be a crucial aspect of learner achievement and an aspect that could be developed, promoted and enhanced through an understanding of various aspects attendant to it as exposed in the literature review.

6.3.2 Findings with regard how primary schools currently promote parental involvement

Findings generally revealed that the meaning attached to parental involvement includes such activities as attending meetings, responding to calls to schools, seeing that children come to school every day, paying school fees, checking children's books and helping the school where needed. It was clear that parental involvement is seen as a response expected from parents when the school determines it. This detracts from the full meaning of parental involvement in terms of school and parent obligations as espoused in parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, participation in decision-making and collaboration with the community.

Parent levels of literacy were confirmed by both principals and parents as an inhibiting factor to parental involvement. This was found to be compounded by

the use of languages in which parents were not comfortable when schools communicate with parents as well as policies and Acts. This was identified as the major barrier to parental involvement, which indeed is extensively reported in literature on parental involvement.

The attitude of school staff to parents was also found to be a barrier. This included being hostile and blaming parents. The fact that in most instances, parental involvement is seen as parents doing as the school determines, can be a barrier in that it removes the element of partnership with parents. This equally applies to parents who felt that they would be doing the school's work when they become involved.

These findings have implications for the enhancement of parental involvement in primary schools. The next section presents recommendations to this effect.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made with regards to the findings of this research:

Recommendation 1

There is a need for concerted efforts to ensure that parental involvement as a concept is fully understood by all stakeholders at schools. In this regard, it is recommended that a holistic and empowering approach be used to empower both schools and parents regarding the essence of parental involvement. This approach should take cognisance of the family, the community and the school as the child's ecologies and incorporate principles that encourage collaborative activities. This notion is further developed in the Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement proposed in this study.

Motivation

It was clear from the findings, that the meaning attached to parental involvement focuses on a number of aspects that are only a fraction of the whole concept. This demonstrates a gap in knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon.

Recommendation 2

Parental involvement should be approached from an empowerment perspective, which implies departing from a point of view that considers all stakeholders as equals in the school-family ecology.

Motivation

It is clear that parental involvement activities are currently not considered as a partnership of the school-home-community. This was evident in the differing perceptions held by principals and parents, which largely gave an impression of a "them" and "us" relationship.

Recommendation 3

There is a need for a formal and systematic approach to parental involvement that takes as a point of departure, the dynamics of families, communities and schools in which they are situated. The Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement presented in the next section details how such an approach can be developed.

Motivation

It was clear from the findings that there is no formal approach to parental involvement at schools. Activities aimed at parental involvement seemed to be motivated by responses to needs emanating at schools from various concerns among others, discipline problems, lack of financial resources and concerns over children's family circumstances like poverty and orphanhood.

On the basis of the last recommendation, the following section details this study's proposed approach to parental involvement in the primary school.

6.5 AN EMPOWERMENT APPROACH TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

6.5.1 Orientation

Parental involvement needs to be considered within the context of the primary school in South Africa, and in this case, the Welkom area of Lejweleputswa. A number of factors are worth considering in this regard.

First, the primary school in this area caters for educational needs of learners in Grade R to Grade 7 and between the ages of six and thirteen. While this is the norm at these schools, it is not uncommon to find learners of ages above thirteen due to various factors in the communities. Parental involvement is critical at this stage of children's development because children are developing rapidly in a strange environment. Their development needs care and support, so as to prepare them for independent life in later years, especially in recognition of the social developmental challenges they face (Tzvetkova, http://www.erces.com/journal/articles/actuel/v02.htm).

Second, the communities in this area are predominantly African, with the majority living in townships and informal settlements. These areas are historical settlements designated for blacks and are characterised by poor socio-economic conditions and poor educational infrastructure and resources. In this regard, Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) (2002/2003) states:

> " ... 90% of learners are still in schools that are in townships ... . They are receiving an education that few can be proud of. They are faced with trying conditions and are faced with barriers to learning, which include limited curriculum offerings, inadequate teaching and learning resources and a host of other constraints".

Needless to say, most adult members in these communities have low literacy levels, and as articulated elsewhere in this text (cf. 5.4.4), that would have adverse effects on parental involvement in schools.

Third, most families that have two or more children do not necessarily send them to the same school. Consequently, a parent or family could be a parent in two or more schools. This brings in the concept of communality and *masakhane* (cf. 1.5), where children are regarded as belonging to the community. This is an element exploited by the proposed approach in this research.

Finally, a remarkable activity in these communities is the concept of *stokvels*, which are forms of savings clubs, burial societies and various economic activities by groups of people as joint undertakings (Broodryk, 2005:57). Lukhele (*in* Broodryk, 2005:57) points out that in a research of 24 000 stokvels, it was found that they exchanged R84 million during one month. What is worth pointing out in this concept, is the ability of groups of people in the community to work cooperatively in ventures for a common purpose. It is in these *stokvels* that *ubuntu* frequently emerges. The report below is such an example:

> Members of a *stokvel* have come to the rescue of an 11-year-old orphaned girl who didn't have a school uniform. The Nkowankowa Youth Travelling Club is made up of 20 young people from Nkowankowa near Tzaneen in Limpopo. On Sunday, they delivered a winter blanket, schoolbag, tracksuit, jersey, tunic and a pair of shoes and socks worth more than R500 to Khensani Mushwana of Petanenge village. - Neville Maakana, *News24.com.* 26/05/2008.

The way in which the *stokvels* function, is familiar to the communities in the research area, and it presents a novel way of enhancing parental involvement through *stokvel*-like community involvement. The proposed approach seeks to include the functioning of this concept.

6.5.2 The meaning of the concept "approach"

From a purely linguistic point of view, an approach is defined as a way of doing something or a path or route that leads to a place (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary, 2001). Being a way of doing something, an approach in this research refers to the way of enhancing parental involvement in the primary school and a path of actually reaching this destination namely, an ideal parental involvement "place".

For this approach to be clearly presented, a model is used as a way of describing it. Kühne (2005:2) describes a model as information on something, created by someone, for somebody for some purpose. Sedgestock (2006) describes a model as a description of the variables being analysed in a given situation and further states that models are used for a number of purposes, because they:

- help researchers to clarify important variables they wish to study;
- help to predict possible relationships among variables;
- help to illustrate hypothesised relationships to others;
- form the basis for statistical verification of relationships; and
- are used in many dissertations and theses.

Therefore it can be stated that a model helps to clarify the researcher's thoughts to predict possible relationships. In this research, a model is used to illustrate the proposed approach to parental involvement.

6.5.3 The proposed approach to parental involvement in the primary school

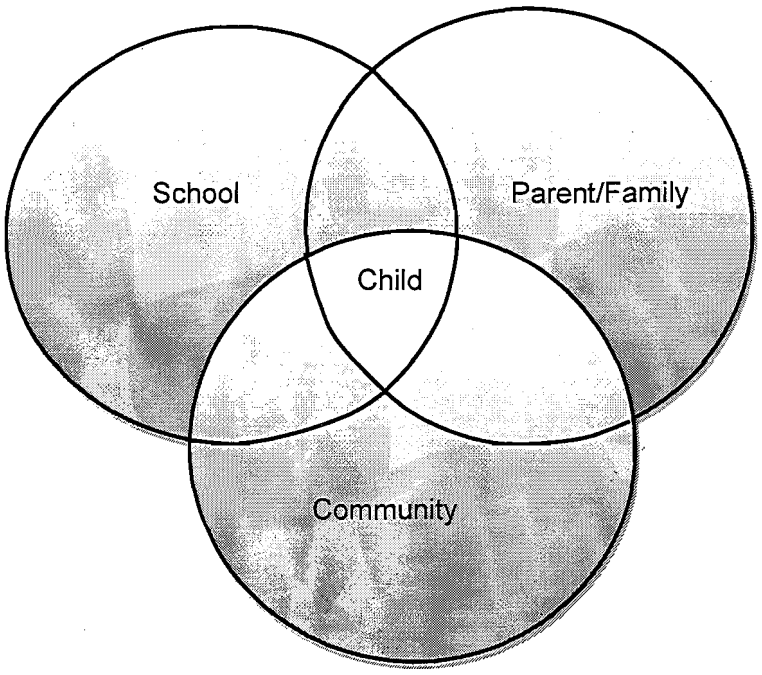
The proposed approach is regarded as an empowerment approach to parental involvement. Empowerment is defined as the process that allows one to gain the knowledge, skill-sets and attitudes needed to cope with the changing world and circumstances in which one lives (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/

Empowerment). Wikipedia states further that empowerment is a process which enables one to gain power, authority and influence over others, institutions or society and is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision-making power of one's own.
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decisions.
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or).
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making.
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change.
- Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
- Ability to change others' perceptions by democratic means.
- Involvement in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated.
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.
- Increasing one's ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong.

Therefore the proposed approach seeks to empower schools, parents and communities with regard to an understanding of what parental involvement entails and how it can be made a reality at schools. Figure 6.1 models the basic dimensions of the approach.

Figure 6.1 **The dimensions of the Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement (EAPI)**



As illustrated in figure 6.1 above, the main dimensions of the EAPI are the family, the school and the community. These dimensions should be understood to represent a child's ecological environment in that the child belongs and grows in a family, which is in the community and is therefore influenced by the community environment and enters the school with its influencing relationships as a new environment. These three environments thus locate the child in the central position and influence him or her. That is why parental involvement within this ecological system is important.

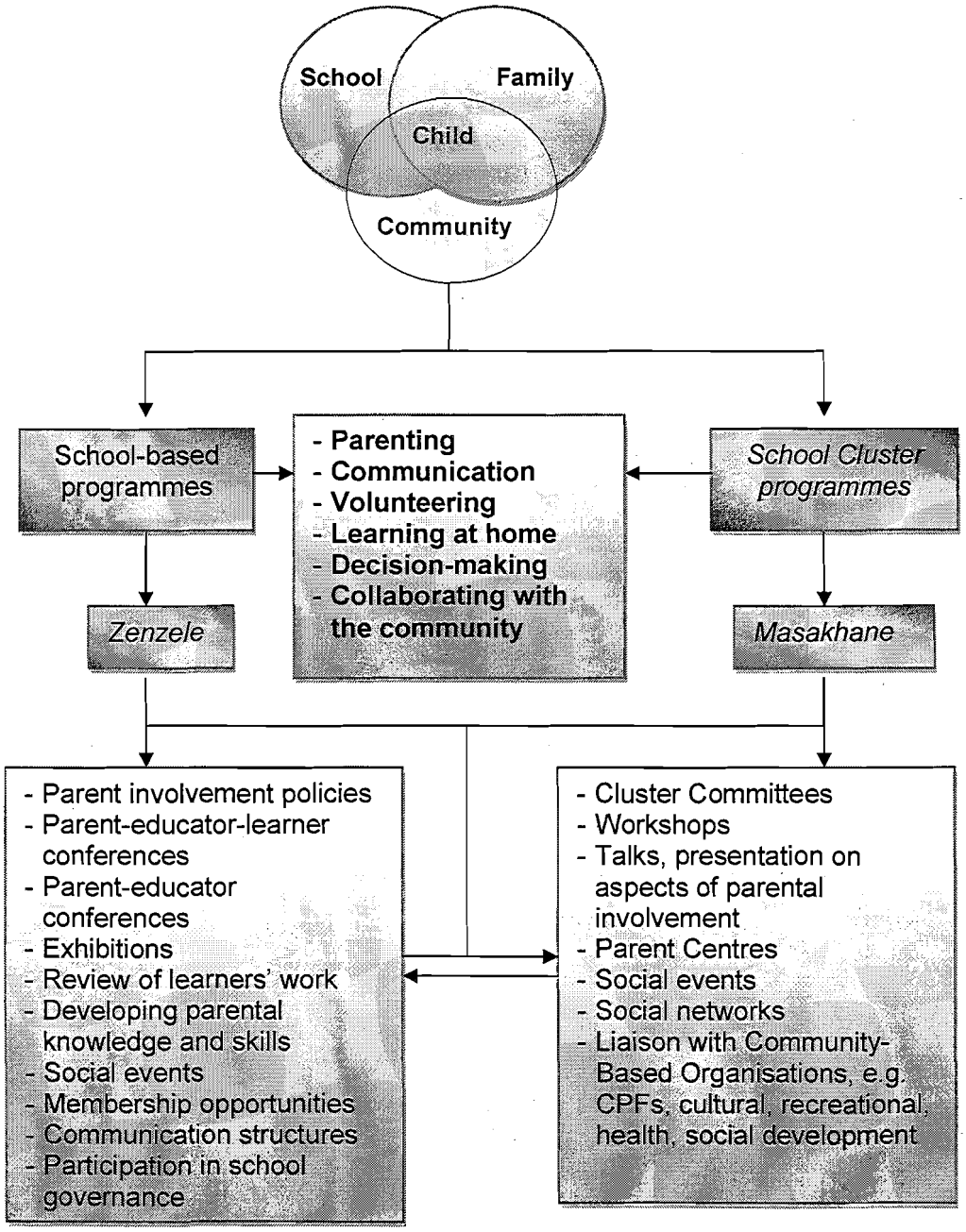
The main tasks regarding parental involvement in so far as the three elements are concerned, relate to advocacy and implementation of the parental involvement typologies. Thus the focus is on parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community.

In focusing on these aspects, the school recognises that parents' situations include decisions to participate or be involved in the different spaces the school

provides (cf. 2.3.1.1). This implies the recognition that parents have something to contribute to the child's schooling and their involvement is dependent on the space the school offers them, be it a school-based academic space or the home-community space. Providing parent space, allows them to contribute capital in the form of economic, cultural, academic, social and symbolic capital (2.3.1.1).

Therefore taking the dimensions of the EAPI as a starting point, parental involvement is viewed as a function of the interaction among these three dimensions. This interaction is represented in figure 6.2 below.

Figure 6.2 **The Empowerment Approach to Parental Involvement (EAPI)**



Based on the findings on the empirical research, the first need relates to engendering an understanding of what parental involvement entails. This requires a process involving a series of activities aimed at advocating the six typologies of parental involvement.

This is especially because there seems to be an acknowledgement from both principals and parents that suggests the main challenges as being two-fold. First, there are those parental involvement challenges that are school-based and can be addressed at school level. These include ensuring that the basic obligations of parents and schools are promoted. This is in terms of the parenting responsibilities of parents, school communication with the parents, parental volunteering, learning at home responsibilities and participation of parents in decision-making (cf. 2.3.2 & 3.3). Focusing on these aspects addresses the main findings of this research namely, a comprehensive understanding of what parental involvement entails and language and literacy challenges.

Second, there are those parental involvement challenges over which both, schools and parents have little control. These relate to such issues as school safety, orphaned learners, single parenthood, teenage-motherhood including issues around HIV/AIDS. These are challenges that require a focus on collaboration with the community (cf. 3.3.6).

As illustrated in figure 6.2 above, the EAPI addresses this by initiating the necessary structures. This implies a framework consisting of two main parts namely, school-based and cluster-based parental involvement programmes.

- The *school-based* parental involvement programmes

  The school initiates programmes aimed at enhancing parental involvement in terms of those parental involvement challenges at school level. These include such aspects as advocating an understanding of parental involvement, language and literacy and staff attitudes challenges.

  These programmes are premised on the principle of *zenzele*, which means schools do it themselves in terms of empowerment. Individual schools initiate school-based programmes that include among others (cf. 3.2.1; 3.2.2; 3.2.3:

- Parental involvement policies.
- Parent-educator-learner conferences.
- Parent-educator conferences.
- Exhibitions.
- Review of learners' work.
- Developing parental knowledge and skills.
- Social events.
- Membership opportunities.
- Communication structures.
- Participation in school governance.

To initiate such programmes, schools have to conduct a systematic strategic review process, which must involve all stakeholders in line with the school and home engaging in *zenzele* (cf. 1.5 & 3.4). This is a process that focuses on identifying the school's needs for development in parental involvement. This includes, identifying the school's stakeholders, analysing current activities and programmes of parental involvement with the view of identifying the strengths and challenges, prioritising the most critical aspects of need in terms of development. This in essence requires the school to focus on the question of where the school is and where the school would want to be in terms of parental involvement.

This process culminates into the development of written parental involvement policies and the production of an action plan addressing those areas that shall have been identified and prioritised as critical for enhancing parental involvement.

In the case of schools in the research area, the action plan of the school will focus on who the stakeholders are in terms of families. This will

identify the persons responsible for learners at home as well identify those families where parents are "absent" or families that are headed by children, grandparents or guardians. The intention is to be able to determine parental involvement programmes that are specific to family needs. This identification will serve as a feedback loop to the greater cluster-based phase, which seeks to include stakeholders external to the school, such as State Departments that can be of assistance in such cases in line with *masakhane*.

For instances where there are parents who already are involved, the action plan will focus on ensuring that they are attuned to being fully engaged and are high contributors to learner success (cf.2.3.1.3). This will also allow the school to create space for parents to engage in mediation, authoring and positioning, and orientation to action (cf. 2.3.1.2).

- *Cluster-based parental involvement programmes*

This phase entails organising schools into local clusters, which essentially implies that schools in a locality, determined by political ward boundaries or by some determined radius, are clustered and form a cluster-based parental involvement forum. This forum can consist of representatives that will comprise parents and school staff from each school. The forum elects a liaison person who will act as chair. The logistics of how the forum will function will be determined by the forum, including resource acquisition. It must be stated that this is a process requiring dedication and commitment. The forum will, as it develops, strive to form partnerships with Community-Based Organisations and structures.

The aim of the forum would be to advocate parental involvement across the school cluster, which in essence implies applying *masakhane* principles. This is premised on the principles that view parents as parents of all children and children as children of all parents.

The cluster-based forum's main focus will be to address those aspects of involvement over which both the schools and parents have little control. These include issues relating to school safety, orphaned learners, single parenthood, teenage-motherhood including issues around HIV/AIDS. Therefore parental involvement programmes will focus on areas such as safety, health and community welfare, in line with the six typologies of parental involvement.

The notion of, for example, *stokvel* problem-solving and fundraising could be beneficial at this level, where the cluster raises funds to resource schools on a rotational basis. For instance, in a cluster of five schools, funds can be raised to equip school libraries on a rotational cycle spanning a number of months or years or it can be deliberated about how to assist child-headed families by viewing such children as "children of the village" or community.

The advantage of this cluster-based parental involvement is that the community's economic, cultural, academic and social capitals are pooled together for the good of the schools and community (cf. 2.3.1.1). Another advantage of this level is that it can eliminate most of the barriers to parental involvement, especially those relating to language and illiteracy, cultural factors, socio-economic factors and school characteristics factors (cf. 2.3.4). Finally, activities at this level will benefit schools in the area and reduce the disparity often found in schools. In this sense the children become the community's children.

The EAPI proposes a systematic approach to initiating parental involvement programmes. The most important aspect of the approach is its adjustability to local circumstances of schools and their communities. However, its implementation requires conscientious leadership. It is therefore recommended that the section dealing with governance at departmental level should take the lead in initiating parental involvement advocacy processes.

6.5.4 **Possible strengths of the EAPI**

The EAPI possesses among other strengths the following:

- The approach begins with the assumption that all stakeholders need to be empowered in terms of what parental involvement really entails. This is of benefit, not only because no one should feel he/she is above others, but also because it lays the ground for real partnerships among stakeholders.

- It seeks to engender empowerment of individual schools, schools in the cluster and the community. This should bode well for all schools because intellectual and other resources are pooled together for the good of the learners in schools. This also takes cognisance of the fact that parents have children in different schools, and also ensures that the resource and performance disparities among schools are reduced. It also promotes a spirit of cooperation among stakeholders, thereby advocating the principle of a village taking care of its children.

- The concepts of *zenzele* and *masakhane* are familiar concepts in the communities and as such, allow for schools, parents and communities to operate within familiar circumstances. This, eliminates the often reported confusion brought about by the introduction of foreign and academic programmes and processes, which are likely to overwhelm stakeholders and make them lose interest. An example relates to such processes as strategic planning and school development planning, which pose real problems for parents and schools (Xaba, 2006:15). The use of strategies like the *stokvel* equally addresses strategic processes of schools, and yet they are not complicated.

- The approach sets the tone for the possibility of initiating district, provincial and national parental involvement initiatives and networks.

Despite the strengths of the approach, the EAPI also has some shortcomings.

6.5.5 **Possible limitations of the EAPI**

The EAPI can be limited by the following shortcomings:

- Initiation of the process, both at school and cluster level requires strong and dedicated leadership. This can be addressed by the Department of Education taking the initiative to advocate the importance of parental involvement. Currently programmes at school seem to be *ad hoc* and seem to address specific target areas. It is argued that, without the full understanding of what parental involvement entails, the focus will always be on issues that do not address the complete picture in as far as parental involvement is concerned.

- The approach addresses the phenomenon of parental involvement based on findings of this research. It does not adequately address specific issues like, educators' knowledge and expertise in terms of parental involvement. This can be a shortcoming in the initiation since it might elevate educators to the level of "know-alls", which might entrench some of the barriers to parental involvement reported in the text (cf. 2.3.4; 5.3.4; 5.3.6).

Despite the possible shortcomings highlighted above, the approach presents a usable way of promoting and enhancing parental involvement from a school and community perspective. It also provides scope for adaptation to school circumstances, so that while not generalisable, it can serve as a frame of reference for promoting parental involvement as a process addressing all areas related to the child and learners' academic performance and growth.

6.6 **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study did not intend to address all aspects related to parental involvement in schools. Consequently, other areas of research could be:

- Specific parental involvement needs of educators and principals;

- Parent empowerment programmes in terms of completely illiterate parents, semi-literate and very literate parents.
- How unemployed parents can be capacitated to be involved in school programmes.
- The roles of departmental officers in charge of governance and community involvement in the advocacy and implementation of parental involvernent in schools.
- Initiation of district, province and national parental involvement initiatives.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research has invoked an understanding of the full implications of the essence of parental involvement in the primary school. As a building block of the child's later educational career and life, the primary school is critical, and thus parental involvement is an equally critical aspect of a child's development to later educational achievements.

The findings of the research have highlighted the limited focus of parental involvement activities in schools in comparison to the actual meaning of the concept. The proposed approach to parental involvement in the primary school attempts to address this aspect, and also attempts to locate parental involvement in the area of all stakeholders of schools as against focusing of developmental efforts of individual schools.

In conclusion, the Department of Education should explore the possibility of instituting a unit to deal with parental involvement issues. This way there will be a coordinated effort that will also receive funding, so as ultimately, to establish national organisational networks for parental involvement. Then, children will truly belong to the "village".

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ANNEXURE A

education
Department of Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

Permission from the Free State Department of Education

Enquiries: Gaborone MMA
Reference: 16/4/1/11-2008

Tel: 051 404 8658
Fax: 051 447 7318
e-mail: gaborone@edu.fs.gov.za

2008 – 04 – 21

Ms MM Tshabalala
P O Box 2335
WELKOM
9460

Dear Ms Tshabalala

REGISTRATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

1. This letter is in reply to your application for the registration of your research project.

2 Research topic: **Parental Involvement in the Primary School.**

3 Your research project has been registered with the Free State Education Department

4 Approval is granted under the following conditions:-

4.1 Learners and officials participate voluntarily in the project.

4.2 The names of all schools, learners and educators involved remain confidential

4.3 The questionnaires are completed and the interviews are conducted outside normal tuition time

4.4 This letter is shown to all participating persons.

4.5 A bound copy of the report and a summary on a computer disc on this study is donated to the Free State Department of Education

4.6 Findings and recommendations are presented to relevant officials in the Department

5. The costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility

6. **You are requested to confirm acceptance of the above conditions in writing to:**

The Head: Education, for attention: DIRECTOR : QUALITY ASSURANCE
Room 401, Syfrets Building, Private Bag X20565, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9301

We wish you every success with your research

Yours sincerely

FR SELLO
DIRECTOR : QUALITY ASSURANCE

25/04/08
DATE

Private Bag X20565, Bloemfontein, 9300
Free State Provincial Government Building, 15th Floor, Chr Markgraaf and Elizabeth Streets, Bloemfontein
Tel: (051) 404 8100 / 8412 Fax: (086) 630 4790

ANNEXURE B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview questions were similar for both principals and parents. These focused on the following:

1. What does parental involvement mean to you as it concerns children's schooling?
2. How would you define parents' roles and responsibilities at schools?
3. What would you say is the average or typical level of parental involvement in your school?
4. In which types of activities do parents get involved at your school?
5. How much of a priority is parental involvement considered at your school?
6. In your opinion, what are the barriers to parental involvement at your schools?
7. Is parental involvement monitored at your school?
8. Do you think parents understand educational policies?
9. Which strategies are used at your school to encourage parental involvement?
10. How effective, would you say, are the strategies use to encourage parental involvement?