

**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN PROMOTING PARENTAL PARTICIPATION**

**IN EDUCATION: AN INVESTIGATION IN A PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**By**  
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## **DECLARATION**

I, Kathlyn Lillian Kannapathi, declare that this thesis is my own. It is being submitted for the degree of the Master of Education at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood campus). It has not been submitted before, for examination at any other university.

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**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

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**Supervisor's signature**

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**Date**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the continuous assistance, support and guidance of many people. I wish to extend my deep felt appreciation and gratitude to the following people:

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- The principal and staff at the school within which the study was conducted.
- All parent and staff participants.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to explore the role of the school in promoting parental participation in education. Parents' perceptions of their role in education and the benefits of their participation were also explored. Lastly, the study aimed to identify support structures designed and implemented by schools to assist parents overcome barriers to their participation.

The study employed qualitative methods. Data was collected in two stages. Firstly, questionnaires were administered to parents and school staff. Returned questionnaires were analysed. The data collected using the questionnaires was used as a springboard for the second stage of data collection. This second stage included semi-structured interviews conducted with educators and school managers. These interviews provided the researcher with in – depth information which built on the information gathered through the questionnaires.

The study aimed to explore the role of the school in promoting parental participation in education by exploring various aspects that impact parental involvement within the school. Attitude of school staff, school climate, school policy, communication and management of parental participation were identified as aspects within a school that impact parental participation in education.

The research revealed that while parents and school staff agreed that parental participation in education is beneficial, parents' perception of their participation was limited to assisting their children with homework tasks. In addition, school staff were unclear of their expectations of parents.

Findings revealed that the school plays an imperative role in promoting parental participation in education since they have control over factors such as school climate, school policy, home-school communication and management of parental participation which all impact levels of parental participation within a school. The study also found that the school in the study lacked support structures to assist parents overcome barriers to their participation.

The study concludes by making recommendations for improved levels of parental participation in education based on the findings of the study.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>SASA</b>	South African Schools Act
<b>DPI</b>	Department of Public Instruction
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>SES</b>	Socio – Economic status

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

*“When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life”*

Henderson and Berla (1997) cited in Gianzero (1999)

The development of a meaningful relationship between parents and schools is an essential component of attaining and improving the educational outcomes of children. Parental involvement in education is an invaluable asset to the process of teaching and learning. High levels of parental involvement result in benefits for all stakeholders in education. Gianzero (1999) identifies positive correlations between parental involvement in education and improved student attitudes, attendance and achievement. In addition, he maintains that schools that have high levels of parental involvement have better reputations in their communities and tend to have higher teacher morale (Gianzero,1999). Citing Henderson and Berla (1997) Gianzero (1999) goes further to claim that when parents are active participants in the education of their children, it prompts them to pursue further education for themselves whilst Berger (1981) believes that it also sensitizes them to the needs of their children.

Educators have recognized high levels of parental involvement in education as a vital resource that is beneficial not only to the student but the school and its staff. As a result, it has received much attention over the past few decades (Hoover-Dempsey, Battatio and Walker (2001).

It has become common knowledge that parental involvement in education benefits various aspects of a child's schooling career. While research places much emphasis on the academic benefits that children gain from high levels of parental involvement in education parental involvement in education yields benefits in all facets of a child's education. According to Mmotlane, Winnaar and wa Kivilu (2009) parental participation heightens children's social and interpersonal relations with all school mates and school personnel. In addition, to improving the socialization and attitudes of children toward those around them, Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) are convinced that the parental participation in school activities also elevates the cultural identity of children within the school system.

Parents are central to a child's education since they have the ability to enforce stable family routines which can include reading or homework time. In addition, parents are responsible for implementing family values and creating home environments that support learning which facilitate academic success (Gianzero,1999)

The system of education in South Africa underwent major changes after the birth of democracy in 1994. With the new democracy came legislation that aimed to promote and change parental participation in education significantly. For example, the South African Schools Act of 1996 defined the concept of a parent; describe basic parental duties; set requirements for schools related to parents' right to information; and provided for parent and community representation in mandatory school governing bodies (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004, p261). The new legislation aimed to create a partnership between schools and parents, a partnership that would ultimately benefit the South African learner.

Although parental involvement has received much attention recently (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001) and in spite of the benefits it yields, high levels of parental involvement in education are not a reality in many South African schools. This presents a problem since the parental component is vital in encouraging academic success and for the existence of democratically governed and effectively run schools. Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004) describe parental involvement in education as problematic since it is influenced by so

many factors. Research has identified various barriers that impede parental involvement in education and the following are barriers that are relevant in contexts such as South Africa.

*a) Psychological and emotional barriers*

A parents psychological and emotional state contributes significantly to the level at which that parent would involve himself/herself in their children's education. For example, Gianzero (1999) believes that many parents are reluctant to actively participate in their child's education as a result of their own feelings of inadequacy due to their poor educational skills. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullham (1998) cited by Moore and Lasky (2001) state that some parents might isolate themselves from their child's school and teachers because of their own negatives educational experiences. Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) identify stress, depression, unstable moods and anxiety as psychological factors that could impede the level of parental participation in their child's education. In the South African context realities such as poverty and unemployment have been identified by Fryer (2006), as being responsible for, or, adding to psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse. These psychological challenges severely impact the level at which a parent chooses to participate in their child's education.

*b) Socio-economic status*

A family's socio-economic status can have a significant bearing on the level of involvement parents have in the education of their children. Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) states that low parental involvement in South African black schools are due to the socio-economic status of parents. This is corroborated by Singh *et al.* (2004) who reveal that according to a South African study, 70% of the parents that participated in their study came from low socio-economic status homes. Due to this parents were not empowered to assist with school work activities or to involve themselves in school life. Gianzero (1999) claims that while parents from low socio-economic backgrounds might attempt to improve their children's educational outcomes through their involvement at school, these

outcomes are unlikely to reach the levels achieved by children who come from high socio-economic backgrounds. According to Gianzero (1999) this is attributed to a disconnection that exists between the homes' cultures and school cultures of low socio-economic students. Kivilu and Morrow (2006) cited in Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) state that parents in South Africa, as in high income countries such as Australia, also have a desire to have their children educated and to be involved in their education. However, the reality in countries such as South Africa, according to Frye (2006), is that 48.5% of adults live below the poverty line. With high levels of poverty and unemployment parents that come from low socio-economic backgrounds are preoccupied with survival. Efforts and attempts to involve themselves in the education of the children unfortunately are not a priority in contexts such as this.

Other barriers to parental involvement as identified by The State of Texas Education Department (1999) are:

- Different ideas among parents and teachers on what constitutes involvement.
- A school atmosphere that is not welcoming.
- Negative or neutral communication from schools.
- Insufficient training for teachers on how to reach out to parents.
- Lack of parent education and skills.
- Time pressure
- Language barriers

Although highlighted internationally these barriers are equally applicable in to the South African education context.

## 1.2 Context of the study

As an educator, assisting learners in reaching their full potential is essential to me. As research suggests, developing a relationship with their parents yields benefits for all stakeholders of education, especially the learner (Gianzero, 1999). From my experience as an educator in a public primary school, it has been my observation that parental participation at the school in which I am employed varies significantly. Through conversations and interactions with parents it became evident to me that while many parents express a desire to participate in the education of their children, they are more often than not unacquainted with ways on how to do this. In addition, the school is located within an area in which many families are affected by unemployment, single parenthood and sometimes grandparents taking responsibility for their grandchildren. In a context such as this, as research suggests, many barriers to parental involvement are likely to arise (Frye, 2006 and Mmotlane *et al.* ,2009).

The motivation behind this study was based on my desire as an educator to ascertain the level of knowledge that parents have with regard to their role in education and the benefits their participation yields for their children. In addition, I wished to explore the role that the school management team and educators played in promoting parental participation in education. As discussed above, taking the context and location of the school into consideration it is likely that many parents are faced with barriers that prevent them from participating in the education of the children. This led me to investigate the support structures that the school has implemented to help these parents overcome barriers to their participation. Such structures are essential since they could support and promote parental participation and help foster a relationship between the child's home and school.

### **1.3 Focus of the study**

This study sought to explore the following:

- a) The role of the school (educators and school management) in promoting parental involvement.
- b) The support structures that this school has implemented by this school to help parents overcome barriers to their participation?
- c) Parents' understanding of their role in education and the benefits thereof.

To realize these objectives, the study attempted to answer the following critical research questions:

1. What role do educators and school management play in promoting parental participation?
2. What support structures are implemented by this school to help parents overcome barriers to their participation?
3. What do parents understand to be their role in education and what do they think are the benefits of such participation?

### **1.4 Relevance of the study**

Most studies that have been conducted in the field of parental participation have focused on examining the concept of parental participation in education holistically, focusing on levels of participation, attitudes of parents and educators, and other aspects of parental participation. (Maphanga, 2006; Khumalo, 2006; Bridgemohan, 2001 and Avvisati, Besbas and Guyon, 2010). Other groups of studies in this field have concentrated on exploring the relationship between high levels of parental participation in education and learners academic achievement (Hara and Burke, 1998; Narain, 2005; Gianzero, 1999;

Oluwatature and Oloruntegbe, 2009; and Wanda, 2007). Issues of parental participation in school governance have also been explored by many researchers (Lewis and Naidoo, 2004 ; Singh *et al.*, 2004 and Heystek, 2003). In an attempt to improve parental participation in education, many studies have also focused on identifying barriers to parental involvement (Wanda, 2007; Smit and Liebenberg, 2003; Moore and Laskey, 2001; Fryer, 2006; Mmotlane, Winnaar and Wa Kivilu , 2009).

While a small group of studies have explored parental participation by examining the role of school principals in promoting parental participation (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004; Majola, 2008; Risimati, 2001), there is still a lack of literature and focus on the role of school staff and management in parental participation and the structures and strategies implemented by them to provide support to parents to overcome barriers to parental participation in education.

The insufficiency of literature on the role school management and educators play in parental participation and the support strategies and structures they implement is unfortunate since a school's climate and environment, its staff and their attitude towards parents may encourage or impede parental participation in education (Gianzero, 1999). If successful strategies are identified they could be shared and transferred to help other schools improve their levels of parental participation. This will yield many benefits for the school on a whole. Identification of such strategies and structures will also allow for schools that lack these strategies to reflect on their current practices and make the necessary changes required for the running of an effective school. This study hopes to fill this gap.

This study sought to contribute to the literature on parental participation by exploring the role of educators and the school management teams in promoting parental participation in education. In addition, this study aimed to identify strategies implemented and support structures designed by the school under study to encourage high levels of parental participation and to overcome barriers that prevent parents from participating.

## **1.5 Methodology**

This study used the qualitative research approach in its exploration of the role of the school in parental involvement in education. According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993), the qualitative approach is an empirical, systematic strategy for answering questions concerning people in a bounded social context. In addition, they maintain that this research approach describes and attempts to understand the regularities in what people say, do and report as their experience. This research approach was selected for this study, as it aimed to explore parents' and school staff's perceptions of their role in parental involvement in education. Therefore the data collected was not statistical in nature, rather it emphasized the participants' perceptions in words, a key feature of the qualitative approach as identified by Narain (2005).

The case study method was selected to understand participants' experiences of parental involvement and the interactions between parents and school staff. Tellis (2007) states that case studies are useful for explorations such as these. The school within which the study was located and participants in the study were selected by means of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting specific participants with the goal of identifying information rich cases which allows for the in – depth study of a case (Merriam, 2001). Participants selected for this study included parents who were actively involved in the education of their children and parents who did not involve themselves in the education of their children. In addition, the sample included educators and school managers across all phases of the school. Participants were selected purposively to represent staff across all phases and parents who were both involved and not involved. Such a sample provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore parental involvement holistically thus providing an opportunity for an in-depth study as pointed out by Merriam (2001).

Data collection was completed in two stages. Semi – structured questionnaires were administered to thirty parents. While questionnaires are not a popular data collection tool

in qualitative research, Woods (2006) states that it is useful in cases where a personal interview cannot be used. Parents were not keen on being interviewed, hence only semi-structured questionnaires were used. Data analysis began when all questionnaires were returned. Twenty two parent questionnaires were returned, however, twelve were not completed correctly allowing for the analyses of ten. Questionnaires were also administered to four educators and two school managers. All staff questionnaires were returned and analysed. The data collected from the questionnaires were used to inform the researcher's construction of the interview schedules. Semi – structured interviews were conducted with two educators and two members of school management. Interviews were recorded to ensure that no loss of data was incurred and they were later transcribed. Transcripts and questionnaires were engaged with continuously as data was reduced and organized (Lacey and Luff, 2001). This process allowed for the researcher to become familiar with the data. Thereafter, data was coded and themes identified.

## **1.6 Definition of terms**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

### 1.6.1 “parent”

A parent as defined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 refers to :

- (a) The parent or guardian of a learner;
- (b) The person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or
- (c) The person who undertakes to fulfill the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school

For the purpose of this study, a parent is defined as any individual who has a child in their care and is responsible for the well being of that child.

### 1.6.2 “parent involvement”

Avvisati, Besbasy and Guyonz (2010) explain that economists have defined parental participation as a direct effort made by the parent in order to increase educational outcomes. Sociologist and other education practitioners, they state, have defined parental involvement by breaking it into home based and school based activities in which the parent provides the child with assistance. A more holistic definition is offered by Epstein (1995, p4), she maintains that parental involvement includes six types of involvement:

“Type 1: Basic obligations of parents covering the provision of positive home school conditions that support children’s learning.

Type 2: Basic obligation of schools covering a range of communication from school to home.

Type 3: Parent involvement at school in the classroom and attending events.

Type 4: Parent involvement in learning activities at home, including parent, child and teacher-initiated.

Type 5: Parent involvement in governance and advocacy.

Type 6: Collaborating with community, covering resources and services that strengthen home-school links which list decision-making and management, home-school communication, school support for families, family and community help for schools, school support for learning at home, collaboration with community agencies, and community education”

The study reported herein refers to any of the six types of parental involvement. Please note that the term parent involvement and parental participation will be used synonymously for the purpose of this study.

### 1.7.3 “Barrier”

According to the Macmillan dictionary, a barrier is defined as:

- a) Anything that prevents progress or makes its difficult for someone to achieve something.
- b) Something that prevents people communicating or working together.

### 1.7.4 “The role of the school”

The manner in which schools encourage parental involvement in education has more influence than aspects such as marital status, socio-economic status, income and family size. For the purpose of this study, the role of the school refers to the various elements within a school that impact parental involvement in education, as listed below:

- School climate
- School policy on parental involvement
- Attitude of educators and school managers towards parental involvement
- Management of parental involvement
- School – home communication
- Support structures designed by the school to assist parents overcome barriers to their involvement.

### 1.7.5 “School management team”

The school management team comprises of the principal, deputy principal (s) and heads of department. Each member of the management team performs specific role functions. These functions include organisation, decision making, leadership and policy formulation (Naidoo, 1999) which could have an impact on levels of parental involvement.

## **1.8 Limitation of the study**

Like all other studies, this study had limitations. The main limitations were as follows:

- Most parent participants in the study were second language English speakers. Although questionnaires were designed to be quick and simple to complete, it is likely that some parents might have encountered difficulty in answering them since they were written only in English and this may have compromised the quality of their responses.
- The trustworthiness of the information given is based on the honesty of the respondents.
- The researcher is an employee at the school in which the study was located. Bertram (2003) explains that the way participants view the research is important. It is possible that participants' responses may have been affected by the presence of the researcher.
- The researcher was unable to interview parents since they did not respond favourably to the invitation to be interviewed. Hence, interviews were limited to school staff.

## **1.9 Structure of the study**

This study is divided into five chapters. These chapters are as follows:

### *Chapter one: Introduction*

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It has provided the rationale and the purpose of the study, outlined the importance of parental involvement in education and highlighted the barriers that impede involvement in schools. In addition, the study is placed into context and its focus discussed. Included is the research methodology used and definitions of the terms to be used in the study.

### *Chapter two: Theoretical framework and literature review*

Chapter two includes a review of literature and a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks which underpins the study.

### *Chapter three: Research Methodology*

This chapter describes the research process followed, the methods used in the data collection and data analysis phases of the study. Included in this chapter is a description of the context of the school in which the study was located. Data collection methods are described and sampling procedures discussed. In addition, this chapter includes the ethical considerations made in this study and the limitations of the study.

### *Chapter four: Data Analysis*

Chapter four is the presentation of the data collected and the analysis thereof.

## *Chapter five: Summary and Recommendations*

This chapter presents the main findings of the study. The findings of the study are discussed and a summary is also included. Lastly, recommendations are made on how the school can increase parental involvement based on the findings of the study.

### **1.10 Summary**

The importance of parental involvement cannot be emphasized enough. However, a multitude of barriers impede high levels of parental involvement in education. Schools play an important role in promoting parental involvement. The manner in which schools encourage parental involvement has more influence on levels of involvement than other factors such as marital status, socio – economic status, income and family size.

Hence, the factors below significantly impact level of parental involvement in that school:

- the perception and understanding of parental involvement held by school staff;
- the manner in which schools encourage parental involvement;
- the organisation and management of parental involvement;
- and the frameworks put into place by schools to assist parents overcome barriers to their participation in education

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Aim of the chapter**

Parents and the school system both have a significant influence and impact on children. When both parties work together in a partnership, the child reaps the most benefits. This chapter reviews literature to highlight how a parent – school partnership would benefit the child using the Ecological theory. In addition, the conceptual framework of cultural capital is used to explore and gain insight into the nature of the relationship between the school staff and parents in this study.

Included in this chapter is a review of literature which discusses the role of the parent in education and the role of the school in promoting parental involvement in education. In addition, this chapter includes a brief discussion on local and international legislation regarding parental involvement in education and the most effective model of parental involvement.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study utilised two frameworks, the concept of cultural capital and the ecological theory to understand the role of parental involvement in their children's education and how schools can enhance parental involvement.

### **2.2.1 The concept of cultural capital**

The concept of cultural capital is widely recognised as the work of Bourdieu who commonly used the term in his own educational research. De Graff, De Graff and Kraaykamp (2000) explain this theory as activities practiced by the dominant social class that provide an individual with the skills and socialization to succeed in an educational environment.

Lareau (1987) cited in Singh *et al* (2004) emphasise the importance of cultural capital within the context of education. Just as economic capital represents the power to purchase products; cultural capital for parents in terms of their children's education represents the power to promote their children's academic enhancement (Lee and Bowen, 2006). They maintain that the level of parents' involvement in their child's education vary according to the extent of their cultural capital. Parents, who have high levels of education, enforce educational home routines such as homework time and expose their children to educational resources such as books. Children of parents who do not possess cultural capital that is consistent with the culture of a school are likely to experience school as a hostile environment and are unfamiliar with educational activities. Feuerstein (2000) further explains that schools reproduce and represent middle or upper class values and forms of communication, a practice that may alienate parents who make up the working class. In addition, educators predominantly come from the middle and upper class and parents from these classes find it easier to communicate with educators.

Lareau and Weininger (2003) explain that cultural capital relates to parental involvement in education in the following ways:

- The amount of interaction parents have with other parents.
- Parents understanding of school processes.
- Amount of contact parents have with school personnel.
- Parents' communication skills.

According to Lee and Bowen (2006) parents who possess less cultural capital such as those who have low levels of education are likely to be less involved in the education of the children. They possibly have low levels of confidence and therefore may have problems communicating with teachers. In addition, it is likely that they lack knowledge about the school system and educational jargon.

The way parents view their role and involvement in the education of their children depends on the amount of cultural capital they possess (Bouakaz and Persson, 2007).

Wanda's (2007) study in rural South African communities revealed that 96% of the children who attended the school in which he conducted his study went home to illiterate parents. This was identified as one of the leading factors that prevented these parents from participating in the education of their children. According to Lareau and Weininger (2003) the ability to converse proficiently in English is viewed as a form of cultural capital since it is valued by educational institutions. Research conducted in London revealed that while they were concerned about the education of the children, Bangladeshi mothers living in London were unable to assist them in homework due to their lack of proficiency in English (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). Since they did not possess the cultural capital that was valued in the schools of their children, despite their efforts, these mothers were viewed as not being devoted to their children's education since their efforts did not meet teachers' standards of parental involvement.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is relevant in understanding the dynamics of parental participation especially in disadvantaged communities. Lareau and Shumar (1996) cited

in Majoribanks (2005) in discussing their observations of parent-teacher programs constructed to assist children's learning, they state that parents from different social and cultural contexts approach schools with quite diverse expectations and interpretations of what it means for them to be educationally helpful when interacting with their children. In addition, they suggest that the nature and intellectual quality of parent-teacher interactions might be affected quite significantly by teachers' perceptions of parents' backgrounds" (Majoribanks, 2005, p648).

The concept of cultural capital gives us significant insight in understanding the role schools can play in fostering parental involvement. Cultural capital influences parental participation in education and helps us understand the power relations that occur within a school. It can be argued based on the theory of cultural capital that parents who do not possess cultural capital that is consistent with the dominant culture of the school or school staff are not likely to participate in the education of their children. This study aims to explore the power relations that impact parental participation in schools by closely examining interactions and relationships between staff and parents.

### **2.2.2 Ecological Theory – The importance of the parent – school relationship**

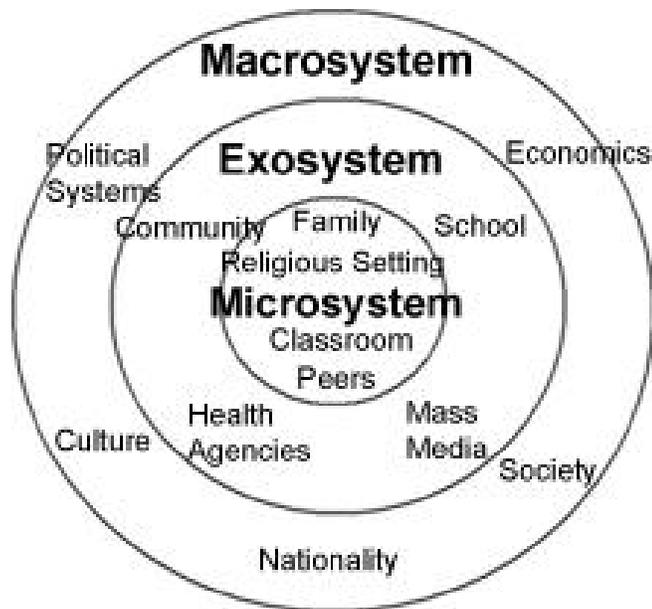
Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory focuses on the social contexts in which children live and the impact of the people that they know on their development. Santrock (2008) explains that the ecological theory comprises of five environmental systems that range from close interpersonal interactions to broader based influences such as culture.

- The microsystem comprises of family, the school, peers and other individuals that spend a significant amount of time with the child and have direct interactions with the child.
- The mesosystem comprises of linkages and interactions that occur within the microsystem.
- In the exosystems does not directly involve the child, but may influence, or be influenced by, the people who have close relationships the child in the Microsystems.
- “The macrosystem involves dominant social structures, as well as beliefs and values that influence and may be influenced by all other levels of system”. (Narain, 2005, p 18).
- The chronosystem involves the change or consistency over time which is not just restricted to the person but also the environment in which the person lives. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner clearly indicates that a child cannot function in isolation of the various systems mentioned above. Parents and the school are two vital components of the microsystem thus according to Lee and Bowen (2006) parent's educational involvement practices represent two central aspects of the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. They further maintain that “parent

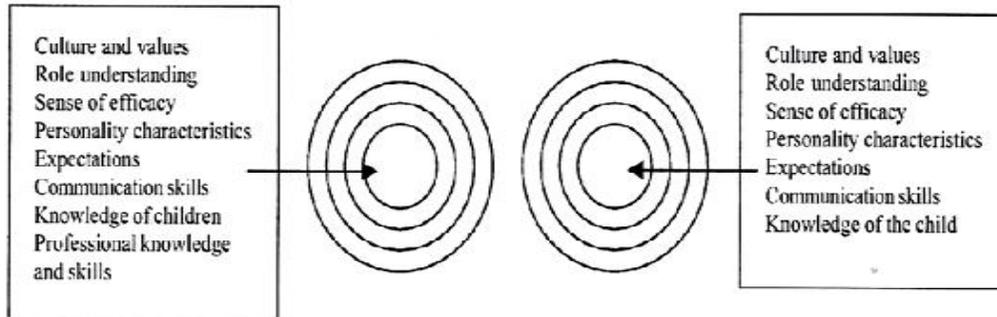
involvement at school promotes connections between adults in two of the child's primary Microsystems, the home and the school, and parental educational involvement at the home conveys congruence in the attitudes and behaviours governing these two Microsystems" (Lee and Bowen, 2006, p196). Individuals that make up the microsystem and the connections that they make in the mesosystem have a significant impact on key aspects of that child's life, one aspect being his/her education. Thus the relationship and connections that the home system builds with the school system are vital and influence the educational outcomes of a child to a large extent.

*Figure 1 - BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL THEORY*



(Source : [www.ksspaulding.wordpress.com](http://www.ksspaulding.wordpress.com) )

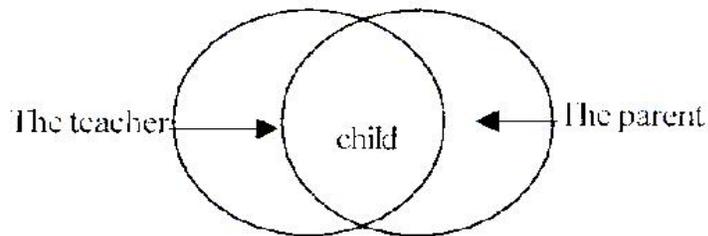
**Figure two**



Keyes (2000) makes an interesting integration of the parent – teacher relationship into the ecological theory. *Refer to figure 2.* The box on the left represents the educator and all the characteristics developed in the microsystem and the box on the right represents the parent and the characteristics developed in his/her microsystem. The next circle represents the mesosystem in which both adults interact within the school and bring with them their personal experiences. Lastly the exosystem and macrosystem, the two outer circles represent social influences, laws, customs and contexts and environments including the workplace. Keyes (2000) explains that this adaptation of Bronfenbrenners model helps us to view the educator and parents as people and assists us to understand the skill that is required to bridge the differences that exist between them to form a partnership.

Figure 3 represents the parent – educator relationship in relation to their common interest which is the child (Keyes,2000). Keyes explains that the way in which parents and educators come together for the benefit of their common interest which is the child, is influenced by the social factors represented in figure two, their interactions with the child and their feelings toward the child.

*Figure 3*



Parental involvement in education is conceptualized as part of a mesosystem, which comprises of interactions between two important Microsystems, the home and the school (El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal, 2010). The home and the school are both separate Microsystems that have independent influences on the child. However, together through a partnership they offer a unique influence that has significant benefits for the child. The ecological theory is used in this study to show the benefits for the child when a partnership is developed between the school and home microsystem.

## **2.3 THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

Reviewing relevant and accumulated knowledge surrounding a topic is an essential part of the research process (Neuman, 1991). According to Watson and Webster (2001, p13) “An effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, doses areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed”

Literature reviews require careful planning and should be presented in an organized manner. A clear purpose should be communicated as opposed to a mere summary of a list of studies conducted.

The four goals of a literature review according to Neuman are :

- To demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility
- To show the path of prior knowledge
- To integrate and summarise what is known in an area
- To learn from others and stimulate new ideas (1991, p111)

A literature review is based on the assumption that knowledge accumulates and that people learn from and build on what others have done (Neuman, 1991,p111).

Narain (2005) explains that a well organized and well presented literature review helps add to understanding the selected problem and puts it in historical perspective. In addition the review of relevant literature brings focus to a study (Patton , 1992).

Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) cited in Randolph (p2, 2009) state that a literature review plays a role in:

- Delimiting the research problem,
- Seeking new lines of inquiry,
- Avoiding fruitless approaches,
- Gaining methodological insights,
- Identifying recommendations for further research, and
- Seeking support for grounded theory.

### **2.3.1 Defining parental involvement in education**

Michael (2004) explains that parental involvement in education is difficult to define. However, a broad definition of parental involvement that includes a number of activities allows parents a variety of activities to get involved in. From an economist's perspective, parental involvement is defined as a direct effort provided by the parent to increase the educational outcomes of a child (Avvisati, Besbas and Guyon, 2010).

Many traditional definitions of parental involvement emphasise parents' participation in school related activities such as parent – teacher associations, fundraising activities and volunteering in the classroom (Squelch, 1994 cited in Majola, 2008). More recent definitions of parental involvement include parents' involvement in school related activities, in addition, these definitions recognise the importance of parental involvement in school related activities that occur in the home. These activities involve parents enquiring about their child's day at school, assisting with homework and providing children with a suitable environment to complete homework (Mbokodi, 2008).

A definition of parental involvement proposed by Squelch & Lemmer (1994,p93) describes the dual nature of parental involvement in education by including parents roles both in the home and school.

“It is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities, which may be educational or non-educational. It extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children’s homework at home. Parent involvement implies mutual co-operation, sharing and support”

### **2.3.2 Types of involvement**

Leading researcher in the field of parental involvement in education, Dr Joyce Epstein, professor of Sociology at the University of John Hopkins is also the director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network for Partnership Schools. She established the National Network of Partnership Schools which provides professional development to equip individual schools, school districts and state leaders to develop programmes to involve families and the community in education.

Epstein developed a framework which includes six types of parental involvement; her framework is widely used in parental involvement research (Michael, 2004). This framework of parental involvement comprises of six types of involvement, sample practices, possible challenges and expected results. An explanation of Epstein’s (2001) framework is discussed below:

- Parenting

According to Epstein (2001) schools should assist all families to establish a home environment to support children as learners. Ganzero (1999) explains that parents are responsible for providing children with an environment that supports learning. Schools should provide parents who are unable to provide an environment conducive to learning with support and guidance. Epstein (2001) suggests that schools provide parents with programmes to educate themselves, inform them on what constitutes a home condition that supports learning for each grade and implement family support with nutrition, health and other services. This according to Epstein (2001) instills positive qualities in the

child, improves attendance and behaviour. In addition, parents feel a sense of support from the school and educators gain respect for families' efforts, cultures and goals.

- Communicating

Epstein (2001) explains that schools need to design effective strategies for home – to – school and school – to – home communication to occur. Parents should be kept informed about school programmes and learner progress. Epstein's framework suggests that schools make use of language translators based on the home language of parents of the school. In addition, the school should provide parents with clear information on schools policies, programmes and changes. Parents should also be encouraged to pick up learners' report cards as this presents educators with an opportunity to discuss their children's progress and strategies to improve grades. Epstein (2001) states that when effective communication occurs parents show an understanding for school policies, programmes and an awareness of their roles as partners is heightened. This allows learners to make informed decisions about school programmes and policies. Effective communication between parents and schools also allows parents to gain an appreciation for parent network communications.

- Volunteering

Volunteering is an important form of parental involvement in education since it involves parents who are already eager and willing to assist the school (Jeynes, 2012). Epstein (2001) states that schools should send out an annual survey to identify the talents, skills and strengths of parents. In addition, schools should provide parents with various opportunities to volunteer, these opportunities should not be restricted to classroom activities. This allows for maximum parental involvement since some parents might feel intimidated due to insecurities stemming from their personal schooling experiences. Learners develop skills on how to communicate with adults and benefit by receiving targeted attention and tutoring by volunteers (Epstein, 2001). Volunteering in school

yields numerous benefits for parent volunteers. Parents who volunteer at school gain an understanding of the job of an educator. In addition, they experience increased levels of comfort at school. Parents also gain self-confidence, develop specific skills as a result of their volunteering and may take steps to improve their own education (Epstein, 2001).

- Learning at home

Many learners experience academic difficulties because they are unable to bridge the gap between their school and their home. According to Epstein (1995) parental involvement in homework activities result in the child viewing parents as more similar to teachers and home as more similar to school thus providing a link between the home and school environment. Schools should provide parents with information on homework policies, homework monitoring and the various skills required for all subjects at every grade level (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2001) also suggests that schools host family Math, Science and reading activities at school. Learners tend to complete their homework and develop a positive attitude towards their schoolwork when their parents get involved in the homework process (Epstein, 2001).

- Decision making

Providing parents with opportunities to make decisions in the running of a school gives them a sense of ownership of and belonging to the school their children attend. South African legislation requires schools to involve parents in the governance of schools through school governing bodies. Epstein (2001) advocates for the formation of bodies with parent representation not just at school level but district level as well. In addition, she states that committees and bodies that operate within individual schools should be linked in through a network. Schools should provide parents with the necessary information which will inform and empower them to be effective partners in school governance. Epstein (2001) identifies numerous benefits for the child, parent and school when parents are actively involved in decision making within the school. Learners become aware that their families are represented at school. Parents are provided with the

opportunity to have an input in school programmes and policies, they become aware of state policies and legislation and they are likely to share experiences and connections with other families in the school (Epstein, 2001). Despite the various benefits that parents have as decisions makers in school this form of parental involvement has often proved to be ineffective. In the South African context, many governing bodies do not function to their full potential, parents are reluctant to participate in school activities and perform the bare minimum when serving on school governing bodies (Mncube, 2009). A South African study aimed at exploring the perceptions of parents of their role in school governing bodies used both the quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The sample for the study comprised of four secondary schools in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the schools selected were chosen to reflect the race classification of apartheid. The study identified feelings of intimidation, the language barrier and lack of education as barriers that prevented parents from actively participating in school governance structures (Mncube, 2009).

- Collaborating with the community

According to Epstein (2001), schools need to identify and integrate resources from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development. This form of involvement is essential for building home-school partnerships. Schools should provide parents and families with information on health and try to provide social support. Schools should also attempt to form partnerships with businesses and organisations to provide parents and the communities they services with support. Schools and families should participate in activities together, activities can range from art related activities, music related activities, recycling and activities for senior citizens (Epstein, 2001).

### **2.3.3. The role of the parent in education**

Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that parents have a significant influence on the education of their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) although in some cases schools do not know what role the parent should play (Vandergrift and Greene, 1992). Research has revealed that parental involvement in education benefits various aspects of a child's schooling career (Hara and Burke, 1998; Narain, 2005; Gianzero, 1999; Oluwateture and Oloruntegbe, 2009; and Wanda, 2007).

#### *a) Academic achievement*

A significant area of interest regarding parental involvement is its impact on a child's academic achievement. There is a sizable amount of research on the topic of parental involvement in education which reveals that high levels of parental involvement in education have a direct impact on a child's level of academic achievement. Studies focusing on the involvement of parents in historically disadvantaged black schools reveal that parental involvement in education is necessary for learner success in the classroom (Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004). Similarly, research conducted amongst families of low socio-economic status in Nigeria found that children who come from poor and difficult communities are likely to experience academic success if they are able to develop resilience (Okafor, 2007). According to Okafor (2007), children who witness their parents getting involved in their education are more likely to develop resilience which contributes to academic success. Another African study revealed that learners who obtained higher marks in science subjects and displayed a positive attitude towards these subjects were usually those whose parents were actively involved in their learning (Oluwatelure and Oloruntegbe, 2010).

It is clear that children gain better scores and improve academic achievement when parents work hand in hand with the school (Mmotlane, Winnaar and Wa Kivilu, 2009, Deutscher, nd).

Hara and Burke (1998) conducted a study in which a parent involvement programme was set up in a local primary school. The programme was aimed at helping students, educators and parents form a partnership to improve student achievement. Parents were equipped with skills to help their children with their homework. In addition, they were taught techniques of reading to their children and creating a home learning environment. According to Hara and Burke (1998) those who gained the most from the programme of parental involvement were the students as they demonstrated improved academic achievement as well as significant improvements in students' reading and vocabulary levels

Studies have also shown that parental involvement has a positive impact on learners reading achievements in their early years of schooling (Saunders and Sheldon, 2009 cited in Erlendsdóttir,2010). The positive influence that parents have on their children's reading achievements is not only significant in children's early years of schooling but parental involvement has the same impact well into primary and secondary school (Saunders and Sheldon,2009 cited in Erlendsdóttir, 2010).

A qualitative study conducted in previously disadvantaged African schools examined the home environment and its impact on academic achievement (Madanda, 1997). A sample of five hundred Grade 10 learners who attended high schools across various districts in Kwa-Zulu Natal participated in the study. The study revealed that children who came from families whose parents are involved in their education process and school matters performed better in their academic work as compared to their counterparts. An average pass rate of 50% was obtained by learners who had parents that were actively involved as opposed to a pass rate of 36.1% obtained by learners who had parents that were not actively involved in their education (Madanda, 1997).

A South African study conducted by Mji and Makgato (2006) explored the factors that contributed to poor performance of high school learners in Mathematics and Physical Science. Data was collected using focus group and one-on-one structured interviews from Grade eleven pupils and educators purposively selected from seven schools with low pass

rates in Mathematics and Physical Science. The study identified low levels of parental involvement as a factor that contributed to learners' poor performance in these subjects (Mji and Magato, 2006).

*b) Student morale and motivation*

According to Hara and Burke (1998) student morale, motivation and attitude have almost as much impact on student achievement as cognitive development does. Parents play a vital role in shaping the attitude of their children and motivating them into adopting a positive attitude toward their education. Dempsey *et al.* (2001) also maintains that positive parent attitudes and parental involvement especially in homework tasks translate into the child adopting positive attitudes toward homework and learning at school. High levels of parental involvement translate to the child that the parent has a positive attitude toward his/her education. In addition, it gives the child the sense that school and academic activities are of importance if their parent has taken time to assist them with it or shows interest in it.

Parental involvement is a vital component in shaping learners' attitudes toward education. This is maintained by Wells (1996) cited in Singh *et al.* (2004) who states that parental involvement and education are linked due to the notion that learners tend to adopt their parents' ideology with regard to education. In addition to shaping their child's attitude toward education parents have the ability to motivate their children and contribute to keeping their morale high.

An ethnographic study conducted by Singh *et al.* (2004) in eight historically disadvantaged schools in South Africa involved the monitoring of learner participants' progress and a follow up study documented their achievement levels after they progressed to the next grade. The study found that parents who gave their children attention and spent time motivating them empowered their children. Learners who worked consistently with their parents in 2002 when the research was started were still performing well at the second stage of the research in 2003 even though some parents were no longer as involved due to the complexity of the subject matter as their children progressed to a

higher grade. The study revealed that parents who spent quality time with their children on a daily basis tend to be good motivators and this tends to empower their children to deal with schoolwork and work independently.

A quantitative study conducted by Oluwature and Oloruntegbe (2010) in Nigeria aimed to find out what influence parental involvement had on the attitude of learners towards science subjects, Chemistry and Biology. A sample of four hundred and eighty learners was randomly selected from ten schools. The study revealed that high levels of parental involvement resulted in students' developing positive attitudes towards Chemistry and Biology. Oluwature and Oloruntegbe's (2010) study revealed that learners' positive attitudes towards education translated into them achieving better results. The findings of the study are corroborated by Gianzero (1999) who states that parental involvement in a child's education has a strong correlation with that child adopting a positive attitude which increases his/her chances of academic success.

*c) Homework assistance and providing a suitable learning environment*

Parents are central to a child's education since they have the ability to enforce stable family routines which can include reading or homework time. In addition, parents are responsible for implementing family values and creating home environments that support learning which facilitate academic success (Gianzero, 1999)

Asmal (2000) cited in Smit & Liebenberg (2003) states that a child's education extends beyond school premises and school hours. The context in which the rest of their day is spent will have a fundamental impact on their official schooling. Many learners struggle academically since they are unable to bridge the gap between their school and home environment. Parental involvement in academic activities at home level cannot be emphasized enough. According to Epstein (1995) learning at home and parents involvement in homework activities are imperative since they result in the child improving skills, abilities and test scores linked to homework and class work activities. In addition, Epstein (1995) maintains parental involvement in homework activities

results in the child viewing parents as more similar to teachers and home as more similar to school thus providing a link between the home and school environment. This link is vital to children since it helps them develop a connection between their home environment and school environment.

Singh *et al* (2004) revealed that educators were highly frustrated about the lack of support on the part of many parents in terms of homework tasks that are given to their children. According to Singh *et al* (2004) in South Africa high levels of parental involvement at home are not a reality as seventy percent of the children in his study went home to parents who were unable to enrich their lives educationally which led to a high drop out rate. This presents learners with a huge problem since the learning that occurs at school is not reinforced in their homes.

However, while many parents may not be able to assist their children with the subject matter of the homework tasks providing moral and emotional support does play a significant role. A South African study revealed that while many parents were unable to keep up with the content that their children were expected to learn the attention and support given to them by their parents allowed them to still perform well and work independently through the higher grades (Singh *et al*, 200). Children who did not receive this attention and support at home were not empowered to work independently and experienced academic difficulties (Singh *et al*, 2004). The SoTE (1999) concurs with this adding that parents who monitor their children's homework promote academic achievement. However, it goes on to state that while parental involvement in education is important, parents need not know all the answers. It is important for them to demonstrate their interest by providing an environment conducive to learning and to encourage children's efforts (SoTE, 1999).

#### *d) Non academic benefits*

While research places much emphasis on the academic benefits that children gain from high levels of parental involvement in education parental involvement in education yields benefits in all facets of a child's education

- Attendance

According to Gianzero (1999) parental involvement in education has a positive impact on learner daily attendance. It stands to reason that learners who attend school on a regular basis are provided with more opportunities to learn. Research indicates that if parents are involved in their children's education and have formed a partnership with the school learner absenteeism levels are reduced. In addition learners are also less likely to truant if they are aware that their parents communicate with their educators on a regular basis or if their parents volunteer at school (Erlendsdóttir, 2010)

- Behaviour

Improved learner behaviour has also been identified as a benefit of parental involvement in education (Gianzero, 1999). A study conducted by Sheldon and Epstein (2010) used longitudinal data from elementary and secondary schools to explore the impact of family and community activities on discipline issues. The findings of the study revealed that the more family and community involvement activities were implemented by the school, the fewer learners were being referred to the principal, given detention or being suspended. It was found that activities that promoted parenting skills and parent volunteers were most effective in reducing percentages of students who were subject to discipline.

Efforts designed by an elementary school in California to reduce behaviour problems at school proved to be effective when parents were provided with opportunities to assist the school in solving discipline problems. Parents of children who were at risk of expulsion were required to attend regular meetings to help the school develop solutions to combat their children's bad behaviour. This collaborative approach was highly effective and was rated successful by both parents and educators (US DoE, nd). Parents were also provided with Parent Management Training, which was aimed at teaching them effective strategies to decrease their children's aggressive or disruptive behaviour.

#### *e) Other benefits of parental involvement*

According to Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) parental participation heightens children's social and interpersonal relations with all school mates and school personnel. An American study that explored the relationship between parental involvement and learners social development in the first, third and fifth grade, found that high levels of parental involvement had a significant positive impact on the way learners socialize in school (El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal, 2010). In addition, to improved socialization and attitudes of children toward those around them, Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) also maintain that parental participation in school activities elevates the cultural identity of their children within the school system.

### **2.3.4 South African Legislation**

The vital role played by parents in the education of their children was not recognized by South African education authorities until significant changes were made to the system of education after the first democratic election in 1994. These changes involved the transformation of the South African education system so it would embody the core values and principles of the South African constitution. These changes had significant implications for parental involvement in South African education.

The first significant change came in March 1995 with the release of the White Paper on Education and Training, titled Education and Training in democratic South Africa which stated that,

“The principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system, by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision- making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups and role players. This is the only guaranteed way to infuse new social energy into the institutional and structures of the education and training system, dispel the chronic alienation of large sectors of society from the

education process, and reduce the power of government administration to intervene where it should be” (Gezani, 2003, p30).

According to Gezani (2003), the White Paper gave consideration to both parental and communal involvement in education. Furthermore, it provided parents with an opportunity to formally involve themselves in their children’s education.

In 1996, shortly after the publication of the White Paper on Education and Training, the Department of Education released the White Paper on Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools. The focus of the White Paper was to cultivate institutional democratic management at school level. All stakeholders were expected to actively participate in encouraging tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision making (Mncube, 2009, p83).

The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 emanated from The White Paper on Organisation, Governance and Funding of schools. This new legislation significantly reformed the management and running of South African schools and gave new meaning to the concept on parental involvement in education. The South African Schools Act defines the concept of a parent; describes basic parental duties and sets requirements for schools related to parents' right to information (Lemmer and van Wyk, 2004, p261).

To develop effective partnerships between parents, communities and their schools, the South African Schools Act mandated the establishment of school governing bodies which were implemented in May 1997. This translated into parental participation extending from parents assisting with homework tasks and attending school functions to playing an active role in school governance. According to SASA (RSA, 1996, section 23) a school governing body should comprise of the school principal, elected educators, parents, and non- teaching staff. A requirement as set out by SASA was that the parental component makes up the majority of the membership of the governing body. “This majority was restricted to one more than the combined total of the other members of a governing body

who have voting rights” (Van Wyk, 2004, p 49). In addition, it was mandatory that a parent serve as the chairperson of the school governing body.

Legislation as mentioned above required parents to play an active role in education. Apart from legislation which requires parental participation in school governance structures, no formal programme has been designed or implemented by the South African Department of education to assist schools to encourage parental involvement in all facets of their children’s education.

### **2.3.5 International trends**

Encouraging parental involvement in education is a growing global trend. The vital role played by parents in the education of their children is being given more recognition as time progresses. This is evident in that many countries manage and regulate parental involvement in education through Government legislation.

The Department of Education of the United States of America allocated \$14 billion to assist over 56000 title one schools (schools that receive additional funding to meet the needs of students who are at risk of failing and students who come from low – income families) between the years 2010-2011 (Malburgh and Lorcher, 2011). Malburgh and Lorcher (2011) explain that title one schools originated from the Elementary and Secondary schools Act of 1965. A portion of the additional funding received by these schools must be utilised by the school to fund programmes and other school efforts to encourage parental involvement in education. Amendments to the Improving American Schools Act of 1994 required all title one schools, who wished to continue receiving this additional funding to implement programmes, activities and procedures for the involvement of parents in programmes. In addition, these activities had to be planned and implemented with the consultation of parents (DoPI, nd). The act also required school districts to design a written district wide plan on how parents would be involved in the education of their children. This plan was to inform title one schools’ within that district and assist them to design and implement a written school policy on parental involvement

which had to be complied in consultation with parents. Schools were also required to make provision for the distribution of their policy on parental involvement to all parents (DoPI, nd). The US department of education provided schools with detailed information brochures with guidance on how to design their policies on parental involvement, schools were also provided with sample policies which could be adapted according to the needs of individual schools. Legislation such as this requires schools to take significant steps toward encouraging and maintaining parental involvement in education.

European countries have also developed policies in favour of the promotion of parental involvement in education. The “Parents as Partners” conference organized under the British Presidency of the European Union on 26-27 February 1998 was aimed at providing schools with ways to get parents actively involved in the education of their children (Apostolopoulou and Kourdistou,1998). The conference included a presentation of a variety of strategies and methods that have been developed to encourage parental participation in education and to help school use their involvement to raise standards. Apostolopoulou and Kourdistou (1998) explain that in the case of Greece and many other European countries legislation led to the formation of the following bodies and committees to involve parents in education:

- National council of education

This body is made up of representatives from various ministries such as Education, Finance, Industry etc, religious groups, various municipalities and representatives from the Greek General Confederation of Parents. This body is responsible for recommendations made to the Government on issues of education policy for all levels of schooling

- Prefectural Council of Education

This council is made up of school counselors, the administrative directors of Primary and Secondary education and representatives of other association’s one of which is the Local Federation of Parents. This council is makes

recommendations on matters regarding local education such as school libraries, seminars for parents and establishing or closing schools.

- Municipal Committee of Education

Each municipality is required to form a committee of education. The Mayor, a headmaster of a local primary school, a headmaster of a local secondary school and representation from the Parents Union form the membership of this committee. This committee is responsible for making recommendations to the Mayor on issues of local education namely effective organising and functioning of schools.

- School Council

Every state school is required to establish a school council comprising of all members of teaching staff and all members of the Board of Parents Association and learners. This body develops strategies to establish ways of mutual communication between teachers and parents and the sanitary condition of the schools and learners.

- School Committee

A school committee comprises of the head teacher, a representative of the municipality, a representative of the Parents Association of the school and a learners representative. Each state school is required to have a school committee and their role function is to manage financial expenses of the school.

- Parent Organisation

All parents of children who attend state public schools compose one parents association. Parents who wish to participate in any of the councils or committee discussed above are required to belong to the parent association. The selection of the representatives of parents to the above councils and bodies takes place in a general meeting of all members of the association of each school. The vote is done by secret ballot. The parent association of the schools of a particular

municipality form themselves into a Parents Union, in which each parent association is represented by at least one member. The Federation of Parents is represented by at least one member.

### **2.3.6 The role of the school**

South African legislation requires parents to actively participate in the education of their children. However, initiatives by the Department of Education to promote participation in various forms are absent (Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004). In addition, departmental funds and incentives to support parental involvement in schools are non-existent (Nardine and Morris, 1991). According to Heystek and Louw (1999) cited in Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) communiqués from the Department emphasize the responsibility of parents and their role in governance as mandated in the South African Schools Act, however, the initiative to encourage, promote and manage parental support at home and in school still remains the responsibility of individual schools.

While Department support is restricted to policy and lacking in practice, parental involvement in education is an essential asset to schools, therefore school leadership and policy makers should be concerned with identifying factors within a school that are associated with parental involvement. School leadership and staff have significant influence on the level of parental involvement within a school. (Feuerstein, 2000). In addition, schools have the ability to teach parents how to support their children's learning in the home environment (Rismati, 2001). Therefore, school staff should be trained on how to communicate with parents and encourage parental involvement in schools (Lemmer, 2007).

According to studies conducted by the Department of Education of the state of Texas (1999), the manner in which schools encourage parental involvement has more influence on levels of involvement than other factors such as marital status, socio – economic status, income and family size. Michael (2004) explains that schools need to realise that involving parents in education should be part of the school mission. He further states that

school staff and managers should be trained to understand this important mission and should develop strategies to achieve its goals.

*a) School climate and environment*

Moore and Lasky (2001) identify institutional and organizational barriers as one of the obstacles to high levels of parental involvement in education. A schools climate that does not make families feel welcomed, respected, needed and valued risks alienating parents. (Gianzero, 1999). An ethnographic study conducted in eight South African schools by Singh *et al.* (2004) clearly illustrates this point as it revealed that sixty eight percent of the parent participants stated that they felt that schools were unwelcoming and did not possess an open environment to parents. In addition, parents felt that schools did not do enough to involve them in school matters. Similar findings were revealed in a study conducted in two schools in the Southern Cape district of the Western Cape, when questioned on the climate of the school, 35 out of 40 parents participants felt that it was unfriendly and unwelcoming, while 25 out of 30 educator participants felt that the school climate was friendly towards parents (Majola, 2001).

*b) School staff*

In addition to the school's climate and environment, school staff also has considerable influence on parental involvement within a school. Studies conducted in the United States of America revealed that the manner in which schools encourage parental participation is more influential than family attributes such as marital status, family size, level of parents' education, student grade level, or even socioeconomic status in predicting whether parents get involved (SoTE, 1999). In addition, parent involvement increases when the administration and staff of a school communicate a genuine desire to involve parents by considering their needs (Epstein and Dauber, 1993). Educator perceptions and attitudes toward parents may encourage or impede parental involvement in education (Gianzero, 1999). Studies have revealed that educators are reluctant to allow parents to assume decision making roles and school governance because it feels as

an intrusion on their domain and they are seen as over stepping their boundaries (Gianzero, 1999, Grant-Lewis and Naidoo, 2004).

A lack of understanding on the part of school staff of the realities of communities within the context of poverty, as in the case in South Africa, force parents to detract from getting actively involved in the education of their children. A study conducted in disadvantaged urban communities in the Western Cape province revealed that parents felt that the school staff were out of touch with the realities of their communities and therefore placed unrealistic demands on them as parents (Smit and Liebenberg, 2003).

Research conducted in formally disadvantaged Black schools revealed that 70% of educator participants blamed parents' ignorance for the lack of success at that school. In addition they expressed that parents expected too much of them as educators. However, parent parent participants felt that the school did not involve them in school practices. (Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004).

Another barrier revealed by Gianzero (1999) is that many parents are reluctant to actively participate in their children's education as a result of their own feelings of inadequacy due to their poor educational skills. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fullham (1998) cited by Moore and Lasky (2001) state that some parents might isolate themselves from their children's school and teachers because of their own negatives educational experiences.

An authentic partnership between schools and parents requires a significant change in educator attitudes and practices (Mestry and Grobler, 2007). According to Mestry and Grobler (2007) school seldom provide teachers with training to collaborate with parents or understand the varieties of modern families. In addition, they state that teacher education on parental involvement can assist educators in changing their traditional perception of parental involvement which is limited to participation in fundraising and school governance. A qualitative South African study involving an enquiry into the practices of educators who were enrolled into a long distance education course on parental involvement revealed that these educators developed confidence and became

eager to work with parents, parents were no longer seen as an interference. This also resulted in parents feeling welcomed and valued by school staff (Mestry and Grobler, 2007).

*c) Managing parental involvement in education*

One of the key functions of school management teams is to involve parents in the education of their children (Naidoo, 1999). According to Michael (2004) long term planning, short term planning and various management tasks are necessary for effective and active parental involvement to take place. School managers should set aims regarding parental involvement and establish how these aims will be met. Parental involvement strategies and programmes should be designed by school managers with the following management activities in mind (Michael, 2004):

- Planning

Planning is an integral function of every school management team. Badenhorst (1988) as cited in Michael (2004) suggests that the following guidelines be followed when school managers plan:

- Planning is usually geared to change;
- Aspects of planning should be related;
- Policy determines parameters of planning;
- Aspects of planning should be related;
- Planning should not be rigid;
- Human limitations should be taken into account when planning;
- Planning is essential;
- Routine planning – not all planning is geared to change;

- Organisation

Michael (2004) explains that in order to achieve the goals and fulfill plans set out by school management regarding parental involvement in education, organisation needs to take place. Facilitating the process of organizing parental involvement should entail school management deciding on how parental involvement activities will be done, how the work will be divided, how communication will take place, what resources will be utilized and the time frame that things should be completed in.

- Providing guidance

Parents require guidance so that they are empowered to participate in school activities. Many parents have a desire to get involved but they are unable to empower themselves concerning school issues (Majola, 2008). Michael (2004) identifies providing guidance in the home-school relationship as part of managing parental involvement in education.

- Supervision and evaluation

Supervision and evaluation is necessary for effective management. Without these management functions the success of plans and the realization of plans may not be achieved (Michael, 2004). Parental involvement tasks and initiatives require management supervision and constant evaluation. These practices allow for improvement of strategies that are ineffective and implementing changes when necessary.

The principal, according to Rismati (2001) should adopt a democratic leadership approach which fosters a positive school climate in which open communication between the school, parents and learners can occur. Pearson (1998) cited in Michael (2004) explains that the challenge of ensuring effective parental involvement lies with the principal who should facilitate the extent of parental involvement in his/her school. Principals should be equipped to guide their staff to develop effective parental

involvement programmes and classroom practices that inform parents and involve them in their child's education (Michael, 2004). However, according to Squelch and Lemmer (1994) while the principal is the most important leader at school he/she is not solely responsible for the improvement of the school and should be supported by other managers and school staff.

Mills and Gale (2002) cited in Majola (2006) state that educators and school administrators need to teach parents how to become active participants. When parents do not attend school programmes, schools need to make enquiries as to why they did not come should be made to ensure their absence was not due to intimidation by the school and its policies.

They further maintain that when it comes to parents schools should do the following:

- Teach them how to be actively involved without scaring them away
  - Make it easy for them so that they feel comfortable to do things and practice what they've taught them
  - Listen to all regardless of the background of people
  - Treat them the same and accept them equally
  - Give them chances to make decisions and to share knowledge with educators
- (Mills and Gale, 2002 cited in Majola, 2006).

#### *d) School policy on parental involvement*

A school policy on parental involvement is necessary to assist school staff and parents understand their role and the expectations placed on them concerning parental involvement in school. Boyer (1991) explains that a well structured policy on parental involvement assists in building a strong partnership between the school and the home. The importance of a policy to guide and manage parental involvement in schools was recognized by the Department of Public Instruction in the United States of America. This

led to the Department of Public Instruction requiring all title one schools to design and implement a district and school policy on parental involvement. According to the requirements outlined by the DPI, school policy should cover issues such as:

- What the school staff will do to support parent involvement
- Parents' rights and responsibilities
- How school staff will communicate with parents
- The school procedure for complaints and other concerns

(DPI, nd)

In addition, when designing a policy of parental involvement it was stipulated parents be given an equal opportunity to express their ideas in the creation of the policy and not be merely presented with the final product. Parents should be asked to evaluate the policy based on its effectiveness. The policy should also be evaluated and updated. It is also imperative that the policy be distributed to all relevant stakeholders (DPI, nd). A written school policy is essential in managing and promoting parental involvement in schools (Maphanga, 2006) and the lack of such a policy is indicative of inadequate leadership.

#### *e) Home - school communication*

Effective communication between the school and the home is vital in developing a partnership. Mestry and Grobler (2007) identify collaboration and communication within the partnership model of parental involvement as an effective strategy for parent – school relations. They suggest that educators should be provided with in service training on how to communicate with parents both verbally and in writing. Williams and Chavkin (1989) identify two way communication as a key element of a successful parental involvement programme. Majola (2006) explains that good communication is not merely the sending and receiving of information, neither is it a simple process of data exchange. Effective communication forces the recipient to both listen and act. In addition, when communication between the school and home is effective it results in a healthy working

atmosphere for parent – teacher collaboration, parent co – operation increases and problem solving improves (Majola, 2006).

According to Mestry and Grobler (2007) effective communication skills and processes are a necessity in schools that reflect the multicultural South African society. They identify the language barrier as a significant obstacle to parental involvement in schools such as these. They recommend the following be tried to overcome this barrier (Mestry and Grobler, 2007):

- Schools should invite parents who are proficient in more than one language spoken by parents in that school to act as translators and interpreters.
- Translators should be used at all parent – school meetings.
- School prospectus, newsletters and other forms of written communications should also be translated to ensure that effective communication is taking place and that this information can be accessed by all parents.

When school staff communicate issues concerning their children with parents, it is imperative to keep in mind that emphasizing the “bad news” is not effective in promoting parental involvement. Providing parents with “good news” will help lessen the impact of bad news. School staff should bear in mind that every message parents receive that criticizes their child is one more failure, one more bad experience and one more reason to stay away from the school and school personnel (Comer and Haynes, 1991).

It is also imperative that parents recognize that communication should occur not only from the school to the home but also from the home to the school. A qualitative study conducted in ten African primary schools revealed that educators felt that parents failed to communicate important information that would have an impact on a child’s performance in the classroom. They identified issues such as the child’s health and family grief as vital information which parents did not communicate (Chindanya, 2011).

### **2.3.7 A parent – school partnership**

Bauer and Shea (2003) cited in Mestry and Grobler (2007) categorise parental involvement into four basic models. (Mestry and Grobler, 2007).

- The first model is called the protective model, in this model the goal is to reduce conflict between parents and educators. This is done by identifying the roles of both parties by separating their functions. There is little collaboration and communication and parents delegate the education of their child to the school.
- The second model involves home-school transmission, in which the school enlists parents in supporting the activities and aims of the school.
- The third model is based on curriculum enrichment. The goal of this model is to expand and develop the schools curriculum by incorporating the contributions of parents. In this model parents and educators work collaboratively to achieve curriculum objectives.
- The last model is one of true collaboration and is based on a parent-educator partnership. In this model parents and educators work collaboratively to achieve a common goal and to accomplish success for all learners. This partnership is based on collegiality and mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and the school.

Epstein (1995) states that a model of parental involvement that promotes a partnership between parents and schools is most effective. The family and school, as the ecological theory already discussed suggests, are two major systems that both have significant impact on the development and socialization of children. Therefore linking these two spheres in a true partnership would be a model of parental involvement that would be the

most beneficial to a child's education. Leading researcher in the field of parental involvement, Dr Joyce Epstein refers to the school, family and the community as overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein's (1995) partnership model comprises of six types of parental involvement, each type of parental involvement is accompanied by sample practices that parents could participate in. In addition, each type of parental involvement consists of specific desired outcomes that benefit the child, parent and the educators.

### *Benefits of parent school partnerships*

Epstein (1995) explains that partnerships between schools and parents can improve school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership and connects families in other schools. However, the central benefit to school-parent partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and throughout life. Mmotlane *et al.* (2009) assert that true parental participation in education denotes that parents are active partners with their child's school rather than passive recipients. Research findings presented by Henderson and Berla (1997) cited in Gianzero (1999) conclude that parental involvement programmes that resemble true partnerships in which parents are not restricted to certain school activities but are an integral part of all parts of school life including decision making are programmes that raise student outcomes.

According to Naftchi –Ardebili (1995) cited in Moore and Lasky (2001) true partnerships emphasize three common themes. Firstly, the provision of success for all children. Secondly, serving children's emotional, psychological, physical and academic needs and lastly, sharing responsibility to promote children's growth.

### **2.3.8 Parental involvement programmes**

An effective way of encouraging parental involvement in the process of educating their children and developing a parent – school partnership is for schools to design and implement a parental involvement programme (Becher, 1986). Parents involved in educational programmes such as these develop positive attitudes about themselves, increase self confidence and often enroll in programmes to enhance their personal development. In addition, they develop a positive attitude about school and school staff. (Becher, 1986). This in turn helps them gain confidence about their contribution to the education of their children and has a positive impact of the levels of parental involvement within a school.

A meta-analysis of fifty one studies conducted by Jeynes (2012) aimed to find a relationship between parental involvement programmes and academic achievement. Results of the study found that parental involvement programmes had a significantly positive effect on learners academic achievement (Jeynes, 2012).

Increased levels of parental involvement ultimately benefit the learner academically (Mmotlane *et al*, 2009, Deutscher, nd, Singh *et al*, 2004). Other benefits include improved learner attendance, learner behavior and learners adopting a positive attitude towards learning (Gianzero, 1999).

According to Becher (2001) successful programmes designed by schools to involve parents should emphasize the contributions that parents already make to their child's education and development and assist parents identify the skills they can share. In addition, it should provide parents with opportunities to share important information about their children with educators. Successful programmes recognise that most parents have good intentions and want to get involved, however they might not always know how too.

Becher (2001) states that schools should consider the specific guidelines when implementing a school programme to get parents actively involved. He states that schools should match goals, purposes and activities and realistically consider the skills and resources of staff. In addition, they should recognise that parents skills vary and respond to the various needs of parents with flexible and creative programmes. Communicating roles, responsibilities, expectations and involving parents in decision making should also be emphasized. Lastly, schools should expect problems but emphasize solutions.

Every school is unique and the context of a school varies from one school to another. School managers and staff must determine the most effective way to plan and manage parental involvement in their school. While Williams and Chavkin (1989) explain that there is no perfect parental involvement programme to be used in all schools, they suggest seven key elements, as explained below, that should form the core of parental involvement programmes.

- A written policy: This specifies the areas in which parents can get involved as well as the duties and powers of parents and school staff.
- Administrative support: This refers to resources such as staff and funds which should be made available to carry out and maintain parental involvement programmes.
- Training: This refers to ongoing training that staff should receive so they are effectively equipped to promote and maintain parental involvement. Michael (2004) states that many principals are still not trained to understand, design or implement productive connections with parents. Therefore they are not equipped to guide or lead their staff to implement parental involvement programmes.

- Partnership approach: If parents and school staff adopt this approach or model regarding curriculum, extra curricular and management issues then an attitude of ownership of the school and a sense of belonging is developed.
- Two way communication: Parents and school staff should be communicating on a regular basis. Communication can take many forms. The school is to ensure that the methods of communication used are assessable by all parents.
- Liaison: Schools should liaise with other schools and discuss parental involvement programmes.
- Evaluation: Continuous evaluation should be practiced to ensure that parental involvement programmes are running effectively.

According to William and Chavkin (1989) parental involvement programmes that comprise of these key features are likely to increase levels of parental involvement in schools which would positively impact learners' academic performance.

A study conducted by Comer and Haynes (1991), involved researchers designing and implementing a parental involvement programme in two American elementary schools located in low-income neighborhoods. The parental involvement programme designed included three levels of parental involvement:

***Level three:*** This level included opportunities for parents to involve themselves in school programmes and activities. Schools organized programme such a Christmas programme and a father's breakfast to encourage the involvement of males in the education of their children. Schools approached local churches to assist; church ministers were enlisted by schools to help encourage parental involvement in school programmes. A significant improvement in parental involvement at this level was noticed.

**Level two:** This level included parental involvement in day to day school and classroom activities. Parents who were already involved were encouraged to invite a friend from the community. Parents were not given menial tasks to complete. Rather, their input was valued and welcomed. Community leaders were used to motivate parents. Comer and Haynes (1991) listed crucial points that schools should take cognizance of when involving parents at this level:

1. Before inviting parents to serve in schools school staff should be consulted.
  - This allows staff members to have an input in the process of inviting parents to school. Consulting staff encourages their co-operation.
2. Be sure that the organisation of the school and the school climate is developed to accommodate parents.
  - School climate and policies have a direct impact of the level of parental involvement in schools.
3. Carefully screen and train parents.
  - The best interest of all learners should always be a priority to schools. It is imperative that parents who volunteer are carefully screened and trained.
4. Involve staff in the orientation of parents.
  - Involving staff in the orientation of parents allows them the opportunity to build relationships in the initial stages of involvement.
5. Have clearly defined roles activities for parents to avoid confusion and conflict.
  - Clearly defined roles are necessary for parents and school staff to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
6. Safeguard confidentiality of parents, learners and educators.
  - Confidentiality is imperative for building relationships based on trust and respect.
7. Design evaluation mechanisms and provide parents with feedback.
  - Providing parents with feedback present them with an opportunity to reflect on their practices and revise them if the need arises.

**Level one:** This level of involvement is sensitive and crucial according to Comer and Haynes (1991). A small group of parents were elected to represent parents on the School Planning and Management Team. This is a crucial form of participation. Comer and Haynes (1991) explained that in schools in which educators do not live in the area within which the school is located parent representation on the School Planning and Management Team is essential. They further explain that these parents will be able to bring an understanding of the needs and experiences of their children and the community which will inform school plans and policies. Parents provide a natural link between the school and the community in which the school is located in.

The parental involvement programme designed and implemented in the study proved to be effective since it included three levels of involvement with tasks and responsibilities. Each level enabled parents to get involved according to what was comfortable for them. A clear purpose and direction was identified and parents were involved in meaningful activities (Comer and Haynes, 1991). This programme allowed for the involvement of a large percentage of parents, including parents from stressful family and community conditions (Comer and Haynes, 1991).

While parental involvement programmes have proved to be effective in increasing levels of parental involvement in education. Goodson (1991) argues that once levels of parental involvement have been increased by such programmes it is imperative that these levels of involvement are sustained. A qualitative study reviewed seventeen parental involvement programmes using interviews and case studies. The study aimed to provide detailed information regarding the operation of the programmes. The study found that the programmes that were able to not only encourage parental involvement but also sustain these levels of involvement had the following characteristics in common:

- Direct benefits for parents: While the ultimate beneficiaries of parental involvement are the children, all parental involvement programmes that were able

to sustain high levels of parental involvement provided direct benefits for parents as well. These programmes served as a resource for them as individuals.

- Multiple types of participation: Successful programmes accommodated a variety of parents' skills. This included group process, interpersonal literacy and language skills. The programmes also allowed for parents to move between various forms of parental participation.
- Flexibility in programme operation: A key characteristic of programmes that were able to sustain parental involvement was the ability to accommodate the demands placed on families by offering parents flexibility in scheduling, location, programme activities and participation.
- Techniques to create bonds among parents and with the programme: In an attempt to help parents overcome feelings of isolation, powerlessness and negative feelings about school experiences which is often a characteristic of disadvantaged families, programmes used a variety of techniques to assist parents identify with the programme and to see themselves as part of the group.
- Activities focused on realistic objectives: Programmes that were able to sustain levels of parental involvement designed activities in which parents and children were able to see some form of immediate benefit. This encouraged parents to continue their involvement.
- Activities for children that build their enthusiasm: Successful programmes were able to create enthusiasm among children which helped sustain their parents' participation.

These characteristics should be considered by school staff and management when designing parental involvement programmes and other strategies to improve levels of parental involvement. The characteristics discussed above were successful not only

increasing levels of parental involvement but also sustaining these levels over time (Goodson, 1991). This is imperative since it suggests that parental involvement in these parental involvement programmes built a lasting partnership with schools.

## **2.4 Summary**

A review of the literature on parental involvement has shown the following:

- Parents play a crucial role in the lives of their children and their involvement in the education of their children yields a number of benefits for the child, school and the parent.
- Although a number of personal characteristics influence levels of parental involvement, according to literature school personal, school policies and practices also play a significant role in promoting or impeding parental involvement in education.
- A partnership between the school and parents encourages parental involvement in the running of the school and the education of their children. True partnerships involve schools offering parents support and providing them with opportunities to collaborate on the running of the school.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Aim of the chapter**

This chapter focuses on a description of the research methodology used in this study. The research design includes a description of the procedure followed “when” collecting data, “who” the data was collected from and the methods used to collect the data. Ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also included.

The “research design is the plan of how the researcher will systematically collect and analyse the data that is needed to answer the research question. “It is the designed and planned nature of observation that distinguishes research from other forms of observations” (Bertram, 2003, p 35).

This study aimed to explore the role of the school in parental involvement in education and sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What role do educators and school management play in promoting parental participation?
2. What support structures are implemented by this school to help parents overcome barriers to their participation?
3. What do parents understand to be their role in education and what do they think are the benefits of such participation?

### **3.2 Research site**

This study was conducted in a public primary school located in Mariannhill, Pinetown. The school serves as the educational institution for over one thousand learners. The school has a staff compliment of 31 members: twenty three state paid level one educators, seven staff members who make up the school management team and one computer/library educator who is employed by the school governing body. Most of the learners are English second language speakers. This is also true of most parents hence they do not have a very good command of the English language. The Department of Education's quintile school rating system which ranges from quintile 1, being the poorest, to quintile 5, being the least poor has rated this school with a quintile level 2. This rating is based on the high levels of unemployment, low levels of literacy and low income levels in the community within which the school is located, according to National census statistics (Kunjee and Chudgar, 2009). A quintile rating of two speaks volumes about the area within which this school is located. Most learners come from single parent or grandparent headed homes. A high percentage of the parents do not have a high level of education.

Levels of parental involvement vary considerably within the school. There are a small percentage of parents who show an interest in the education of their children, they attend parents meetings, assist their children with homework and attend school functions. However, most of the parents at the school show very little interest in their children's education or the programmes of the school. Parent meetings have extremely low attendance levels. Parent volunteers are used at school, however, their participation is restricted to classroom based activities and the number of volunteers decreases significantly as children progress to higher grades. The school has a school governing body as mandated by the South Africans Schools Act. However, the school has not reached quorum at the school governing body elections in the past ten years.

### **3.3 Research design**

Research, according to Powers and Knapp (1995) cited in Higgs, Horsfall and Grace (2009), “is a systematic process of investigation, the general purpose of which is to contribute to the body of knowledge that shapes and guides academic and/or practice discipline”. Creswell (2003) explains that a research problem is an issue or concern that needs to be addressed and the most appropriate research approach should be selected. According to Hussey and Hussey (1997,p114), in the research design “the researcher is concerned with why they collect certain data, what data they will collect, where and how they will collect it, and how they will analyse the data in order to answer the research question”

This research study adopted a qualitative research approach. The school was selected through purposive sampling and data was collected from parents, educators and school management with the use of semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were analysed and the data gathered was used as a spring board to conduct interviews. Interviews were conducted and transcribed. The information gathered was thereafter analysed. This research process will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

#### **Qualitative approach**

This qualitative research approach was the approach selected to address the research problem in this study. Higgs *et al.* (2009, p5) state that while the term qualitative research has no simple definition, “it refers to a range of research strategies with one common feature: they rely upon qualitative (non – mathematical) judgments”. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) cited in Higgs et al (2009, p5) identify five major assumptions concerning the construction of knowledge in qualitative research:

- There are multiple constructed realities. Different people have different perceptions of reality through their attribution of meaning.
- The process of inquiry changes both the investigator and the participant.

- Knowledge is both context and time dependant.
- It is more useful to describe and interpret events then control them to establish cause and effect.
- Inquiry is value bound. Values appear, for instance, in how questions are asked and how results are interpreted.

According to Bogdan and Bilken (1982) qualitative research has five key features.

- *Naturalistic*: qualitative researchers aim to know where, when and how situations have come into being. Each word or gesture is of significance to the qualitative researcher. The qualitative researcher believes that actions can be better understood if they are observed in the setting that they usually occur in.
- *Descriptive data*: data collected by qualitative researchers takes the form of pictures or words as oppose to numbers. The descriptive data usually contains direct quotes from participants which is used to illustrate and substantiate findings. Nothing is taken for granted by the qualitative researcher gestures, response time, body language and jokes are all apart of the data collection and can be used to enrich the data. This world is approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial. Everything has the potential to be a clue that may unlock a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of what is being studied (Patton, 1990).
- *Concern with process*: qualitative researchers are more concerned with the process that simply the outcomes. For qualitative researchers is education the process is beneficial in clarifying the “self – fulfilling prophecy”. The researcher attempts to penetrate the layers of meaning to uncover and identify the various ranges and depths of situations and perspectives that apply under the area in study. In addition, the qualitative researcher does not merely seek knowledge for the sake of seeking knowledge, rather the researcher seeks knowledge to find meaning.

- *Inductive*: qualitative researchers analyse the data they collect inductively. They do not set out to find something specific neither do they set out to disprove a hypothesis made at the beginning of their study. Theories do not come from “top down” rather they are from “bottom up”. The qualitative researcher’s theory is grounded in the data. Things are more open in the beginning and specific in the bottom.
- *Meaning*: participant perspective, focus questions such as: What assumptions do people make about their lives? What do they take for granted? The researcher shows the data in the form of transcripts and recorded material to the respondent to make sure that the researcher’s interpretation of what the respondent said was a true reflection of what was interpreted.

The selected approach was viewed as most appropriate since this study aimed to gather data that is not statistical or experimental in nature, rather, it aimed to collect data that included in-depth descriptions of rich experiences and views of all participants. Narain (2005) describes qualitative research as an approach to research that emphasizes words as opposed to quantification in the collection and analysis of data. In addition, the study aimed to explore the nature of the relationships between parents and school staff.

This study is situated within the interpretive paradigm since it did not aim to predict what participants will do, rather it aimed to explore and investigate how school staff relate and interact with parents. Interpretivists aim to understand, they acknowledge that the truth is not out there waiting to be found, rather it is discovered through the interpretation of data (Bertram, 2003).

### **3.3.1 Research style**

#### **The case study**

The case study research style was selected for this study. Baxter and Jack (2008) claim that case study approach should be used when:

- The focus of the study is to provide the answers to “how” and “when” questions.
- When the behaviour of the participants in the study cannot be manipulated.
- When contextual conditions want to be covered because they are relevant to the study.

Bertram (2003) explains that case studies are often used by researchers in the interpretivist paradigm since its aims to capture the reality of lived experiences and thoughts of the participants. According to Baxter and Jack (2008, p544),

“The qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood”

Tellis (2007) states that case studies are multi-perspective analyses, this he explains, means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. Hence, this research style was appropriate for this study since the researcher aimed to conduct an in-depth study of the school selected. In addition, the study aimed to explore the participants’ experiences of parental participation in this particular school and the interactions between parents and educators. Case studies are useful for such an exploration (Tellis, 2007).

### **3.3.2 Data collection**

The data collected for this study was done by means of both semi – structured questionnaires and semi – structured interviews. Multiple data collection instruments were used in this study in an attempt to triangulate the data collected to achieve consistency. Patton (2002) explains that a common misunderstanding about triangulation is that its aim is to produce similar data with different data sources. However, different kinds of data collection may yield different results because” different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real – world nuances” (Patton, 2002, p248).

The term triangulation originates from field of land surveying and refers to the combination of methods within a study (Patton, 2002). Combining approaches and methods within a study strengthens the study.

Data triangulation refers to the use of various data sources in a study. Patton (2002) explains that triangulation within a qualitative study can be effectively achieved by combining data collection methods.

Two educators and two school managers were interviewed at the school within which the study was located. In addition, questionnaires were administered to parents, school managers and educators. Ten parents, four educators and two managers returned questionnaires which were then used for analysis.

#### **3.3.2.1 The Questionnaire**

Bertram (2003, p57) defines a questionnaire as a list of questions which the respondents answer. They take the form of either a structured questionnaire comprising of close ended questions or semi – structured questionnaire comprising of open ended questions or a combination of both.

While questionnaires are not a popular method of data collection in qualitative research, they are useful in collecting information from a sample that cannot be reached through a personal interview (Woods, 2006).

This data collection tool was selected for the following reasons:

- To gather data from parents who do not visit the school and therefore could not be interviewed.
- Parents and school staff could complete the questionnaire in a location of their choice and at their convenience.
- Parents that answered the questionnaire would not feel intimidated by the presence of the researcher since she is an educator in the school within which the study was conducted.

The semi – structured questionnaires comprised of both open and close ended questions. The close ended questions provided respondents with options from which they could choose. In addition, the questionnaires comprised of open ended questions. These questions provided respondents with the flexibility to respond freely. The researcher found it necessary to include such questions since it is likely that they would yield data that would not have been obtained through close ended questions that restricted responses. Questionnaires were designed to be quick and simple to complete. This was necessary since many parent participants were second language English speakers.

Questionnaires were administered to 30 parents from these, 22 were returned. 12 of the 22 returned questionnaires were not completed correctly and could not be used. Hence 10 questionnaires were analysed.

## **Construction of the questionnaire**

Hague (1993) states that specific guidelines should be followed when constructing a questionnaire to ensure that it is effective. The questionnaires used in this study were constructed by following the guidelines proposed by Hague (1993,p32):

All questions in the questionnaire were carefully phrased to ensure that they did not lead the respondent to a particular response. Questions were kept short and simple. The researcher was aware that parent respondents were second language English speakers. In addition, individual questions did not include multiple ideas or multiple responses. Questions were also specific so respondents would have a clear idea about what the researcher was asking. No jargon or shorthand was used. The researchers had to assume assumptions about parents or educators knowledge when constructing the questionnaire. Therefore no jargon or abbreviations were used. The researchers acknowledged that while some jargon or abbreviations might be common knowledge among other researchers in the field, this is likely not to be the case with respondents in the study.

The researcher ensured that simple language was used in the construction of the questions. The researcher acknowledged that elaborate language was unnecessary and was likely to confuse the respondents. This would in turn result in the questionnaires yielding data that was not useful to the study. Words such as these are not specific enough and often require qualifying. Therefore they were avoided in the construction of the questionnaires.

Questions posed in the negative form are often confusing. This was taken into consideration and questions were carefully phrased to avoid this. Hypothetical questions were not included in the questionnaire. Questions such as these require answers of incidents or situations that have not already occurred. Hence, the respondent would have to answer based on an imaginary situation, the researcher acknowledged that information such as this would not necessarily be reliable.

Hague (1993) explains that questions which ask women about their age or companies about their turnover are best presented as a range of response bands. He claims that this softens the question by indicating that precision is not required and a broader answer is acceptable. In addition, since data such as this would be put into grouped into bands at the analysis stage it makes sense that it be collected this way. Taking this into consideration, biographical questions such as age, education level, marital status and gender were presented as a range of response bands. This was done to minimize any feelings of fear or insecurity that respondents might feel when providing the researcher with information of a personal nature. Categories used in the biographical details sections of the questionnaire were checked to ensure that there was no overlap. The researcher acknowledged that this section comprised of fixed responses and an overlap would be problematic at the analysis stage. The researcher ensured that the response “other” was included when fixed responses were required. This allowed for greater accuracy at the analysis stage.

### **A) Construction of the parent questionnaire**

The questionnaires administered to parents were structured as follows:

Part A : Biographical information

Part B : Parents understanding of their role in the education of their children and their knowledge of the benefits of such participation.

- This section of the questionnaire included statements concerning the parents’ perceptions of their role in education and the benefits of their involvement. Respondents were given options from which they were required to choose. In addition to the close ended questions, two open ended questions were included. These questions allowed respondents to provide any additional information they

felt was necessary. This section was included to gain an insight into parents understanding of their role in the education of their children.

Part C : Level of parental involvement.

- This section of the questionnaire was designed to ascertain the level at which each respondent participated in the education of their children. Close ended questions regarding parents' practices of involvement were included in this section. Parents were required to respond to close ended questions regarding their volunteering practices in school activities, their communication with educators, their role in school governance and their practices regarding assistance with their children's homework. This section also included open ended questions which allowed respondents to provide additional information.

Part D : The role of the school

- In this part of the questionnaire parents were required to answer questions surrounding school support structures. In addition questions concerning factors within the school such as attitude of school staff and school climate are included to ascertain which factors within a school prevent or promote parental involvement. As in other sections of the questionnaire, open ended questions were included to allow parents to provide any additional information they feel is necessary.

## **B ) Construction of the school staff questionnaire**

Questionnaires were administered to six staff members (4 level one educators and two managers). All questionnaires were returned and used for data analysis.

The questionnaires administered to school staff were structured as follows :

#### Part A : Introductory questions

- This section comprised of questions that required respondents to provide information about their views on the definition of parental involvement in education. In addition, they were required to respond to questions based on the role of parents and school staff. The aim of this section was to gain insight into what school staff understood by parental involvement and what they perceived their role and the role of the parent was to be.

#### Part B : The nature of parental involvement in this school

- In this section of the questionnaire, school staff were required to provide more detailed information about parental involvement in the school within which the study was located. Questions are based on levels of parental involvement at the school, support the school staff provide parents and barriers within the school that promote or prevent parental involvement.

#### Part C : Policy and practice

- This section of the questionnaire consisted of questions based on school policy regarding parental involvement, parental involvement in school governance, the home-school link and the school – community partnership.

#### Part D : General

- The last section of the questionnaire required respondents to answer questions based on the nature of the school environment towards parents, the manner in which parental involvement is managed at the school and the support structures implemented by the school to support parents in this school get actively involved. The questionnaire was concluded by providing respondents with an opportunity to provide any additional information they felt was necessary.

### **3.3.2.2 The semi structured interview**

Rubin and Rubin (2005, p4) define the qualitative interview as “conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion”. Interviews are conducted in case study research to find out what happened in that particular case, why it happened and what it translates into more broadly (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Kvale (1996, p88) identifies seven stages that are involved when interviews are used:

- a.** Introducing questions
- b.** Follow-up questions
- c.** Probing questions
- d.** Specifying questions
- e.** Direct questions
- f.** Indirect questions
- g.** Structuring questions: indicating when a theme is exhausted by breaking of long irrelevant answers.
- h.** Silence: By allowing pauses the interviewees have ample time to associate and reflect.
- i.** Interpreting questions

Interviews were conducted with school staff. Interview schedules were designed after all questionnaires were collected and analysed. The results of the questionnaires assisted in designing interview questions that would yield data that added to and strengthened the data already collected from the questionnaires. In addition to the data collected through questionnaires, two school managers and two educators were interviewed. All interviews were conducted at the school within which the research was conducted.

### **3.3. Validity and Trustworthiness**

#### **Validity**

While addressing issues of validity in qualitative research is difficult (Struwig and Stead, (2001) cited in Majola(2008), Creswell (2009) identifies validity as one of the strengths of qualitative research. Key (1997) states that the first step of maintaining the validity of a qualitative research is for the researcher to be a good listener who allows the data to come from the participants, this was a key feature of this study which ensured its validity.

In addition, Bertram (2003) states that in order to ensure construct validity it is important the researcher's understanding of a construct is similar to the general accepted meaning of the construct. To ensure the construct validity of this study all key concepts were clearly explained to all participants. This ensured that the participants and the researcher had the same understanding of the key concepts used in this study.

In addition, interview transcripts were given back to respondents providing them with an opportunity to check the accuracy of the information transcribed. This, according to Lacey and Fuller (2001) is referred to as respondent validation. Qualitative researchers often feed back their data to respondents in some way. Many reviewers consider respondent validation of qualitative research as a mark of quality of the study (Lacey and Fuller, 2001).

Pilot testing is part of the process of validating a data collection instrument. Pilot studies, according to Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), are a crucial element of a good study design. Conducting a pilot study does not guarantee success in the main study, but it does increase the likelihood. Pilot studies fulfill a range of important functions and can provide valuable insights for other researchers.

A small pilot study was conducted to ensure that the data collection tools were effective and yielded relevant data. Questionnaires were administered to two staff members and five parents who had similar characteristics to those that were going to participate in the

main study. The aim of this pilot study was to eliminate or rephrase questions that were ambiguous or did not yield the kind of data that the researcher required. The data collected from the pilot study did not lead to the modification of the data collection instruments and was not included in the analysis of data in the main study.

Trustworthiness is a concept used by Guba and Lincoln (1994) for qualitative research as cited in Bertram (2003). Key (1997) discusses Guba's model of trustworthiness, which he explains is made up of four criteria namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Trustworthiness of this study was ensured at all phases of the research (phases as discussed in Bertram 2003)

- Data collection phase – all interviews were recorded to ensure that no information was lost when interviews were transcribed. All bias or aspects that may have affected the data in any way were acknowledged.
  
- Data analysis, interpretation and writing up phase – all data sources were engaged with continuously and repeatedly. Interview transcripts were given back to participants to ascertain if what was transcribed was an accurate reflection of what was said. All procedures regarding data collection and analyses were made clear and explicit. The researcher ensured that all claims were substantiated by the data collected.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Mills (2003) cited in Majola (2008) identifies three concurrent flows of activity that form data analysis. These activities are as follows:

- Data reduction - means selecting, simplifying and transforming data.
- Data display - is the organized assembly of information.

- Conclusion drawing - has to do with carefully searching for patterns and explanations and constructing a conclusion based on the data gathered. Conclusion drawing and recommendations comprises the last chapter of this treatise.

Data analysis began when all questionnaires were returned. Questionnaires were read repeatedly. The researcher then analysed the questionnaires and the information gathered from them was used to form the basis of the interviews that were to follow.

### *Transcription*

Interviews were conducted with members of staff, two level one educators and two school managers. Interviews were later transcribed. Accurate transcription was an important step in the process of analysis. Interviews were transcribed verbatim including grammatical errors and non verbal gestures. Lacey and Luff (2001) explain that almost all qualitative research studies involve some level of transcription. They on go on to emphasize the importance of including words verbatim and including non – verbal cues such as silence. Words such as “well” and “er” are also an important element of conversation and should not be left out (Lacey and Luff, 2001).

### *Reduction*

Reducing data is an important stage in analysis (Majola, 2008). Since qualitative data is most often voluminous therefore the data collected had to be reduced. In the initial stage of data reduction, all interview transcripts were read to gain a general sense of the data gathered

### *Organisation of data*

Data from questionnaires and interview transcripts were then categorized according to their similarity and organized.

### *Familiarization*

Continuous engagement with the data allowed for the researcher to become familiar with the data collected. The transcription and reduction processes also allowed for the familiarization of data. Lacey and Luff (2001) identify the familiarization of data as an essential stage of data analysis.

### *Coding and Themes*

The process of coding follows the process of familiarization (Lacey and Luff, 2001). Data was coded and themes and patterns emerged from the questionnaires and interview transcripts. Rossman and Rallis (1998) cited in Creswell (2009) refer to coding as the process in which material is organized into segments of text before bringing meaning to the data collected.

## **3.5 Sampling**

Purposive sampling, according to Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2002) involves the researcher choosing a particular case for the study because it illustrates some features or process of that is of interest for a particular study.

The school used in this study was selected by means of purposive sampling because the level of parental participation varied from parent to parent. While this is true of many schools, this particular school is located within a disadvantaged community and some parents still get involved in the education of their children. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify and explore the elements within the school that promote or prevent the participation of parents.

Parent participants comprised of parents who did not participate in the education of their children and parents who did participate. In addition to parent participants, educators and school managers were selected to represent all phases within the school hence providing the study with a whole school view of parental participation.

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

“If social research is to remain of benefit to society and the groups and individuals within it, then social researchers must conduct their work responsibly and in light of the moral and legal order of the society in which they practice. They have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data and the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings” (SRA, 2003)

The focus of qualitative research is to explore, examine and describe people and their natural environment. Entrenched in qualitative research are aspects of relationships and power relations between researcher and participants. The participation of an individual depends upon that individual’s willingness to share his/her experiences (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2000). Orb *et al*, (2000) explain that any research that involves people requires an awareness of ethical issues.

Autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence are ethical principals that are imperative in any research study (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2001 cited in Bertram, 2003). Participants consent is imperative. In addition, it must be made clear that their participation may be withdrawn at any stage without any consequence. Orb et al. (2000) also maintain that at no stage should confidentiality and anonymity be breeched.

The following ethical considerations were made:

- A copy of the research proposal was submitted to the Ethics Council at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal for written approval and consent to proceed with the study.

- A copy of the research proposal and data collection instruments were submitted to the Department of Education requesting permission to conduct research at the school used in the study.
- All participants were made aware of the aim of the study and their role in the study.
- This ensured that all participants were knowledgeable of the researchers aim and their participation was consensual.
- It was made clear to participants that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage.
- At no point in this study was any participant intentionally harmed emotionally, physically or on a social level.
- All participants were assured of the confidentiality of all the information they supplied for this study. They were informed that the information will be made public but their identities will be protected by means of pseudonyms.
- A copy of the findings of the study was made available to the school principal.

### **3.7 Limitations**

Majority of the parent participants in this school are first language isiZulu speakers, since the questionnaires administered were in English it is likely that the participants experienced some difficulty in responding. The trustworthiness of the information given is based on the honesty of the respondents. According to Bertram (2003) the way

respondents in a study view the researcher is important. It is likely that the responses of some of the participants in this study were affected in some way since the researcher conducting the interviews is an educator in the same school in which the study was conducted. The researcher was unable to interview parents since they did not respond favourably to the invitation to be interviewed. Hence, interviews were limited to school staff.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter included a description of the procedure followed in conducting this study and reasoning behind the choices made by the researcher. The chapter to follow will include an analysis the data collected in accordance to the three research questions in chapter one.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Aim of the chapter**

The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the study and to analyse the data.

The word analysis is derived from the prefix “ana” meaning above and the Greek root “lysis” meaning to break up or dissolve. According to Dey (1993) data analysis involves resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristics, elements and structure.

Dey (1993) explains that while descriptions form the basis of analysis, one should go beyond descriptions to transform data. Data should be broken down into bits to reveal how these bits interconnect (Dey, 1993).

#### **4.2 Characteristics of participants**

Questionnaires were administered to 30 parents from these, 22 were returned. 12 of the 22 returned questionnaires were not completed correctly and could not be used. Hence 10 questionnaires were analysed.

The questionnaire was divided into sections as listed below:

- Biographical information
- The role of the parent in education
- The benefits of parental participation in education
- Forms of parental participation
- School support structures
- Factors within a school that promote or prevent participation

#### 4.2.1. Parents

##### Biographical information

Table A

Parent responses should be read in conjunction with their biographical information as it provides more insight.

	Marital status	Age	Gender	Level of education
Parent 1	Married	25-40	Male	University
Parent 2	Divorced	25-40	Male	Matric
Parent 3	Single	Older than 40	Female	Below matric
Parent 4	Married	Less than 25	Male	Matric
Parent 5	Single	25-40	Female	Matric
Parent 6	Married	25-40	Female	Below matric
Parent 7	Married	25-40	Male	University
Parent 8	Widowed	Older than 40	Female	Below matric
Parent 9	Single	Older than 40	Female	Below matric
Parent 10	Married	25-40	Male	Matric

#### 4.2.2 Educators and school managers

Questionnaires were also administered and interviews were conducted to collect data from educators and school management. Questionnaires were administered to four educators and two managers. All questionnaires were returned and analysed. In addition to the questionnaires, two educators and two managers were interviewed.

Table B

Participant	Data collection method	Position at school
1	Interview	Educator
2	Interview	Educator

<b>3</b>	Interview	SMT
<b>4</b>	Interview	SMT
<b>5</b>	Questionnaire	Educator
<b>6</b>	Questionnaire	Educator
<b>7</b>	Questionnaire	Educator
<b>8</b>	Questionnaire	Educator
<b>9</b>	Questionnaire	SMT
<b>10</b>	Questionnaire	SMT

#### **4.3 Perceptions of the parents of their role in education and the benefits of their participation**

<b>My role as a parent in my child/children's education</b>	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
My child's education is the responsibility of the school.	1	9	0
My child's education is the shared responsibility of the school and me.	10	0	0
Government policy requires me to participate in my child's education.	10	0	0
I should be involved in school matters such as curriculum and school governance.	9	1	0

Almost all of the parents in the study agreed that their role as a parent in education is to share responsibility with the school to educate their child. When asked to describe their role in education parent 7 responded:

*“At the very moment the teacher of my child is doing very well to me. I do my part I help with homework”*

Other parents responded in a similar manner:

Parent 10: *“My wife and I work but we make sure the kids homework is done when they get it”*

Parent 9: *“I make sure my child does her work when she get the work at home”*

Parent 1: *“As a parent I feel like I need to take the first step, I do help my child with her homework”*

Educators’ responses on the role of the parent in education revealed that they had expectations of parents that went beyond homework assistance. However from their responses it was also apparent that they were unclear on what role the parent should play in education.

One educator answered:

*“Parents play an important role in education of their children it is just not about paying school fees, but helping their children”*

Most educators agreed that parents played a vital role in education. However from their responses it was evident that they could not describe the role that parents should play. This suggested that they were unclear of their expectations of parents.

It was evident that parent perceptions of their role in education were limited to assisting their children with homework tasks. This forms a vital component of parental involvement. Epstein (1995) maintains parental involvement in homework activities result in the child viewing parents as more similar to teachers and home as more similar to school thus providing a link between the home and school environment. However, parents displayed no knowledge of other aspects in which they should be involved in. Epstein (1995) discusses a variety of ways in which parents can participate in the education of their children. Her parental involvement framework outlines six types of involvement and sample practices for each type. The possibilities of parental involvement are vast however; parents and schools have different ideas on what

constitutes parental involvement or the role of the parent. This in itself serves as a barrier to parental involvement in education (SoTE, 1999).

Educators need to have a clear idea of what they expect of parents and ways in which they expect them to fulfill their role in education. Vandergrift and Greene (1992) argue that schools do not always know what parent involvement is. This suggests that they are unclear of the role of the parent which leads to confusion on what they expect from the parent. If educators are unclear of their expectations of parents it is unlikely that parents will be able to anticipate what type of involvement the school requires of them. Teachers and parents have different ideas on how parents should get involved, the challenge is to decide on expectations and ways that are mutually beneficial and more importantly, improves quality of life for the child (SoTE, 1999).

### **Forms of involvement**

#### **a) I discuss my child's experiences at school**

a) Everyday       b) Sometimes       c) Hardly ever       d) Never

Four out of ten parents responded by saying they spoke about school experiences everyday while six out of ten parents spoke about school experiences sometimes.

When asked to elaborate on some of the issues parents spoke to their children about the responses were as follows:

Parent 8 : “ *how his day was*”

Parent 1 : “ *her mum stays at home so she is there when my daughter gets home, they talk about homework, friends and anything new at school*”

Parent 7 : “ *work, did her teacher come today?*”

Other common responses were things that the child might need for school.

Communication between children and parents about school and school related activities are an important factor in developing a child's attitude towards his/her education. While many parents might not be equipped to assist children with the content of their school work tasks, enquiring about their day, teachers, friends and other school related topics translate to the child that the parent is interested in his/her education. Students' morale, motivation and attitude play a vital role in their education process (Hara and Burke, 1998). Parents have the ability to show the child that they are interested in their education which leads to the child adopting that same kind of interest. Daily school related conversation between children and parents allows parents to shape their child's attitude towards education.

**b) I help my child with his/her homework**

a) Yes                       b) Sometimes                       c) No

Five out of ten respondents answered yes when asked if they help their children with their homework, three answered sometimes and two answered no. Parents who answered no were asked to please explain why this was the case. Both expressed that they were unable able to help because they did not understand the homework given.

Parent nine : *“I do not no what to do for his work”*

Parent three: *“cannot do the work I cannot understaand (understand) the work what to do”*

Educators also expressed frustration about parents being absent in the homework assistance of their children, *“Three quarter of them (learners) come with it (homework) not done”*

Homework forms an integral part of the education process of a child. Homework tasks should be designed to reinforce the learning that is taking place in the classroom. Parental involvement when children are attempting homework tasks is imperative. Children tend to view parents who show an interest in their homework as being similar to their teachers and their homes as being similar to school. This provides the child with a very important link between the home and school environment (Epstein, 1995). Some of the parents in the study indicated that they were unaware of how to assist their children with homework. School staff need to implement structures to overcome barriers such as these. Parents need to also be made aware that their involvement in homework tasks need not be restricted to assisting children with actual content. Their involvement could take the form of establishing and enforcing specific homework times and providing the child with a safe and quiet environment to complete homework tasks (Gianzero, 1999). Such routines are also beneficial and relay to their child that the parent values his/her education.

**c) How often do you communicate with your child's educator about his/her conduct and progress?**

a) Often                       b) Sometimes                       c) Never

When asked how often parents communicated with their child's educator about their progress, two out of ten answered often and two answered never. Six out of ten parents answered sometimes.

Both parent nine and two who answered never attributed their lack of communication with educators to their working conditions.

Communication between parents and educators is a crucial part of an effective parent school partnership. Although schools can communicate with parents through a variety of methods, two – way communication which consists of dialogue between educators and parents is essential. Communication that involves dialogue between parents and

educators develops out of growing trust, mutual concern and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives (Graham-Clay, 2005). Schools need to ensure that parents are provided with opportunities to communicate with educators.

**d) Have you ever volunteered to assist at your child's school?**

- a) Yes                       b) No

Four out of the 10 parents answered yes to have volunteered at school while six answered no. Four out of the six parents who answered no expressed that they had no time to volunteer at school since they worked.

Parent 10 stated that: *"no one has ever asked us too"* and parent eight felt that: *"she was too old"*

All staff agreed that parents were used in the classroom and school events. However, they also expressed that the special needs and talents of parents not being utilized at the school.

Parent volunteers can be a very valuable asset to any school. Volunteering activities provide parents with opportunities to work together with the school to support school programmes and learners work. Simango (2006) explains that when parents feel valued and that they play a crucial role in a school they are more inclined to offer their special skills. It is also important for schools to remember that parent volunteers can be used both in and out of the classroom. Six out of ten parents in this study indicated that they were unable to volunteer at school since they worked. Fuller and Olsen (1998) cited in Simango (2006) explain that volunteers can be used after school hours, during weekends and during holidays this provides parents who work with opportunities to help the school their children attend.

**e) Do you play an active role in school governance?**

a) Yes

b) No

Majority of the participants responded no when asked if they played an active role in school governance. The reason for this according to their responses was that they were not knowledgeable on how to do so.

However, educators' views on the issue differed from that of parents. All educators expressed that parents are provided with the information they required to understand their role as the school governing body. One educator stated that: “ *they get notes and information before the election of the governing body*”

Another educator expressed that, “*they (parents) just do not know the importance of it*”

When asked if they thought that providing parents on the governing body with support and direction all educator and management respondents answered yes.

An educator expressed that: “ *Although the school is suppose to help those parents in the SGB with some information but it is also the SGB members responsibility to seek for knowledge of how to govern the school from the department and from other related institutions*”

Educators were asked to describe the role of the governing body at their school.

A manager stated, “ *In the past 10 years we have never had a quorum for SGB elections or by-election elections*”

He went on to explain that “*a few members are active within the school governing body, other show apathy in school matters and often do not attend meetings*”

Other educators answered:

*“not very effective”*

*“to be honest I don’t know what they doing in my school”*

*“I think they are not working to their full potential”*

The staff of this school have expressed that the school has given parents the information they require to participate in the governing structures of the school. However, a lack of making quorum for school governing body elections or by-elections in the past ten years suggest that there is definitely a barrier that prevents parents from getting involved in the governing structures of the school. Parents have identified this barrier as a lack of knowledge on how to get involved. According to Mncube (2007) many Black parents lack experience in school governance issues since they were not provided with the opportunity to participate in school governance in apartheid schooling structures. In addition, as is the case in this school, a lack of training contributes significantly to parents’ lack of involvement.

#### **4.4 Parents’ perceptions of the benefits of parental involvement in education**

<b>The benefits of parental participation in education</b>	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
It does not make a difference if I am involved in my child’s education or not.	2	8	0
My participation in the education of my child can improve his/her marks and attitude towards school activities.	8	2	0
If I help my children with their homework, it will show my child that I care about their education and they will care about it too.	8	2	0
Children should do their homework alone, it is the only way for them to learn.	0	9	1
Educators are the experts, I do not want to get involved.	2	8	0

Eight out of ten of the parent respondents agreed that their involvement would benefit their children’s progress and attitude towards school activities. In addition, they

expressed that their involvement would translate to their children that they care about their education this will in turn result in the child valuing his/her education as well.

When asked if they felt getting involved in their child's education was important most parents acknowledged its importance. Parent 10 responded:

*“ when we scold our kids or keep asking about wat (what) they do at school they can see we worry and then they will worry about it too. We push them education is the key to success. We study in school they will too we will make sure they do it because its for their own benefit”*

Another parent expressed that his involvement was important because his child's education is important. He went on to explain that he needed to be involved in order to help his child achieve good results to further his studies.

Parents also felt that their involvement will help keep their children on track and will help them know in which areas the child is lacking. Parent 7 also stated, that getting involved in his child's education will help him *“be on track”* with *“this new type of education”*

Of the ten respondents only two did not agree that their involvement would benefit their child. These parents also agreed that educators were they experts hence they did not wish to get involved.

When asked if they felt their involvement in their child's education was important they responded:

*Parent 8: “if I know then it helps (but) I don't know how the work is so it don't help. The teachers they know what to do”*

*Parent 3: “I do not have much schooling then teachers they can know what to do if the child is making the trouble then I can go”*

Upon review of the biographical information it was found that both of these respondents were over 40 years and had a level of education that was below matric. From their response it was evident that they felt that they lacked the knowledge to assist their children. They both viewed educators as experts and left the educational progress of their children solely in their hands.

Most educators identified a positive change in attitude on the part of learners as one of the benefits of parental involvement in education. One educator stated that children tend to learn better when parents are involved since what is learnt in the classroom is reinforced at home.

One educator stated, *“Through the year’s I’ve noticed it’s very important for parents to get involved. Literate or illiterate that support my mother checks my books its makes them know that they are being checked if the parent is not involved in anyway they also know”*

A member of the school management team responded by stating that one of the benefits of parental involvement is that “they (parents) would analyse practices at the school and offer a comparative analysis from other schools”

Parental involvement in education has a myriad of benefits such as a positive impact on daily attendance, the attitude of children, fewer placements in special education programmes, higher graduation rates, improved behavior, improved interpersonal skills and better relationships with staff (Gianzero,1999, Mmotlane *et al.*, 2009). Although none of the respondents were aware of the vast number of benefits, it is pleasing that the majority of them agreed that parental involvement in education is beneficial for the child.

All educators expressed that they felt parental involvement in education would have benefits. Eight of the ten parent respondents were of the same opinion. One of the parent responses revealed that if he cared about his child education so would his child. Dempsey et al. (2001) confirms this, stating that high levels of parental involvement translates to the child that the parent has a positive attitude towards his/her education. This in return has the child adopting that same positive attitude toward education. Only two parents expressed that they did not see the benefit of their involvement and accredited it to a lack of basic education. Both of these respondents were over 40 years old and were educated below matric level. According to Lee and Bowen (2006) parents who possess less cultural capital such as those who have low levels of education are likely to be less involved in the education of the children. They tend to have low levels of confidence and therefore have problems communicating with teachers. In addition, it is likely that they lack knowledge about the school system and educational jargon hence they prefer not to get involved in the process of educating their children. These parents display hesitance in involving themselves in the education of their children not because they do not care but because they are afraid of getting involved in the wrong way which might cause the child more harm than good (Bouakaz and Persson, 2007).

#### 4.5 The role of the school

##### 4.5.1 School climate

<b>Factors within a school that promote or prevent parents from participating</b>	Agree	Disagree
The school has a warm and welcoming environment	7	3
I feel like an outsider when I visit the school	3	7

Seven out of ten of the parents' respondents felt that the school has a warm and welcoming environment. Parent one explained that he was an ex – learner at the school so he felt welcomed, he went on to say that, “*some of them are nice and some don't always try to help but I know who is who here*”.

Four out of five of the educator participants felt that the school has a warm and welcoming environment. A school manager expressed that the school had an open door policy which entertained parent visits at any time of the day. One educator stated that parents were always treated with respect whilst another educator felt that the school environment was welcoming to parents but *“parents are just not interested”*

Another school manager stated that parents are welcomed at school, she expressed that, *“Although we have asked in this newsletter that we always write that if they are going to come and see the class teacher come at a certain time but if they are here we try by all means to accommodate them”*

One educator stated that parents have mixed feelings towards the schools climate. She claimed that parents of children who perform well in school are positive and eager to visit the school. She goes on to state, *“but since majority of the learners are not doing well these parents are responding differently it’s like they put the blame on the teachers not looking at themselves”*

As illustrated in the table above three out of ten parents disagreed that the school had a warm and welcoming environment and they felt like outsiders when they visited the school. Parent eight explained:

*“when I go they say why you don’t come so long why child don’t do this work so I don’t go”*

#### 4.5.2 School staff (attitude towards parents)

<b>Factors within a school that promote or prevent parents from participating</b>	Agree	Disagree
Educators are friendly and willing to help	9	1
The school management is helpful and friendly	6	4
The school staff makes me feel like they do not value my input.	1	9

Majority of the parents in the study felt that educators are friendly and willing to help. Only one respondent felt like her input was not valued.

Parent three explained that she could not blame the educator she says, *“I do not know even what to ask”*

Four out of ten parents felt that the school management was not helpful and friendly. Parent seven expressed,

*“the school management when they take the child during school opened (admission/ registration) they look where you working when you work at a restorant (restaurant) they take your child and if you a lady your child get a place. They not thinking all children are learning but not yours”*

Parent nine had a similar response, *“when I came for a place for my big child the bosses they say no but they be bad they say no in a bad way”*

Institutional barriers pose a significant barrier to parental involvement in education. A welcoming climate extends an open invitation to parents and helps ease any discomfort they may have about their participation in education. Gianzero (1999) states that educators perceptions and attitudes towards parents have the potential to promote or impede parental involvement in education. Most of the parent respondents felt that the school had a warm and friendly environment. In addition they felt that educators were friendly towards them. Of the ten parent respondents three felt that the school environment was not welcoming. Upon review of the biographical details it was found that all three of these parents were educated below matric level. Parents who are not confident in their educational ability will be reluctant to involve themselves in the education of their child due to feelings of inadequacy (Gianzero, 1999). In addition, they isolate themselves from the school because it brings up negative feelings about their own school experiences (Hargreaves and Fullham, 1998 cited in Moore and Lasky, 2001).

The data also revealed that four out of ten parents had negative feelings toward school management. Their dissatisfaction however, was based on school admission practices.

#### 4.5.3 Policy

The findings of the study revealed that the school does not have a verbal or written policy on parental involvement. Only one educator felt the need for a written policy. She stated that forming a policy on parental involvement was the responsibility of the school management team.

A school manager stated that although the school did not have a policy of parental involvement she felt that a written policy would be beneficial. She stated, *“in some cases you just take things for granted we just take it as if those things need to happen but there is no direction on how these things need to be”*

She goes on to explain that a policy will also give parents direction on what to do, she states, *“I think that if there is a policy in place maybe that policy is also known by parents too because if I can tell you the truth most of our parents now have less interest when it come to school. Their involvement is very minimal. Its only those exceptionally those who still have that consciousness and maybe that background that they are coming from that is directing them to do what they are doing in terms of their involvement. But if everyone will know this is what parents should be able to be doing. Policies will differ according to certain environments because they are schools in which the schools are too far from where people live and I don’t think the policy will be the same as others but everyone will be directed accordingly”*

Williams and Chavkin (1989) identify a written policy as a key element of managing parental involvement. Jowett and Baginsky (1991, p12) cited in Maphanga (2006) contend that “a whole school policy on parental involvement with clearly defined parental roles is likely to go a long way in ensuring parental support, involvement and satisfaction with school activities which in turn has positive contributions for the overall

development of learners” Michael (2004) states that a lack of movement in the direction of a written policy on parental involvement is indicative of a lack of strong leadership. A written policy will also give parents some clarity and direction on how they could get involved in the process of their childrens education. Only one educator and one school manager expressed the need for a written policy on parental involvement. The lack of a policy, as literature suggests, creates doubt about the roles of educators, school management and parents’ in parental involvement.

#### 4.5.4 Communication

School staff identified letters which were written in English as the main means of communication between parents and the school. When asked if this proved to be an effective means of communication a manager answered: *“yes, learners translate to grandparents if they do not understand”*

Educators, however, did not feel as if this method seems to be very effective.

One educator stated, *“before when I first started teaching here these letters use to be in English and I use to translate all the communiques. So one side had English and the other side Zulu, at least they can read Zulu. If they can’t then the child or the neighbours can read for them. Now communiqués are only English”*. The educator went on to state that she could not understand why school management had stopped the translation of letters from English to isiZulu.

A school manager stated that she felt that the written communiqués were ineffective. She states, *“The environment it’s always going to come up. The results we are going to get are according to the types of people. Even in the letters if we ask them to acknowledge and sign it’s going to take a year for us to ask for those reply slips and we don’t even know if the parent is aware, are they given those letters?”*

<b>Factors within a school that promote or prevent parents from participating</b>	Agree	Disagree
The only way the school communicates with me is through written notices and I do not understand them.	2	8

Only two out of the ten parents (Parent 3 and 9) felt that were they unable to understand the written notices. Once again in reference with their biographical information a pattern was found between the parents' level of education and their inability to understand the written notices sent by the school. Both parents indicated a level of education below matric. Eight out of ten of the parent respondents expressed that they understood the written notices.

Parent 10 responded: “ *I understand the notes and letters but they just tell us when the school is closed early or when we must send money. They don't tell us things to help us with children's work*”

Communication between schools and parents is a vital component to develop a mutually beneficial partnership. Williams and Chavkin (1989) explain that two way communication should be on going. More importantly, schools should communicate with parents through a method that is accessible to all parents. The main form of communication between this school and parents are written communiqués which are in English. While only two out of the ten parents in the study indicated that they did not understand these notices it is important to acknowledge that their inability to understand English is representative of a significant number of parents at this school. The content of such notices is also important in developing a relationship between parents and the school. Written communication should not only communicate the needs of the school and basic changes of school times to parents. While such information is important, in addition to other forms of communication, written communication can be used to inform parents of the various forms of parental involvement as well as support they may require in assisting their children with academic work.

#### 4.5.5 Managing parental involvement

All educator and school manager participants recognized the important role of the school management team in parental involvement. One educator expressed that *“The role of the SMT is crucial in promoting parental participation as the key to encourage and foster partnerships with parents”*

Educators felt that the school lacked effective management of parental involvement. An educator stated, “ In my school they (school management) are more involved in other activities than promoting parental involvement in education”

Another educator shared this view highlighting that in this school learners are not the priority hence school managers do not do anything when it comes to parental involvement. She goes on to explain that parents and school managers only focus on what educators need to do and do not pay attention to their individual roles in parental involvement. She states, *“When it comes to parental participation they (School managers) are not doing much. They are not doing any investigation, nothing. Everything is on the teachers”*

One educator stated that the school management is educated and are able to identify problems within the community that prevent parents from actively participating in the education of their children. She explained that the school management team should be working with the SGB and local counsellor to set up meetings with parents to gain insight into their needs as parents. She also explains that meetings such as this will also provide the school with a chance to explain parents’ responsibilities to them. Right now she states, *“everything is on the teacher”*

School managers expressed that parental involvement was being managed fairly well at this school. However, managers did acknowledge that the school had a long way to go in terms of parental involvement. One manager expressed, *“We could as the SMT strive to implement measures to get greater parental involvement participation at this school, the*

*SMT must strive to get educators to set up social clubs. These clubs should be active and functional outside the normal school hours so parents will be able to join”*

Literature has emphasized the importance of effective management regarding parental involvement in education (Naidoo, 1998 and Michael, 2004). Planning, organizing, providing support, supervising and evaluating should be the key focus of school managers when goals are set for parental involvement (Michael, 2004). According to educator responses, no attempts to promote parental involvement at this school have been made by the school management team. The data collected revealed that parental involvement in this school lacks structure and organisation. The school management team does not engage in goal setting or planning when it comes to parental involvement. The absence of these managerial activities suggests that parental involvement is ineffectively managed at this school.

#### **4.6 School Support structures**

##### **a) Are parents meetings held at a time that is convenient for you to attend?**

a) Yes                       b) No

Eight out of ten parents answered that parent meetings were held at an inconvenient time hence they were unable to attend. All of the parents expressed that meetings were held during the day while they were at work.

Parent 10: “My wife and me we work the meeting in school time and I can’t go”

Parent 9: “I work I can’t go for that meeting”

Parent 8: “I sell things to support my children in the day I cannot go I working”

Only one staff member expressed that meetings were held during a time that was convenient for parents to attend. An educator stated that if parents want to see educators after school hours it requires the teacher to make a sacrifice. She states, “*it happens at our kids schools, they make those arrangements. They ask you at what times can you*

*avail yourself. Then maybe you come at six o'clock, you meet the teacher all the things are on the table the mark files books".* However, she expressed that she did not think that this sacrifice would be made by educators and management at this school.

A manager stated that meetings scheduled during school hours did not allow for maximum participation.

**b) If you are unable to attend meetings, does the school provide you with other opportunities to discuss your child's progress?**

a) Yes                       b) No

Seven out of ten parents answered yes to the school having provided other opportunities to discuss their child's progress. When asked what these opportunities were parents responded that they could come to see the educator during the day.

When asked what support structures were implemented by the school to assist parents who are unable to attend meetings during the school day some educators responded "none" and others "nothing". A manager however stated that: "*they (parents) are asked to schedule a meeting with the class teacher*" he explained that the school has an open door policy that entertains parents throughout the school day.

Parent seven expressed that parents are told they can visit during the day but she goes on to say, "*but that too is working hours*"

Parent five shared the same opinion, the school provides parents with the opportunity to visits educators during the day if they cannot attend meetings but she also expresses that school hours are also working hours.

Parent nine stated that: "*I cannot go I work. I went one day cos (because) I had a break but they say teacher is on lunch time see you after so I couldn't wait I had to go back to work. I never go again*"

Another school manager expressed that she felt that the school lacked support for working parents. She states that the context of the school should be taken into consideration. In addition, she claims that working parents in this community do not have “decent jobs” and not going to work to attend a school meeting during the day will result in them losing their pay for the day. She adds, *“I remember one day when I was the grade 4 HOD I once had a meeting on Saturday because that was one of my concerns. If you want this parents to come and they wont come in the evening. In the evening to it is not safe for them just find time where they will be able to come. I think ja we are not doing enough cos even ama ama this meetings we are talking about you have to look into the attendance its poor it is like zero percent”*

Parent meetings in the context of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory is the most important mesolink between parents and schools (Lemmer, 2012). In addition, parents meetings are identified as the most common and regular form of communication between parents and schools worldwide. Lemmer (2012) explains that schools should refrain from treating these meetings as a ritualized school event. Simply scheduling parent meetings and ensuring that they occur does not guarantee that the benefits of meeting parents will be realized. Rather parent meetings should be used as an opportunity to discuss imperative issue concerning a child’s progress, behaviour and school programmes. This study revealed that only two out of the ten parent participants felt that the parent meetings were held at a time that was convenient for them. While the school maintained an open door policy and entertained parents throughout the school day, this does not provide adequate support for parents since school hours are concurrent with most parents working hours. This excludes a large percentage of parents from attending parent meetings. This school lacks vital support structures which should provide working parents with opportunities to attend parent meetings.

**c) Does the school provide you with information on how to help your child with homework, reading or projects?**

a) Yes

b) No

**d) Has the school informed you of ways that you can get involved in your child's education?**

a) Yes

b) No

**e) Do you feel that the school provides you as a parent with the support you need in order to get involved in your child's education?**

a) Yes

b) No

Only one of the ten parents felt that the school provided parents with the help they required to help their children with homework, reading and projects. Two parents stated that the school informed them on how to get involved in the education of their child while only one parent felt that the school provided parents with the necessary support to get involved in their child's education.

Educators however, felt that parents are given the support they need in order to get involved in the education of their child.

*A manager stated, "yes, on a regular basis, at least once a term. Some parents are even called into school to meet with the teacher"*

According to an educator parents are supported since *"they are assisted by being summoned to school and teachers tell them what it is they can do to help their children"*

Another educator agreed, she felt teachers are always willing to assist.

One educator explained that parents who had children in the foundation phase were provided with the support the needed to get involved but this was not the case across all phases in the school. She expressed, *"it is happening at the foundation phase not at the senior phase"*

Other parents responded in a similar way

Parent ten: *“I have two children the small one she I help her we know her work is not so hard. The big one her work especially math’s is not easy for us we were in school long ago. The big one they do not send us things to help her or tell us how we can help her if I knew I can try, even my wife can try”*

Parent seven: *“things change in education they need to show us how to keep with what is changing. When you child is junior you know when your child is senior it becomes not so easy”*

It was apparent that parents required support with helping their children on the actual content they were taught hence they required support more so as their children progressed into higher grades. Parent eight explained, *“They don’t tell us. If they give exam pools (examples) I can try they just give us and say do”*

Parents two: *“Sometimes they come with things we don’t know eg. Maths we are not all good in Maths”*

Parent one felt that the school lacked in providing parents with support on how to assist their children with day to day tasks. He expressed: *“The school does a good job with my child they have lots of activities at school which other schools in this area don’t have. They inform us about things that happen as school like we are told when the exam will start and we sign for the exam timetable, but for the work they do for day to day they don’t give us a lot of direction”*

Parent seven expressed a need to be informed on the changes in education, a similar response was given by parent six. She however, felt that the department of education should also shoulder some responsibility in providing parents with the support they require. Parent seven: *“I wont say it’s the school as such, I think the department of education must also provide workshops for parents so that I can be able to be more*

*involve in my child's schoolwork. Some of us we don't even know OBE so sometimes it get difficult for us to help our children"*

A school manager stated that she was approached by an educator who felt that giving the parents lessons on how to assist their children with homework would be beneficial. She added however, *"But as a school now ay. The only thing we give out is that assessment plan that we normally give and we are not even sure and we cant just give them early in July and they still going to do things in August and September, because that paper will be misplaced somewhere or torn. I think as a school we need to strengthen this communication"*

Almost all of the parents in this study expressed that they were not given support by the school on how to help their children with work or on how they could get involved in their children's education. Parents lacked direction and assistance on how to help their children. In addition, as research suggests (SoTE, 1999) parents have expressed an absence of support as their children progress from grade to grade. Parents who had children in higher grades displayed a lack of knowledge on how to assist their children in specific subjects such as Mathematics. Educators have also acknowledged a lack of support for parents as their children progress to higher grades. This is unfortunate since it does not allow parents and the school to form a lasting partnership that will exist throughout the child's schooling career at that school. Based on parent responses, a genuine desire to assist their children was communicated by parents. The lack of relevant support structures to assist and empower parents is a shortcoming of the school which has lead to this school not effectively tapping into the benefits of parental involvement. The findings also revealed that parents tend to experience more difficulty in assisting their children as they progress to higher grades. According to SoTE (1999) parents tend to be less involved in the education process of their children as they get older. Schools should strive to offer support to help parents overcome this barrier.

**f) Does the school provide any support to you or your community other than meeting the educational needs of your child?**

a) Yes

b) No

<b>Factors within a school that promote or prevent parents from participating</b>	Agree	Disagree
I feel like the school staff are unaware of the realities of my community	7	3

When parents were asked if they felt the school provided support to them or their community other than meeting the educational needs of their child, 2 out of the ten participants answered yes. When asked to specify what support the school provided, parent eight stated, “*food for children*” in reference to a nutritional programme run for the children in this school by the Department of Education.

Parent nine stated that sometimes the school gives poor children “*things*” she did not elaborate.

When educators were asked **if the school provided for any community need or provided any service other than meeting educational needs of learners**, a member of the SMT answered yes and explained that the social needs of learners are met.

Educators were of a different opinion. Two educators explained that the school was used as a venue by a night school and a church. Apart from allowing these organizations to use the school premises after school hours, all educators answered no.

The following questions were posed to school staff participants:

**Taking the location and context of your school into consideration, what support structures and frameworks can you identify that have been implemented to promote parental participation at this school?**

**Would you say that the school provides support for parents to overcome any barriers to their participation?**

In response to the first question a member of the SMT answered, *“Parent meetings are held once a term. Translators are used at mass meetings to ensure that all parents understand the discussions at the meetings”*

An educator stated that during registration/ admission periods at school, “parents are encouraged to take part in their children’s education” She identified this encouragement as a support structure of the school.

All other educator participants felt that the school did not have any support structures or frameworks to promote parental involvement in education.

In addition, all staff participants answered “no” when asked **if the school provided support for parents to overcome barriers to their involvement in education.**

School managers and educators were asked if they felt **the school had a true partnership with the community.**

A member of the SMT expressed that a partnership did exist between the school and the community but *“to a limited extent”*

Another school manager stated that at present the school did not have much of a partnership with the community but she felt that the school will get there eventually.

An educator claimed that the school had a partnership with the community because the school allowed the community to use it as a venue for church services and night school classes. All other educators indicated that a school – community partnership was non-existent.

As indicated above 80% of the parent participants in the study felt that the school provided no support to the community apart from meeting the educational needs of their children. Majority of the educator participants shared the opinion of these parents. In addition, apart from a translator at mass meetings, all school staff expressed that the school does not have supports structures to support parents, does not provide parents with support to overcome barriers to their participation and does not have a partnership with the community. Taking the context of the community within which this school is located into consideration, it is evident from participant's responses that this school lacks vital support structures to encourage parent involvement at the school. The lack of such structures has resulted in what participants have identified as a "non-existent" partnership between the school and the community.

Epstein (1995) explains that partnerships between schools and parents can improve school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership and connects families in other schools. However, the most important benefit to school-parent partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and throughout life. According to DoST (1999) the manner in which schools encourage parental involvement in education has more impact on levels of involvement than factors such as socio-economic status, marital status and family income. A lack of support structures and strategies to develop a meaningful partnership has resulted in 70% of the parent participants in the study feeling that this school is unaware of the realities of this community.

#### **4.8 Summary**

The results revealed that parents and educators were aware of the benefits of parental involvement in education. However, parents' knowledge regarding the types of involvement was limited. School staff agreed that parental involvement was beneficial but they were not clear on their expectations of parents.

The school plays a significantly important role in promoting parental involvement in education. Results revealed that the school lacked key elements that promote parental involvement such as a written policy and specific planning and organisation of parental involvement.

Results also revealed that the context of this school called for support structures that were effectively designed and implemented to support parental involvement. However, the findings revealed that the school lacks severely in this regard.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter of this study includes a summary of the findings of the study in addition to a discussion of the findings. This chapter also presents recommendations based on the findings.

The study set out to answer the following questions:

1. What role do educators and school management play in promoting parental participation?
2. What support structures are implemented by this school to help parents overcome barriers to their participation?
3. What do parents understand to be their role in education and what do they think are the benefits of such participation?

*The findings of this study will be beneficial for the following reasons:*

- To create awareness amongst school staff of the factors within the school that will either promote or prevent parental participation.
- Information such as this will help schools to design structures and strategies to support and encourage parental participation.
- It will also provide members of staff with an opportunity to reflect on current practices regarding parental participation and identify areas that require improvement.

- It will make recommendations on how to implement support structures that will encourage parents to participate in education and form lasting partnerships with the school.
- Forming such partnerships will allow for the school to serve the needs of the community and function within that community as opposed to being an isolated institution.

## **5.2 Main findings of the study**

This study aimed to explore the role of the school in parental involvement in education. The findings revealed that the manner in which the school organize and manage parental involvement has a significant influence on the level of parental involvement in that school. The results of the study revealed that while parents felt school staff were friendly and that the school had a welcoming environment the school did not organise or manage parental involvement effectively. A lack of a written policy on parental involvement left parents and educators with feelings of uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children. The lack of effective and varied strategies of communication between the school and home also suggested that parental involvement was not managed well at this school.

The study also aimed to identify support structures and frameworks designed and implemented by this school to help parents overcome barriers to their involvement. . Parents of this school expressed the need for support and direction regarding their involvement in the education of their children. The context of this school calls for careful planning and implementation of a variety of strategies to encourage parental involvement and assist parents to overcome barriers to the participation. The findings of the study revealed that the school had not designed or implemented any support structures to assist parents overcome barriers to their involvement in education

Lastly, the study aimed to find out what parents' perceptions were of their role in education and what they thought were the benefits of their involvement. The study revealed that parents were aware that their involvement would be beneficial to their children; however their perception of their role in education was limited to assisting their children in homework tasks. Parents' evidently lacked knowledge of the various opportunities for their involvement in education and this is mainly because the school failed to educate them.

The findings of the study reveal that a lack of a policy and support structures to encourage and manage parental involvement suggests that parental involvement is not managed effectively at this school.

### **5.3 Summary of findings**

Based on literature discussed in the literature review it is evident that parents play a vital role in the education of their children. In addition, the literature revealed that schools' plays a significantly important role in encouraging and managing parental involvement in education. The findings of this study confirmed the importance of the role of the school in promoting parental involvement in education and revealed the following regarding the school in this study:

- Parents felt welcomed when they visited the school and they found school staff friendly and helpful.
- Parents were aware that their involvement in education was beneficial to their children, but they lacked knowledge on the various ways they could involve themselves in the education of their children.

- Parental involvement is not being effectively managed at this school. The school lacks a policy on parental involvement and effective strategies to communicate with parents.
- This school lacks support structures that are necessary to support parents who face barriers to their involvement.
- Parent meetings are a vital forum for parents and educators to build partnerships and trust, however a significantly high number of parents are unable to attend due to meetings being scheduled during working hours. No support structures have been implemented by this school to help parents overcome this barrier.
- Parents are unaware of what they can do to assist their children with academic work. According to parents, the school does not provided them with support in this regard. This had been identified as a barrier to their involvement.
- Parents expressed a lack of understanding of subjects such as Mathematics. In addition they felt that helping their children with school related activities as they progressed to higher grades was very difficult. The school in lacked providing parents with support in this regard.
- All participants in the study expressed that the school and the community do not share a partnership and parents felt that school staff was not in touch with the realities of their community.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

Most parent participants in the study were second language English speakers. Although questionnaires were designed to be quick and simple to complete, it is likely that some parents might have encountered difficulty in answering them since they were written only in English and this may have compromised the quality of their responses. The

trustworthiness of the information given is based on the honesty of the respondents. The researcher is an employee at the school in which the study was located. Bertram (2003) explains that the way participants view the research is important. It is possible that participants' responses may have been affected by the presence of the researcher. The researcher was unable to interview parents since they did not respond favourably to the invitation to be interviewed. Hence, interviews were limited to school staff.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

An important finding of the study was that majority of the parent participants in the study felt welcomed at school. In addition, they expressed that school staff were helpful and friendly. This has the potential to have a significantly positive impact on parental involvement at this school. However, a lack of a school policy and effective support structures to encourage and manage parental involvement impedes high levels of parental involvement at this school.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for schools to increase levels of parental involvement:

- Developing and implementing a policy on parental involvement

Written policies are designed to regulate and manage important aspects such as attendance, discipline, admission, assessment etc. within a school. Parental involvement should be no different. A written school policy on parental involvement is essential to manage and promote parental involvement in education (Maphanga, 2006). A written policy should define the role of both parents and the school, expand on school – parent communication strategies and include support structures schools design to assist parents to get involved.

- Designing a parental involvement programme

Parental involvement programmes have been identified as an effective strategy to promote parental involvement (Becher, 2001). Parental involvement programmes should be designed by schools based on the context of the school and the collective needs of the parents of the school. Parental involvement programmes should include activities that assist parents with parenting skills, skills to assist their children with homework, and empowering them on how to get involved in the education of their children. Programmes should also provide varying opportunities for school staff and parents to communicate and work together. This will allow for relationships based on trust to develop and will encourage a parent-school partnership.

- Ensure school staff and personal are adequately trained

School staff is the driving force behind increasing levels of parental involvement. However, schools rarely offer staff training to collaborate with parents (Lemmer, 2007). Schools should ensure that their staff is provided with training that educates them of benefits and effective strategies to involve parents in education. A staff empowered to build relationships and work effectively with parents encourage parents to get involved in the education of their children which ultimately benefits the child. Parental involvement should be the focus of school management and responsibility of all school staff. However, Narain (2005) suggests that schools assign the overseeing of all duties pertaining parental involvement to one educator. SoTE (1999) supports Narain (1999) by suggesting that schools train a home/school coordinator to develop programmes and serve as a liaison between the school staff and families.

## **5.7 Recommendations for further study**

Several lines of study emanate from this study. The outcomes of further studies will be useful in assisting schools to improve teaching and learning by increasing levels of parental involvement.

Some of the research areas are as follows:

A comparative study can be conducted to explore the role of the school in promoting parental involvement using participants from two or more schools.

A study that includes learners' as participants – exploring their perception of parental involvement and factors that contribute to levels of parental involvement.

A comparative study between two schools – to investigate the impact of a parental involvement policy on levels of parental involvement.

## **5.8 Summary**

The benefits of parental involvement cannot be overemphasized. The parental component is an asset that many schools do not take full advantage of. This study and other studies reviewed identify barriers that prevent high levels of parental involvement in education. However, schools should strive to take the necessary measures to increase levels of parental involvement.

Practical steps such as effective planning, organizing and managing of parental involvement contribute to increased levels of parental involvement. Every school is

unique. Therefore parental involvement should be managed in a manner that best suits the individual needs of that school.

Parents and staff should work hand in hand for the benefit of the child. This study revealed that parents were eager to involve themselves in the education of their children. However, they lacked skills and knowledge on how to do so. Parents also felt that school staff was friendly and welcoming. The positive attitude that parents have towards involving themselves in the education of their children and towards school staff is the first step towards an effective relationship between the school and the home. The school needs to take advantage of this and design the necessary support structures to support parents who experience barriers to their involvement.

From the findings of this study, I concluded that parental participation is a critical aspect in education. Both parents and educators need to work together for the benefit of the learner. This has implications for how educators are developed and skilled in their training, as collaborating with parents will not come naturally. They need to constantly review the culture promoted by their schools to ascertain if it promotes or hinders parental participation in education. In that way the partnership will be strengthened and sustained.

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## 7. Annexure A



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ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

29 February 2012

Ms Kathlyn Lillian Kannapathi (205514038)  
School of Education

Dear Ms Kannapathi

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0049/012M**  
**PROJECT TITLE: The role of the school in promoting parental participation in education: An investigation in a public primary school.**

In response to your application dated 20 February 2012, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee

cc Supervisor  
cc Mrs S Naicker/Mr N Memela



Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

## Annexure B



**kzn education**

Department:  
Education  
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:2/4/8/163

Ms. Kathlyn Lillian Kannapathi  
P.O. Box 561607  
Chatsworth  
4030

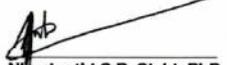
Dear Ms. Kannapathi

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **The Role of the School in Promoting Parental Participation in Education: An Investigation in a Public Primary School**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The Period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 March 2012 to 31 March 2013.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following School:

10.1 Mariannpark Primary School

  
Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD  
Head of Department: Education

25/4/2012  
Date

...dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa

PHYSICAL: Office G 25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, Pietermaritzburg 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610 | Fax: +27 33 3341 8612 | E-mail: sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za |  
Web: www.kzneducation.gov.za

## Annexure C

The Principal

School A

Pinetown

3640

31 May 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE : PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I hereby wish to formally apply for permission to conduct research at your school. I am currently registered at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Edgewood Campus) for a Masters Degree in Education (*School of Educational Psychology: student number – 205514038*). My topic for research is the role of the school in promoting parental involvement in schools. The purpose of the study is to determine what role the school (staff, policy and practice) play in promoting parental participation in schools. The data required for the study will be conducted by means of interviews and questionnaires. Questionnaire will be administered to and interviews will be conducted with parents and school staff

I wish to assure you of the following:-

- Participation will be voluntary.
- The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be respected and ensured.
- No institution will be identifiable by name in the research results.
- A synopsis of the most important findings and recommendations will be forwarded to your school.

I trust that my request will be favourably considered.

Thanking you

K. L. Kannapathi

Dear Educator / SMT member

The aim of this questionnaire is to gather information about parental participation in education. This questionnaire forms part of a study that aims to explore the role of the school in parental participation in education.

Parental participation in this context refers to a parent's involvement in educational related activities such as assisting with homework, school related activities at school or home and involvement in school governance.

The information sought out by this questionnaire is for research purposes only. Confidentiality of the information will be maintained and you are not required to reveal your identity.

Please note that you are in no way compelled to participate in this study and should do so voluntarily. In addition, you may withdraw your participation at any point if you wish to do so. Please provide as much accurate information as possible.

### **Introductory questions**

1. What is your understanding of parental participation in education?

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2. What are your feelings toward parents playing an active role in the education of their children?

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3. What in your opinion, if any, are the benefits of parental participation in education?

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4. How would you describe the parent's role in education?

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5. How would you describe the role of school management in promoting parental participation in education?

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**The nature of parental involvement at the school**

1. How would you describe the level of parental participation at this school?

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2. Have there been any significant changes in the level of participation in recent years?

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3. Would you say that the school has a responsibility in taking measures to improve parental participation in education?

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4. What do you think are the barriers that prevent parents from playing an active role in the education of their children?

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5. What support do you think your school provides in helping parents overcome such barriers?

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**Policy and practice**

*School policy*

1. Do you have a written or verbal policy governing parental participation at this school?

Yes

No

*Communicating with parents*

1. What is the main means of communication between the school and parents?

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2. Has this method proved to be effective?

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3. How often are parents met to discuss the progress of their children?

Once a term

Twice a term

other

If other please explain

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4. Are these meetings held at a location and time that ensures that maximum participation of parents is experienced?

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5. What support structures or alternative means are made to assist parents who are unable to attend such meetings?

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*Parents as Volunteers*

1. Are parent volunteers used at this school in the classroom?

Yes

No

2. Are parents volunteers used at school events?

Yes

No

3. Does the school make use of special talents or skills that parents may possess?

Yes

No

*The home – school link*

1. Are parents provided with information on the school homework policy and how to monitor homework tasks?

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2. Does the school provide support for parents who are eager to assist the children but are unaware on how to do so?

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*Decision making*

1. Are you aware of national policy that requires parental participation in the governance of schools?

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2. How would you describe the role of the school governing body at this school?

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3. Would you say that parents are provided with the necessary information and support they require when electing members of the school governing body?

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4. Do you consider providing parents on the school governing body with support and direction is the responsibility of the school?

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5. Apart from the SGB what other opportunities of school governance are parents provided with?

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*School – community partnership*

1. Would you say that this school has a true partnership with the community within which it is located?

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2. Does the school provide for any community need or provides any service other than meeting its educational needs?

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3. Would you say that the school provides support for parents to overcome any barriers to their participation?

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**General**

1. Would you describe the school environment as one that is welcoming to parents?

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2. What role do you think educators at this school play in promoting or preventing parental participation?

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3. Taking the location and context of your school into consideration, what support structures and frameworks can you identify that have been implemented to promote parental participation at this school?

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4. As a member of the school management team how would you say parental participation is managed at this school?

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5. Please share any information you would like to about parental participation at this school.

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*Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire  
Your co-operation is highly appreciated*

## Annexure E

Dear Parent/Guardian

The aim of this questionnaire is to gather information about parental participation in education. This questionnaire forms part of a study that aims to explore the role of the school in parental participation in education.

Parental participation in this context refers to a parent's involvement in educational related activities such as assisting with homework, school related activities at school or home and involvement in school governance.

The information sought out by this questionnaire is for research purposes only. Confidentiality of the information will be maintained and you are not required to reveal your identity.

Please note that you are in no way compelled to participate in this study and should do so voluntarily. In addition, if you would like to withdraw your participation at any point if you wish to do so. Please provide as much accurate information as possible.

**Part A**

*1. Biographical Information – Indicate with a tick*

**1.1 Marital status** a) Married  b) Single  c) widowed  d) divorced

**1.2 Age** a) Less than 25  b) 25-40  c) older than 40

**1.3 Gender** a) male  b) Female

**1.4 Level of education** a) below matric  b) matric

c) university/technikon  d) Post graduate studies

**Part B**

*2. The role of the parent in education – Indicate with a tick*

<b>My role as a parent in my child/children's education</b>	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
2.1 My child's education is the responsibility of the school.			
2.2 My child's education is the shared responsibility of the school and me.			
2.3 Government policy requires me to participate in my child's education.			
2.4 I should be involved in school matters such as curriculum and school governance.			

2.4 Please share any additional information you would like to about your role as a parent in your child's education.

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*3. The benefits of parental participation in education – Indicate with a tick*

<b>The benefits of parental participation in education</b>	Agree	Disagree	Not sure
3.1 It does not make a difference if I am involved in my child's education or not.			
3.2 My participation in the education of my child can improve his/her marks and attitude towards school activities.			
3.3 If I help my children with their homework, it will show my child that I care about their education and they will care about it too.			
3.4 Children should do their homework alone, it is the only way for them to learn.			
3.5 Educators are the experts, I do not want to get involved.			

3.6 Do you think that getting involved in your child education is important? Please state why you feel this way.

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**Part C**

*4. Forms of parental participation – Indicate with a tick*

**4.1 I discuss my child's experiences at school**

a) Everyday       b) Sometimes       c) Hardly ever       d) Never

**4.1.1 Can you discuss some of the school experiences you and your child have talked about?**

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**4.2 I help my child with his/her homework**

- a) Yes                       b) Sometimes                       c) No

**4.2.1 If you have answered no please explain why you do not help your child with his/her homework**

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**4.3 How often do you communicate with your child's educator about his/her conduct and progress?**

- a) Often                       b) sometimes                       c) Never

**4.3.1 If you have answered never, please state why**

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**4.4 Have you ever volunteered to assist at your child's school?**

- a) Yes                       b) No

**4.4.1 If no please state why**\_\_\_\_\_

**4.5 Do you play an active role in school governance?**

- a) Yes                       b) No

**4.5.1 If no please state why**\_\_\_\_\_

**Part D**

*5. School support structures – Please tick the relevant box*

**5.1 Are parents meetings held at a time that is convenient for you to attend?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.1.1 If you have answered no, please explain why**

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**5.2 If you are unable to attend meetings, does the school provide you with other opportunities to discuss your child’s progress?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.2.1 If you have answered yes, please explain what these opportunities are**

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**5.3 Does the school provide you with information on how to help your child with homework, reading or projects?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.4 Does the school provide any support to you or your community other than meeting the educational needs of your child?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.4.1 If yes, please state what** \_\_\_\_\_

**5.5 Has the school informed you of ways that you can get involved in your child’s education?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.6 Do you feel that the school provides you as a parent with the support you need in order to get involved in your child's education?**

a) Yes

b) No

**5.6.1 Please explain**

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*6. Identifying factors within a school that promote or prevent participation*

<b>Factors within a school that promote or prevent parents from participating</b>	Agree	Disagree
6.1 The school has a warm and welcoming environment		
6.2 Educators are friendly and willing to help		
6.3 The school management is helpful and friendly		
6.4 I feel like an outsider when I visit the school		
6.5 The school staff makes me feel like they do not value my input.		
6.6 I want to get involved but I do not know how to		
6.7 The school gives me the information and support I need to get involved.		
6.8 I feel like the school staff are unaware of the realities of my community		
6.9 The only way the school communicates with me is through written notices and I do not understand them.		

**7. Please add any information you would like to share about your involvement in your child's education.**

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*Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire*  
*Your co-operation is highly appreciated*

## Annexure F

### Interview schedule

#### Educators

This schedule will be used to ensure that specific aspects of parental involvement relevant to this study will be explored during these interviews. However, the interview schedule will in no way dictate the interview and participants are free to raise issues at will.

#### **Introductory questions**

1. What is your understanding of parental participation in education?
2. What are your feelings toward parents playing an active role in the education of their children?
3. What in your opinion, if any, are the benefits of parental participation in education?
4. How would you describe the parent's role in education?
5. Would you say that parents in your school are fulfilling their role?
6. How would you describe the role of school management in promoting parental participation in education?

#### **The nature of parental involvement at the school**

7. Would you say that educators have an influence on the level of parental participation in education?
8. Would you say that the school has a responsibility in taking measures to improve parental participation in education?
9. What do you think are the barriers that prevent parents from playing an active role in the education of their children?
10. What support do you think your school provides in helping parents overcome such barriers?
11. What individual steps have you as an educator taken to promote parental participation?

## **Policy and practice**

### *Communicating with parents*

1. What is the main means of communication between you and parents?
2. Has this method proved to be effective?
3. How often are parents met to discuss the progress of their children?
4. What do you think prevents parents from attending these meetings?
5. Is provision made for parents who are unable to attend such meetings?

### *Parents as Volunteers*

6. Do you make use of parent volunteers?
7. What is your opinion of such a practice?

### *The home – school link*

8. Are parents provided with information on the school homework policy and how to monitor homework tasks?
9. Does the school provide support for parents who are eager to assist the children but are unaware on how to do so?
10. Do you as an educator provide any support for parents to assist their children in your subject?

### *Decision making*

11. Are you aware of national policy that requires parental participation in the governance of schools?
12. How would you describe the role of the school governing body at this school?
13. Would you say that parents are provided with the necessary information and support they require when electing members of the school governing body?
14. Do you consider providing parents on the school governing body with support and direction is the responsibility of the school?

15. Apart from the SGB what other opportunities of school governance are parents provided with?

*School – community partnership*

16. Would you say that this school has a true partnership with the community within which it is located?

17. Does the school provide for any community need or provides any service other than meeting its educational needs?

18. Would you say that the school provides support for parents to overcome any barriers to their participation?

**General**

1. Would you describe the school environment as one that is welcoming to parents?
2. What is your opinion regarding the level of parental participation at your school?
3. What role do you think educators at this school play in promoting or preventing parental participation?
4. Taking the location and context of your school into consideration, what support structures and frameworks can you identify that have been implemented to promote parental participation at this school?
5. How would you say parental participation is managed at this school?
6. If parents call at school without an appointment is they attended to or are they required to wait a long period of time?

## Annexure G

### Interview schedule

#### School management teams

This schedule will be used to ensure that specific aspects of parental involvement relevant to this study will be explored during these interviews. However, the interview schedule will in no way dictate the interview and participants are free to raise issues at will.

#### **Introductory questions**

1. What is your understanding of parental participation in education?
2. What are your feelings toward parents playing and active role in the in education of their children?
3. What in your opinion, if any, are the benefits of parental participation in education?
4. How would you describe the parent's role in education?
5. How would you describe the role of school management in promoting parental participation in education?

#### **The nature of parental involvement at the school**

6. How would you describe the level of parental participation at this school?
7. Have there been any significant changes in the level of participation in recent years?
8. Would you say that the school has a responsibility in taking measures to improve parental participation in education?
9. What do you think are the barriers that prevent parents from playing an active role in the education of their children?
10. What support do you think your school provides in helping parents overcome such barriers?

## **Policy and practice**

### *School policy*

1. Do you have a written or verbal policy governing parental participation at this school?

### *Communicating with parents*

2. What is the main means of communication between the school and parents?
3. Has this method proved to be effective?
4. How often are parents met to discuss the progress of their children?
5. Are these meetings held at a location and time that ensures that maximum participation of parents is experienced?
6. What support structures or alternative means are made to assist parents who are unable to attend such meetings?

### *Parents as Volunteers*

7. Are parent volunteers used at this school in the classroom?
8. Are parents volunteers used at school events?
9. Does the school make use of special talents or skills that parents may possess?

### *The home – school link*

10. Are parents provided with information on the school homework policy and how to monitor homework tasks?
11. Does the school provide support for parents who are eager to assist the children but are unaware on how to do so?

### *Decision making*

12. Are you aware of national policy that requires parental participation in the governance of schools?
13. How would you describe the role of the school governing body at this school?

14. Would you say that parents are provided with the necessary information and support they require when electing members of the school governing body?
15. Do you consider providing parents on the school governing body with support and direction is the responsibility of the school?
16. Apart from the SGB what other opportunities of school governance are parents provided with?

*School – community partnership*

17. Would you say that this school has a true partnership with the community within which it is located?
18. Does the school provide for any community need or provides any service other than meeting its educational needs?
19. Would you say that the school provides support for parents to overcome any barriers to their participation?

**General**

1. Would you describe the school environment as one that is welcoming to parents?
2. What role do you think educators at this school play in promoting or preventing parental participation?
3. Taking the location and context of your school into consideration, what support structures and frameworks can you identify that have been implemented to promote parental participation at this school?
4. As a member of the school management team how would you say parental participation is managed at this school?

## Annexure H – Example of transcribed interview

**Interviewer:** Firstly, I'd like to place on record my thanks to the participant for being willing to be interviewed. Basically, I'm going to start by telling you what my topic is about and what it concerns to make sure that we both have the same understanding of the concepts that are going to be used. My topic is the role of the school in promoting parental involvement in education, just to clarify when I talk about parental involvement in this sense I'll be talking about any involvement that the parent shows in the education process of the child. Just to get the introduction out of the way. How would you describe from your understanding, what is parental involvement in education?

**Educator:** *in the way I see it parental involvement in the school is involvement from the beginning, learning, appearance of the child, the child as a whole in his/her school life. When we go back to the admin form they are made to sign, it says they will do what the school says. They won't keep their child from doing things at school. So they should be involved from the very moment they send their child to the school.*

**Interviewer:** So in other words what you're trying to say is by the very fact that parents sign that admission form; they are compelled to involve themselves.

From your understanding, do you think that there are any benefits when a parent gets involved in their child's education?

**Educator:** My opinion is that there are benefits when the parent is involved and there is evidence through the years when I look at the child where there is no parental involvement when you do home visits. As a teacher you do something at school but when the child gets home they have to do chores, send them to go here, do the washing and everything but when it comes to school some of the parents look at sending their child as they have too, they are not looking at the benefits in the end.

**Interviewer:** So you're saying there's no clear understanding from their part

**Educator:** from their part, some of the parents from their part

**Interviewer:** ok, speaking from the context of the school that you are teaching in now, how would you describe the level of parental involvement at this school?

**Educator:** uh the parental involvement in this school, I think it's nil. Out of 100% I would say maybe 20% of the learners their parents are involved.

**Interviewer:** So obviously you would say that is a very low level of involvement at this school that would suggest that parents are experiencing some kind of barrier something is preventing them from taking part in school activities, something is stopping them. What in your opinion are those barriers?

**Educator:** At face value, the barriers are obvious, the environment, the language level of the parent, how far they've gone in school. They are illiterate most of them. Looking at the environment the school is in, looking at the community, there isn't that much motivation but they do like to send their kids to school but the follow up, the responsibility is left to the teacher.

**Interviewer:** So you say in this community more so in the context of this school parents tend to leave the education of their children on the shoulders of the teachers. In most cases.

**Educator:** In most cases

**Interviewer:** Ok so when you looking at the environment of this school would you describe it as being warm and friendly to parents? Do you think parents feel welcomed when they come here? How do management and staff relate to them? What is your opinion and views on this?

*Interview interrupted by another educator*

**Interviewer:** Okay would you like me to repeat the question? Okay so I was saying in terms of the context of this school do you think that parents feel welcomed when they visit the school? Do you think the environment is inviting to them. Do educators and school management play a role in promoting their involvement? Does this occur at this school?

**Educator:** I think we've got mixed feelings from parents. Parents of learners who do well are always in a positive mood when they come here but since majority of the learners are not doing well these parents are responding differently it's like they put the blame on the teachers not looking at themselves. That's where the SMT comes in.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe the role of the SMT when managing parental involvement?

**Educator:** That's where the SMT come in. If the learners were the priority since they need the pass rate to go up but they are ignoring the fact. Like the parents the SMT are focused on educators. That's the problem of the school, they are ignoring the problem, the problem is obvious the learners, in my opinion they are not doing much when it comes to parental participation.

**Interviewer:** when it comes to parental participation.

**Educator:** when it comes to parental participation they are not doing much. They are not doing any investigation nothing. Everything is on the teachers.

**Interviewer:** So when it comes to parental involvement, do you have a written policy on parental involvement in school?

**Educator:** Oh that one I am not sure about but since they have SGB I think they do there is an SGB and they are not using their SGB. That's how they will get their parents

involved. Use the SGB not only use the SGB to favour them, their ideas, their agendas. We will always have these negative results unless they focus on the problem, the learners, and the parents

**Interviewer:** Okay, so in your opinion would you say that the school has a true partnership with the community?

**Educator:** Ay as I'm saying the feelings are mixed, I'm not sure about the partnership but at face value the SGB I don't know. This school they have problem and they not focusing on it, the learners and the parents. The focus is not on the learners, the focus is not on the parents, only happens when they are talking. And we will always end up getting results because the teachers are working hard. The kids, only five out of 45 are interested when it comes to doing the work they are not motivated

**Interviewer:** So when it comes to having support for parents in terms of the school how would you describe this? In terms of academic support, say for example you give your class homework and half of them come back with it not done

**Educator:** Three quarter of them come with it not done

**Interviewer:** Who provides parents with the support they need? You mentioned many of the parents have a low education level, do you think is providing the parents with support to help their children with their work?

**Educator:** They can say that they is afternoon ABET classes but they are used by a few.

**Interviewer:** So there is no support for the majority of the parents.

**Educator:** You will find that there is a parent who is not working who is sitting at home. You will send four or five letters but they won't come to school and they don't live far from the school.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that maybe parents are not aware of the different ways they can volunteer or the different things that they can do?

**Educator:** They need to show the interest and then we will know that they are eager to learn.

**Interviewer:** Everything is left to the teacher. For example you call the parent, they parent says you must hit the child. But everything must start at home.

**Educator:** okay so in your opinion, when it comes to parental involvement the parent needs to show the first interest and then the school can motivate and encourage.

**Interviewer:** The first thing, the SMT they are educated. They know how to identify they look at their environment and identify their schools problem and the after they have done that work through the SGB. Call a parent meeting identify the things that the school is affected by. Tell them what if we do this and this and this. Maybe involve the local counselor in the area.

**Educator:** Correct me if I'm wrong in understanding what you are saying. You are basically saying when it comes to the way parental involvement is being managed at this school, it lacks severely.

**Interviewer:** I'm not aware of anything except the SGB. What is it that they have done so far? I don't know as I'm a level one. Maybe the management person will give you different answer that will represent the management of the school. But for me you call a SGB meeting you identify the problems you meet with the local counselor you call a community meeting. First of all find out if they are aware that their kids can't read and write they are already aware that their kids can't read and write and they blame the school for that. Their mentality says the teacher must teach my child. One parent said; don't call me why are you calling me. You are the teacher you teach my child. That is how

they should identify the problem and then inform the parents that is not only the educators responsibility to educate the child.

**Interviewer:** So can we speak about how the school communicates with parents.

**Educator:** We do this through letters. But before when I first started teaching here these letters use to be in English and I use to translate all the communities. So one side had English and the other side Zulu

**Interviewer:** So you are saying that this was more effective?

**Educator:** At least they can read Zulu. If they can't then the child or the neighbors can read for them. Now communiqués are only English.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the school is lacking in support for the parents in this respect?

**Educator:** Why did they stop that?

**Interviewer:** Are you asking why they stopped translating in Zulu.

**Educator:** Why did they stop doing that? I don't know.

**Interviewer:** Okay when it comes to parent meeting, in your opinion do you think that parents meetings are an important part of the child's schooling? In terms of it being a place where educators and parents can have a dialogue about the child.

**Educator:** Ja, they are very important.

**Interviewer:** what are the practices of parents meetings in this school? In terms of time, is it convenient for parents? Is it a fair time to have parent meetings and expect full participation?

**Educator:** As I have said most of our parents they work in places where they aren't allowed to take time off (phone rings). It's a barrier on its own.

**Interviewer:** The fact that parent meetings are held during the day. So for parents who cannot attend during the day are there any support structures that the school has in place? So for example if a parent comes to you and says look I cant come because I work during the day and your meeting is during the day but I want to discuss my child's work. Is there some kind of support the school provides the parent with.

**Educator:** It goes back to the teacher who will have to make a sacrifice. Like in other schools the parent can't make the certain time then maybe I can see you at five. Because it happens at our kids schools, they make those arrangements. They ask you at what times can you avail yourself. Then maybe you come at six o'clock, you meet the teacher all the things are on the table the mark files books. Of which I don't know now, when it comes to the teachers here and the management.

**Interviewer:** So when it comes to parents meetings more especially in this school would you say that the school offers the working class parents support? Since they aren't able to attend and who are allowed to come during the school day but they aren't able to because they work.

**Educator:** They are at work and they need to make arrangements and the school must accommodate whatever time the parent can come. Otherwise there is no other means. And you can't say most of the time it is the school. These parents most of them they are unemployed, they are not working but still they don't come. The child says is your mother working no did you tell her about the parent meeting what did she say? She said nothing. How can we correct that?

**Interviewer:** Okay I was going to ask what is or how do you see the levels increasing what the way forward. But you've already covered that by talking about a mass meeting

with the local counselor and the SGB. Is there anything else you would like to add when it comes to parental involvement in schools.

**Educator:** Thought the year's I've noticed it's very important for parents to get involved. Literate or illiterate that support my mother checks my books its makes them know that they are being checked if the parent is not involved in anyway they also know

**Interviewer:** So you say it impacts on the child's attitude

**Educator:** Mmm

**Interviewer:** With that I would like to thank you for availing yourself and participating in this interview.