

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT: CASE
STUDIES OF THREE RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

by

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DECLARATION

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F.L. Haines

December 2012

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late parents, Michael and Crissy Haines, my dear beloved late sisters Catherine and Monica, and late brothers Andrew, Herman, Victor, Harry, Johannes and Cyril as well as my late nephews and nieces.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent of the involvement of parents / care givers from rural primary schools in the school lives of their children in order to ascertain whether their involvement enhanced learner achievement. In a rural context, the value attached to education has evolved over the years and has resulted in rural communities striving to secure a quality education for their children.

The study was underpinned by three theories. The first was Epstein's (1997) integrated theory of family-school relations which are characterized by a set of overlapping spheres of influence. The second theory used was Coleman's (1988) seminal theory of family and community capital. The theory involves the support schools expect from parents; this support includes financial capital, human capital and social capital. Lastly, Burge's theory of rurality was alluded to. This theory depicts rurality as a sense of place linked with the fact that the study focused on rural schools.

A qualitative approach was used and entailed interviews with rural primary school principals, educators, School Governing Body (SGB) chairpersons as well as parent and learner focus groups. School documents were reviewed to establish the provision schools made to allow for parent involvement and the outcomes thereof. Observations were conducted which set out to determine the actual role parents played at the schools.

Related literature was perused and an empirical investigation was conducted to determine parents' role in enhancing learner performance. One of the basic rights of children is the right to a quality education. According to van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 12), parents want the best for their children in schooling, as in everything else. This means a high quality, broad education in a caring, effective and well run institution.

The outcomes of parental support were alluded to and factors that hindered parental support were highlighted. Some of the key findings were that schools were in need of parental support and that parents were aware of the schools' needs. Some parents supported their schools amid challenges. Where parents provided support, learner performance was enhanced.

However, it emerged that most parents were unable to provide support as they spent most of their time eking out a livelihood in order to care for their families. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, the lack of skills and the fact that many rural parents were single parents or aged grandparents were further challenges. Moreover, poor communication between the school and parents, the lack of social services and support structures exacerbated the plight of rural parents.

Some key recommendations that parents should play a more active role in the schools through effective communication and a collaborative working relationship. The Department of Basic Education needs to provide adequate resources, improve facilities, and intensify the drive to eradicate adult illiteracy. They need to review the Post Provisioning Norm (PPN) to help withstand the challenges that rural schools encounter and developed strategies to attract and retain qualified educators.

The conclusions and recommendations provided will assist schools and the Department of Basic Education in improving the teaching and learning environment in rural schools. Moreover, when stakeholders provide resources and encourage parents to be meaningfully involved in the education of their children, things will start to happen.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE STUDY REPORT

ANC	African National Congress
CRSA	Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
HOD	Head of Department
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management Systems
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
QPE	Quality Public Education
SASA	South African Schools' Act
SGB	School Governing Body
WPEA	White Paper on Education and Training
PPN	Post Provisioning Norm

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CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In the developing world (a world with a growing level of economic and human development) in general and in South Africa in particular, within which this study was located, rural education remains a challenge. Layne (1998) describes South Africa which is a developing country as an anomaly because, on the one hand, it has a good infrastructure while on the other hand it is a country with huge social and economic challenges.

Prior to 1994, education was organised into separate schooling systems based on ethnicity. According to Govender, Mnyaka and Pillay (1999), the provision of quality education targeted the white minority while Blacks, Indians and Coloureds were subjected to poor quality education which caused a great socio-educational gap in the South African society. Schools were used as political vehicles for the perpetuation of apartheid. Education policies were designed to keep people of colour subservient and to ensure a supply of non-competitive and cheap labour in a capitalistic economy.

According to Coutts (1992), an education system with separate education departments which separated children from their parents prevailed. This prevented parents from having an input in their children's educational development which greatly affected the learners and subjected them to emotional stress. Democracy, with regard to stakeholder participation in decision making on education policies, was non-existent, especially for Black South African citizens. The 1994 democratic elections led to the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No. 108 of 1996) (CRSA) which promotes values such as human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom (South Africa, 1996, p. 7).

Transformational documents such as the National Constitution (108 of 1996), the South African Schools Act (No. 86 of 1996), the National Education Policy Act (No. 27 of 1996), and White Papers 1 and 2 on Education and Training (WPET) (1995-1996) developed policies and practices to promote the provision of quality education, inter alia, through parental involvement. This

gave authority to parents to play an active role in the education of their children. However, Dekker and Lemmer (1998) contend that many parents are insufficiently involved in the education of their children. They are often unaware of the quality of education provided to their children, and by whom. The only means of communication is a quarterly or an annual report sent to parents. Within current educational realities it has become essential for parents to know how the school functions and to provide support.

1.2 Definition of operational concepts

In the following section the pivotal concepts/key terms of this report are defined. These are: the life of the school, developing world, parental involvement in schools, enhanced achievement, and rural schools.

1.2.1 The life of the school

The term ‘the life of the school’ refers to the purpose of the school, the identity of the school as reflected in the school’s mission as well as the school’s culture. The daily activities that occur in and around the school which have a bearing on the school’s functionality, the safety, well-being and achievement of learners determine the schools’ culture. David and Lazarus (1997) assert that the culture of the school is central to the development of the school and comprises the values and norms which emanate in daily practices. The culture of the school shapes the various facets of school life. The activities in which educators, learners, stakeholders and the school community actively participate on a day-to-day basis represent the life of the school.

1.2.2 Parental involvement

According to van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 8), the concept of parent “...embraces those people with legal or quasi-legal custodianship of the child, whether as biological, adoptive or foster parents.” In the South African society, the South African Schools’ Act (SASA) provides a clear definition of a parent. Firstly, the term includes all primary caregivers; that is, the biological parents or legal guardians of a child. Secondly, it includes the person legally entitled to custody of a learner. Thirdly, it also includes any person who fulfils an obligation towards learners’ schooling.

In practical terms, this definition means that a parent may be married or single, a relative (for example, an older sibling, cousin, aunt or uncle), a custodial grandparent, a legal guardian, a surrogate parent, a foster parent, a same sex household or even a group such as a commune or any other person who takes care of the child. It also means that the children in a school may be in care, temporary housing or in informal foster care.

Fowler and Fowler (1991, p. 883) define involvement as “...cause (a person or thing) to participate; share the experience (effect an activity) or include or effect in its operation”. Therefore, parental involvement will refer to the extent parents will be part of the educative process through a personal desire to make a difference in their children’s education or the extent to which the school will allow or encourage parents to be a part of their children’s educational growth.

Pillay (1998) states that, just as the school cannot replace the internal authority of the home, so the home cannot trespass upon the internal authority of school education. Therefore parental involvement does not mean sole authority or domination. In the final analysis, involvement comes down to the mutual recognition and respect of the school and the home for one another as independent partners, which is really a matter of sound ethics.

Various writers use different terms to define parents’ contribution to schooling. Some talk about home-school partnership while others include the community in this description. Some refer to parental involvement while others distinguish more narrowly between general involvement and parents in school governance (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). These terms may have special emphasis but generally overlap. Throughout the study, the term parental involvement will refer to any activities parents may engage in at the school.

1.2.3 Enhanced achievement

Fowler and Fowler (1991, p. 883) define ‘enhance’ as, “...to heighten or intensify (qualities, power, values, etcetera); or to improve something already of good quality. It is to augment or make something greater; to improve something by adding features or increasing the level of output through motivation to increase effort.”

McClelland (2002) describes achievement as accomplishing or attaining a desired level of performance through a conscious and committed effort to succeed. Those who are achievement motivated tend to work for personal fulfilment rather than reward. They also tend to prefer project or job-related critiques rather than comments about their personal traits and interaction while completing a task.

Further, McClelland (2002) puts forward that achievement-motivated individuals often think about how to improve things as a force of habit. He also believes that households in which parents hold exceptional expectations tend to produce achievement-motivated children. Those who are achievement motivated tend to work for personal fulfilment rather than reward.

In this study, enhanced achievement will refer to all forms of achievement learners may improve in such as academic, co-curricular, extramural, or any other activities offered at the school.

1.2.4 Rural schools

Rural schools as referred to in this study are the schools found on the periphery of an urban area and characterized by a scattered settlement. Such schools are generally difficult to access due to a poor road infrastructure. The area is agrarian or pastoral in nature and is usually inhabited by the aged or unemployed. According to Cubberley (1922), rural schools are part of settlements that are isolated and scattered and uni-functional in nature; they either practise subsistent farming and/or small scale stock farming.

Rural life is full of hardship and is one of unremitting toil. The intense struggle for food and shelter for the family and stock leaves very little time for leisure. As a result, a problem experienced by rural schools is gradual desertion. With the increasing ease with which rural people can now send their children to a town or the city, generally to a better teacher and a better school, the completion of a better education elsewhere has contributed to the weakening of the rural school (Maynard & Howley, 1997).

1.2.5 Developing country

A developing country is a country that has a relatively advanced economy but has not yet demonstrated signs of being a fully industrialised and developed country. It is a country with a

fairly well developed infrastructure where facilities such as transport, communication networks, power supplies, water services and other public utilities (services) are functional. According to Dilley (2012 p. 178), countries like South Africa, Brazil, and India "... are called newly industrialising or developing as their level of industrialisation is growing rapidly".

1.3 Background of the study

This study was an investigation into the role that parents of rural primary school children played in the education of their children and whether their involvement, or lack thereof, affected their children's scholastic achievement. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 12), "...parents want the best for their children in schooling, as in everything else. This means a high quality, broad education in a caring, effective and well run institution." The child's basic rights imply that parents accept responsibility for the well-being of their child and his or her growth towards adulthood (Calitz, Fuglestad & Lillejord, 2002). The South African government makes provision for parental involvement as is provided for in the National Education Policy Act (Act 39 of 1996) which "...assigns a place in the education systems to the parent community".

Internationally, Kyriakides (2005, p. 281) believes that "...involving parents in instructional tasks has positive effects on learning." Epstein (1987) posits that teachers who work with parents understand their students better, generate unique, rather than routine solutions to classroom problems, and reach a shared understanding with parents and students. Furthermore, Epstein (1992, p. 141) asserts that "students at all levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations and other positive behaviours if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging and involved."

According to Clarke (2007), a school is a place where learners are welcomed, secure and where they feel that someone cares for them. It should be a place where they are able to grow intellectually, physically and morally. Atkin, Bastiani and Goode (1988, p. 12) believe that "...there is a growing perception of and support for the view that when professionals and parents share the same goals and work together in a partnership, things can really begin to happen."

However, Heystek and Louw (1999) argue that although the inclusion of parents in school governing bodies has created an environment more conducive to parental involvement in

schools, actual parental involvement in South African schools is poor. Edwards (2004, p. 79) posits that “educators tend to disregard parents to supervise their children and support their schools.” Calitz et al. (2002) concur, stating that “...parents in rural and predominantly Black communities are often not actively involved in school activities for multiple reasons such as lack of empowerment, illiteracy, no clear objectives, exclusion, etcetera” (Calitz et al., 2002, p. 124).

Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2006), however, concur with Davies (1993, p. 206) who asserts that “...parent and community involvement can bring multiple benefits to educators and schools: educators’ work can be made more manageable, parents who are involved have more positive views of the teacher and the school, and parents and others who participate and see positive results will be more supportive of the school”. According to Freidberg (1999), the perceptions of students, parents and the neighbouring communities are key components in creating an atmosphere where teachers can teach, students can learn, parents can take an active role in the education of their children and excellence can be achieved. Parental and community involvement has been found to influence school climate and learner achievement.

According to Ubben and Hughes (1987, p. 27), “...children learn more in schools where there is a good involvement on the part of parents in the school programme ... good instructional leadership calls for the purposeful involvement in their children’s education by parents.” Horne (1998, p. 90) believes that full attendance at parents’ evenings and their participation in helping their children with reading/homework are useful initial targets. Dubin (1991, p. 51) argues that “research indicates that when the school involves parents in home learning activities, parents develop positive attitudes toward the school.”

Children whose parents take active roles in their education are likely to recognize virtue in academic achievement (Nkabinde, 1997). Gabela (1983) believes that parents are able to enhance the quality of educational services, depending on their areas of expertise. The principal and staff, the school governing body and parents need to develop a symbiotic relationship as their mutual interdependence is critical for the achievement of sound educational outcomes.

Dekker and Lemmer (1998) assert that educators cannot perform their educational tasks optimally without a full partnership with parents. For success to be achieved, a collaborative

working relationship should be established between the school and parents. According to Cheney and Osher (1997), collaboration involves relationship and partnership building, coordinating services, explaining service options where assistance is required and allowing flexibility to accommodate participation.

Prinsloo (1996) believes that educators and parents are responsible for the same child, which means they accept responsibility for the child as partners. Effective schools that seem to perform well have a history of effective parental involvement in school activities. Furthermore, Prinsloo (1996) asserts that a good parent-teacher relationship ensures a successful discharge of duties by the school; therefore there is a need for them to work as co-partners to effect quality public education. The more involved parents are, the better they will perform their role in the education of their children, thus ensuring better academic achievement for the child (Mzoneli, 1991).

Dubin (1991) asserts that parental involvement helps parents discover their strengths, potentialities and talents and to use these for the benefit of themselves, the family as a whole and the school. Wolfendale and Bastiani (2000) suggest that for schools to genuinely take parents on board, a policy in consultation with governors, parents and staff needs to be adopted.

Since parents' participation in the schooling of their children has become an indispensable part of the school organization, the development of policies regarding their involvement is paramount. The responsibility of the principal as the accounting officer is to manage parents' participation effectively (Department of Education and Culture, 1996).

Parental involvement can take the form of effective communication, participation and co-operation which will lead to the formation of a partnership. According to Glichman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (1998), communication means the transformation of ideas, information, opinions, attitudes and feelings through one media that produces some responses. In terms of the school, communication means the formal and informal interaction between all stakeholders with the aim of imparting information and delivering services by the respective roleplayers (Van der Westhuizen, 1991).

Dekker and Lemmer (1996) argue that through participation, the parent can restore his natural right in education. Participation does not mean that everyone participates in everything, but

rather than parents are represented at all levels of school management. The school's capacity to work with and through others is important in promoting effective schooling. The quality of education and teaching in schools improves with an improvement in the quality of co-operation between education authorities, schools and parents (Dekker & Lemmer, 1996).

Neale, Bailey and Ross (1981) advise that in order to inspire and recruit support for improvement and development in a school, a humanistic attitude should be adopted among parents and educators. If not, they are likely to develop a defensive attitude towards any form of involvement by another. It is therefore important that every parent, educator and principal be aware of the necessity of a sound partnership between the two parties. Sterling and Davidoff (2000) maintain that a good partnership means learning to work effectively with people. Parents have skills and talents that schools could draw on to make the school a creative and dynamic centre of learning.

In striving to ensure that the school functions optimally, the school has to, among others, create an inviting, harmonious, non-threatening environment where parents are able to participate effectively. In a school where parents are accepted and welcomed, a great deal can be done to create an environment where everyone works in unison towards achieving the school's objectives and in providing for the community's needs. However, this will be determined by the extent to which leadership accommodates parental involvement. Schaleman (1987) affirms that sound leadership is the cornerstone in harnessing parents' participation.

Schools should therefore make every effort to create a warm, friendly and inviting environment to attract their parents' participation. Drawing from several authors, Mncube (2009) argues that parental involvement in education has been associated with a variety of positive academic outcomes such as higher grade point averages (Mc Bride, 1991); Mathematics (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro & Fendrich, 1999); increased achievement in reading (Senechal & Le Fevre, 2002), and lower drop-out rates (Ramburger, 1995).

Clarke (2008) concurs with Epstein (1996) who argues that a good relationship between the home and school is a major feature of educational institutions that are effective, accountable and responsive to the needs of those who use them. Clarke (2008) further advises that stakeholders

have distinctive tasks and that parental involvement is only possible when parents and teachers have mutual sensitivity and empathy for the daily challenges, frustrations and expectations that are all part of the teaching situation.

Middlewood, Parker and Beeres (2005) assert that it would be naïve to assume that all learners in severely disadvantaged areas of deprivation and impoverishment, as is the case in many rural areas, have parents and homes where the ideal support structures and processes are in place. According to Calitz *et al.* (2002), participation by Black parents during the apartheid era in school activities was not very good because they did not live near the schools. The low standard of apartheid education, together with the fact that the schools were perceived as apartheid structures, caused parents to be negative about participating in school activities (Calitz *et al.*, 2002).

The South African democratic elections of April 1994 ushered in the South African Schools' Act (SASA) which aimed to address the inequalities in education. SASA devolved power to parents and guardians and tasked them to participate in a national education system that is intended to provide an education of a progressively high quality. Schools were placed in their hands based on an understanding that they are often in the best position to see what the school really needs and what problems there are in the school (Potgieter, Visser, van der Bank & Squelch, 1997).

Parents were moved from a marginal position on the periphery of professional thought and practice to a more important position – i.e., from being optional extras to essential partners. Such movement, which represents a profound shift, might be seen to revolve around three steadily growing beliefs as alluded to by Bastiani (1987, p. 13):

- Parents have a widely accepted right to be consulted about, and involved with, a process that initially affects both the short and long term development of their children.
- Parents have important knowledge and experience which are crucially important to a child's school career and in getting a picture of the effects of policies and practices upon individuals. Their experiences are both dynamic and continuous and complement those of professionals in important ways.

- Parents have an enormous capacity as a resource to help and support the education and development of young people, which is largely unrecognized by the school system and almost never utilized.

However, a report entitled *Education in South African Rural Communities: Emerging Voices* (Samuel, 2005) has revealed that instead of parents taking an active role in the education of their children in rural areas as directed by SASA, the reality is that many parents do not set foot on the school premises. Parents are used to rubber-stamp decisions of which they are not part.

Heystek (1998) recommends that schools as well as the National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education and other stakeholders take specific action to improve the involvement of parents in school activities so that parents see the advantages of being more involved. A healthy school community relationship and an improved academic achievement are the cornerstones for improved parental involvement. All stakeholders must work towards ratifying factors that inhibit the participation of parents in the school life, if they exist (Heystek, 1998).

1.4 Rationale and motivation

In my experience, a proliferation of literature exists concerning education in urban schools while little research has gone into understanding the challenges experienced by educators, parents and stakeholders in rural areas. I embarked on the study to establish whether parents from rural areas assist schools in a way that enhances learner achievement. My experience as a manager of a rural school is that when parents show a genuine interest, co-operate and participate in the child's school life, the child is motivated to work.

Moreover, my own observation is that parents from rural areas who are, for example, educators, nurses or police officers, send their children to urban schools. I believe that if parents stop moving away, join forces, use their unique skills and plan strategically to find ways of supporting the schools their children attend, they will be a force to be reckoned with. When parents and learners migrate, they take away valuable support that schools may otherwise have utilised to grow and develop.

As a parent who supported the school my own children attended, I believed that it would be most appropriate for me to conduct this study. My active participation in my children's education had a positive impact on their scholastic performance. At the time of the study I was a manager (school principal) of a primary school situated in a rural area where the settlement was largely scattered. The dirt road made it difficult to reach the school, especially when it rained. Learners walked long distances to school, with some having had nothing to eat. The school had no running water, telecommunication systems or electricity. The poor facilities meant learners played sport on gravel surfaces or, alternatively, simply sat around the school during recess times. However, with time the situation at the school was greatly improved through the involvement of parents.

I pursued the study to completion as I am passionate about children and wished to highlight some advantages of education in a rural setting from my experiences and the experiences of others. I also had a good working relationship with the staff and most parents of the schools where I conducted the research. Moreover, I assisted these schools during the appointment of educators as a union representative, facilitated the SGB elections as an electoral officer at two of the schools and served as a peer during the Integrated Quality Management Services (IQMS) process. It is for these reasons that I had access to selected schools and was able to accumulate information from participants that would enable me to do the research to completion. I believe the timing for this study was appropriate as the government of the day had made the provision of quality education its main priority and rural development as one of its five development strategies. This study could contribute to the government's initiative.

1.5 Justification of the study

A gap exists in the provision of education between urban and rural schools despite major efforts by the Department of Basic Education to provide equal education for all South Africans as directed by SASA. There exists a gap between policy intentions and policy implementation as alluded to by Samuel (2005) as well as Fiske and Ladd (2004). Rural schools are isolated, small and under-resourced, have a poor infrastructure, are far from urban schools and serve communities with a low population density. Moreover, many learners are often absent due to

social and financial challenges. Some rural schools are still without water and electricity and some are inaccessible by road or telecommunication (Samuel, 2005).

Urban schools on the other hand enjoy better facilities, sufficient resources, service parents who are employed and attract the services of better qualified educators, to mention a few (Chisholm 2005; Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Fataar (2007) argues that there is a broad consensus, acknowledged by the state, that the inequities in education have deepened and that reform initiatives have faltered.

Graeme Bloch, an education specialist who addressed a delegation at the Knowledge Week organized by the Development Bank of Southern Africa, is quoted as saying, “Education in South Africa is shown to be in crisis. It does not meet national goals in terms of providing broad access to quality education that would enable the equitable sharing of opportunities. The education system remains highly stratified with two systems still in place and the inequality between them is being reinforced and perpetuated. Only a small number of Black students receive an education of any meaningful quality and those attending rural and poor schools are entrenched into the survivalist second economy” (Bloch, 2009).

I believe the study will contribute to national debate as it will reveal what is actually happening in rural schools and illuminate the progress – or lack of progress - of rural education in South Africa. Further, it will allow for a comparison of rural education between South Africa and other countries and share some insights on rural education with the rest of the world. The study will make an impact within disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts as the Department of Basic Education has invested large sums of money to improve rural education by, for example, decreasing the pupil teacher ratio, declaring some schools as no-fee schools and the introduction of the school nutrition programme, to mention a few. However, in my view very little improvement has taken place on the ground.

My experience as a school manager, the conversion of schools from fee paying schools to no-fee schools has had a negative impact on the functionality of schools. Schools are without funds for long periods as the allocated stipend often does not reach the schools during the first quarter when it is needed most. Furthermore, the procurement of resources is such a drawn-out process

that, sometimes, school funds are eventually returned to treasury without learner-teacher support materials reaching the schools.

Class teachers are expected to teach all nine learning areas, some of which they are not familiar with. The revised pupil-teacher ratio has not brought any relief to rural primary schools as many schools have multi-grade classes that compel educators to teach large classes. The working hours allocated to the senior management team members to enable them to deal with their responsibilities further compels educators to teach extra lessons.

In the light of this, the study will contribute to further research as the information provided by the literature review and the empirical nature of the study will reveal what challenges confront schools in rural areas. A search for possible solutions to these challenges could serve as a topic for further research. Much research has been conducted in urban schools, therefore it is hoped that more attention will be given to rural education in the near future.

In terms of parental involvement in education, studies have been conducted globally on this issue. South African authors include Woolhuter, Lemmer and de Wet (2007); Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2006); and Mncube (2009), while international authors include Kyriakides (2005) and Hargreaves (2009). The authors mentioned concur with Epstein (1992) who argues that learners do better academic work and have more positive attitudes if they have parents who are involved.

I believe the study will allude to factors that purport the gaps in education, illuminate challenges, expose failures and highlight factors hindering the effective participation of parents in the education of their children. Since the school is a unique entity, schools could compare strengths, threats, weaknesses and opportunities meaningfully and adopt management techniques that would facilitate effective parental participation in their schools and, in so doing, fill in existing gaps where they exist. The study will provide information as to whether or not parental involvement in the life of the school is enhancing learner achievement. Legislation such as the SASA (1996) implores parents to participate in the life of the school. However, it still has to be proven whether parents in rural areas are assisting their children in an effort to enhance their achievement at school.

It is hoped that this study will encourage rural schools that have not yet tapped into the capacity of parents to do so, so that parents can assist them in the provision of quality education. Schools should acknowledge the important role parents can play and employ their services meaningfully. Furthermore, it is hoped that parents from rural areas may become aware of the contribution they can make in the provision of a quality education. All it will require is some effort on their part.

Parents' prime responsibility is to ensure their children's welfare. In this regard, Departmental prescripts require that parents provide support to the schools attended by their children in a variety of areas. While all areas of support are important and overlap, the following table provides the areas and level of importance at which parents could provide support:

A - the most crucial level of parental support

B - very important level of parental support

C - important level of parental support

D - less important level of parental support

E - least important level of parental support

Table 1.1 Types and levels of possible areas where parents could participate

<p>A. Care of learner welfare: The prime responsibility of all parents is the provision of learner needs, care, safe keeping and ensuring that they attend school regularly.</p>
<p>B. Providing academic support and a suitable environment for children to do school work: Parents can assist their children with simple mathematical operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division), reading, spelling, storytelling, reciting rhymes, learning about the history of the land, caring for the environment, and supervising homework. They can also support learners in preparing for tests and examinations, and they should visit the school to check learner progress.</p>
<p>C. Participating in school management structures: Parents should participate in SGB's and/or finance committees. They can assist in drawing up policies (e.g., the school's code of conduct and admission policy) and ensure that they are implemented. They should attend meetings and planned empowerment programmes.</p>
<p>D. Provide human capital – ensure that the school has resources: Parents should participate in the school's extramural and co-curriculum programmes. They could supervise classes, assist grade R educators, do grounds duty, and accompany learners on trips and excursions.</p>
<p>E. Provide services to the school: Parents could do minor repairs and renovations and attend to the overall upkeep of the school. They could establish flower and vegetable gardens, help prepare for guests and school functions, and accommodate educators.</p>

1.6 Research Aims

The study aimed to explore the following:

- 1.6.1 If parents from rural schools participated in the life of the schools attended by their children
- 1.6.2 Why parents thought it necessary to participate in the life of the school attended by their children
- 1.6.3 How parents from rural primary schools participated in the life of the school attended by their children.
- 1.6.4 Whether parental involvement could be shown to enhance learner achievement, and the ways in which this support took place.

1.7 Research Questions

The following questions served to guide the literature review and the empirical investigation:

1.7.1 Did parents from Rural Primary Schools support the schools attended by their children and, if so, did their support enhance learner achievement?

1.7.1.1 Did parents from rural schools participate adequately in the life of the schools attended by their children? Why do you say so?

1.7.1.2 Why did parents think it necessary to participate in the life of the school attended by their children?

1.7.1.3 How did parents from rural primary schools participate in the life of the school attended by their children?

1.7.1.4 In what way did parental participation enhance learner achievement?

1.8 Parameters of the study

Although SASA mandates the participation of all stakeholders in the education of their children, this study concentrated on establishing whether the support provided by the parent component enhanced learner achievement.

1.9 Method of investigation

The research was conducted by way of:

- a study of available literature that was relative to the support that parents can provide in an effort to improve the quality of education that would enhance learner achievement;
- an empirical survey comprising of interviews conducted with principals of schools, SGB chairpersons, educators, and learner and parent focus groups. Selected documents were analysed and observations were conducted.

1.10 Limitations of the study

As was stated in Chapter one, rural schools are scattered far apart which greatly increased the travelling costs to conduct the research. However, I had established a budget to accommodate unforeseen expenses and this budget came to my rescue. The motor roads were dirt roads with poor surfaces; however, I had a four wheel drive vehicle which I used when visiting the schools. Another limitation was that from my experience, some principals of schools, SGB members and parents are reluctant for different reasons to participate in interviews or have school activities observed.

Furthermore, it was predominantly female parents who were willing to participate in activities such as interviews as male parents were either not interested or working outside the area. Hence the information retrieved was predominantly from a female perspective which had the potential of gender bias. The study did not include the heads of child-headed homes, which meant I was unable to retrieve data from a potentially informative source as many such cases existed in the areas where I conducted the research.

I also envisaged that respondents would give responses that would not be altogether truthful and that they would offer reports or comments that they believed I wanted to hear. To overcome this challenge, I rephrased questions to test that the information respondents provided was what happened in reality.

1.11 Organisation of the study

This report is divided into nine chapters which are presented as follows:

Chapter one presents the conceptualisation of the study. The chapter provides a detailed outline of what the study entailed, starting with the definition of key concepts with regard to the study. Thereafter the background, rationale and purpose as well as the significance of the study are provided. The study objectives and the critical questions that underpinned the study are also presented.

Chapter two explores the global trends on the involvement of parents in the life of the schools attended by their children. It explores the effects of the involvement of parents as well as the

lack of parental involvement in their children's education. The effects of social inequalities, unemployment, isolation and poor communication between parents and the schools are interrogated.

Chapter three explores the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The first was Epstein's integrated theory of family – school relations, which is characterised by a set of overlapping spheres of influence based on three underlying perspectives namely separate responsibilities, shared responsibilities and sequential responsibilities of families and schools. The other two theories adopted by the study included Coleman's seminal theory of family and community capital as well as Burge's theory of rurality which depicts rurality as a sense of place.

Chapter four provides the information on the research design of the study. This chapter critically engages with the research paradigms that guided this research inquiry. These include the research approach that was used in conducting this study. A brief description of the three sampled case study schools is provided. I also provide a detailed description of the research techniques that were used. The process of data analysis, which is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data, is illuminated. Further, the chapter deals with the ethical issues and limitations/constraints that had to be considered. Key issues in research design namely trustworthiness, credibility, dependability; confirmability and transferability are also highlighted.

Owing to the vast quantity of data collected, it was necessary to spread the analysis of the data over three chapters, namely Chapters five, six and seven. Chapter eight provides the themes and patterns emerging from the study as well as the interpretations, analyses and the descriptions thereof.

Finally, Chapter nine provides an outline of the main findings; draws conclusions and offers recommendations to educators, parents as well as the Department of Basic Education on how best to work collaboratively. I also elucidate on resources that stakeholders could provide in an effort to assist in the provision of quality education to rural primary school learners.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction that briefly outlined the education situation in South Africa before the first democratic elections in 1994 and the consequent changes introduced by transformational documents. A clear concern that emanated was that, for various reasons, the quality of education provided to rural learners differs from the education urban learners enjoy. Key concepts were defined and the structure of the study, as well as its conceptualisation and significance, was illuminated. The aims of the study and the research questions were presented. Some limitations and the parameters were briefly discussed. Research aims and questions were outlined to provide the reader with the course of the study.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the background of the study, the purpose for undertaking the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study and methods of investigation. Research aims and critical questions were provided, parameters and limitations were discussed and operational concepts were defined. This chapter provides an in-depth review of multiple national and international literary works on the involvement of parents in the education of their children.

The main research problem was whether rural parents supported the schools attended by their children and, if so, whether their support enhanced learner achievement. The chapter highlights the role parents are expected to play as well as the roles they actually played in supporting the schools attended by their children, with specific reference to rural schools. The chapter also alludes to factors that hinder parental involvement and how these factors impact on learning at schools.

Firstly, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2006) argue that parents bring children into the world; therefore they have the responsibility of taking care of their welfare which includes their education. Secondly, the South African Constitution of 1996 sets out certain responsibilities of government and certain responsibilities of parents with the aim of transforming the education system to ensure the provision of quality education for all learners.

Parental involvement in education has long been a topic of interest among those concerned with the optimal educational development of a child. Sheldon (2010) defines parental involvement broadly to include home-based activities (e.g., helping with homework, discussing school events or courses) and school-based activities (e.g., volunteering at school, coming to school events). Mncube (2010) posits that parental involvement ranges from parents' conscious involvement in the children's well being and learning while at school - to an involvement in school bodies such as the School Governing Body and sub-committees. However, he believes a parent's sense that

he/she can help his/her child/ren succeed in school will depend on the opportunities for involvement provided by the school or its educators.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 34) believe that, "...in South Africa, cultural diversity and extreme socio-economic differences among racial groups pose a challenge. Most families - primarily Black families - live in disadvantaged conditions and struggle to satisfy their needs." One of the major difficulties families have to contend with, especially in rural areas, is the lack of employment and the resultant levels of poverty. Schools therefore have the responsibility of creating an environment conducive to attracting parental involvement. Where schools are able to establish a collaborative working relationship with parents, the chances of providing quality education are enhanced. However, a mechanism to engage all stakeholders is crucial for this ideal to be a reality.

2.2. The nature and levels of parental involvement globally

According to Epstein (1995, p. 702), "the unarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development and success in school." Schools, family and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide and motivate students to produce their own successes. According to Epstein (1995, p. 702), "if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of students, they are more likely to do their best academically, and to remain in school."

2.3 Parental involvement internationally

According to Heystek (2003), countries the world over acknowledge the important role parents can play in the education of their children. Beck and Murphy (1999) purport that parental involvement in their children's education is enhanced when they are provided with opportunities to participate in decision making within the school. Many countries have passed resolutions to make parental involvement in school programmes mandatory. In the British and American systems of education, parents and other role players such as teachers play a major function in the management and governance of local schools. However, Bush and Carington (2008, p. 166) believe that "...keeping an eye on the future, and doing what needs to be done to prepare our children for that, is a primary responsibility of parents today."

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) define parental involvement broadly to include home-based activities (e.g., helping with homework, discussing school events or courses) and school-based activities (e.g., volunteering at school, coming to school events). They argue that parental involvement is a function of a parent's beliefs about parental roles and responsibilities, a parent's sense that s/he can help his/her children succeed in school, and the opportunities for involvement provided by the school or educators. In this theory, when parents get involved, children's schooling is affected through their acquisition of knowledge, skills, and an increased sense of confidence that they can succeed in school.

Long (1986) argues that whatever the form of parental involvement, the effect on children's school performance is positive, provided that the involvement is well planned, comprehensive, long-lasting and serves to integrate the child's experiences at home with those at school. Thomlinson (1991) concurs and alludes to a school improvement framework adopted in Birmingham which engaged parents and community members in school improvement alongside leadership, management and teaching and learning. The analysis of schools showed that progress was higher in schools with good parental involvement than in those schools without. Four aspects of involving parents were outlined. These were: keeping them informed; involving them at school; involving them at home; and offering support through workshops and courses.

Epstein (2001) argues that school, family, and community are important "spheres of influence" on children's development and that a child's educational development is enhanced when these three environments work collaboratively toward shared goals. According to Sheldon (2010), student and family characteristics affect levels of parental involvement. Working-class families and families in which mothers work full-time tend to be less involved in their children's education than parents of older students.

Schools play a significant role in getting parents and family members involved in students' education. Dauber and Epstein (1993) posit that school and teacher practices are the strongest predictors of parental involvement. Specific practices where parental involvement becomes evident include: assigning homework designed to increase student-parent interactions, holding workshops for families, and communicating to parents about their children's education.

Sheldon (2010) is of the opinion that parental beliefs and perceptions strongly influence their involvement in schools. Parents' educational aspirations and level of comfort with the school and staff have been shown to predict levels of involvement. In addition, parents' beliefs about their responsibilities as parents, their ability to affect their children's education, and their perceptions of their children's interests in school subjects have been shown to influence their involvement at home and at school. The good results of rural schools were attributed to parent support and lead to voices going up against the planned closure of many rural schools.

According to Epstein (1991), academic gains occur in subjects in which parents feel confident about their ability to support their children's learning. When parents get involved, children's schooling is influenced by their acquisition of knowledge, skills, and an increased sense of confidence that they can succeed in school. Many well documented initiatives where parents work with learners and educators within the school and at their homes have been cited. For example, Culling (1985), Topping and Wolfendale (1985), Macleod (1989), and Wolfendale (1989, 1992) have collectively provided testimony of collaborative efforts by the school and parents which improved the educational development of their children.

Marschall (2008, p. 16) posits that "when it comes to their children's schooling, language barriers and high rates of poverty in Latino, Chicago, cause parents to face great challenges." She found that due to a break-down in communication, parents and communities did not support or co-operate with schools and this resulted in a low academic achievement and an increased drop-out rate among learners. However, it was found that in schools that had effective Local School Councils (LSCs), parents were significantly more involved in their children's schooling and educators became more aware of and more likely to reach out to them. "Parent involvement helped personnel break down cultural barriers, increase awareness of cultural and community issues, and to facilitate school initiated outreach activities" (Marschall, 2008).

Africa also, cannot be ignored in terms of parental involvement. In Botswana, for example, a research study by the Ministry of Education provided conclusive evidence that in schools where parental involvement was non-existent or minimal, learners performed poorly. However, where parents played an active role in the life of the school, results were the opposite (Ministry of Education [MOE], Botswana, 1993). Based on their findings, they argue that parents tend to get

involved only if there is a crisis whereas, the rest of the time, it is hard work for the principal and educators to get parents involved. The involvement of parents only when crises occur could lead parents to perceive that their involvement with a school is merely a problem solving exercise. Parental involvement can be viewed as a “preventive” approach in that “problems” can be “caught” and dealt with before they are exacerbated. However, Dhingra *et al.* (2008) argue that, traditionally, schools have tended to keep parents out, using the argument that a professional skill such as teaching must be carried out without interference.

Fortunately, however, this attitude was found to have changed in Botswana and schools are trying to encourage parents to take a greater interest in the school (MOE, Botswana, 1993). In our modern era of scientific and technological advancement in almost every human endeavour, parental and community involvement in education has been strongly advocated, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (MOE, Botswana, 1993). This is highly desirable because in our post-modern society we can no longer get every task in the school system effectively and efficiently done by teachers, students and school administrators alone.

Uganda: In Uganda “...every primary school is required by law to have a parent body governing education, called the School Management Committee (SMC), which takes overall responsibility for running the school” (Suzuki, 2002, p. 248). The researcher contests that a lack of transparency in school finances, power imbalances between the head teacher (principal) and parents and the distance between ordinary parents and school leaders caused hindrances to the participation of parents in school governance. Overall, Suzuki found that head teachers tend to dominate school governance and manipulate the work of the SMC in rural areas where some members of the SMC are often semi-literate, as discovered by the International Development Consultant organization in 2000 (Suzuki 2002, p. 252).

Zimbabwe: Although Zimbabwe has the highest literacy levels on the African continent, Chikoko (2006) found that some parents living in rural areas in Zimbabwe had busy schedules and some could not read or write. He asserts that asking them to look at their children’s work was asking for the impossible as the parents’ level of formal school determined their ability to perform school functions. His finding that parents in rural areas have low levels of education

also applies to the South African context as most people with a higher average level of education are found mainly in urban areas.

Another factor that impacts negatively on the provision of quality education in Zimbabwe, which is the case in many rural primary schools in South Africa as well, was that parents did not attend open days to discuss curricular issues and their children's progress. Added to this problem in South Africa is the fact that, while legislation dictates that parents must be involved in their children's education, very little is done to empower them. Chikoko (2006, p. 254) argues that "with very little capacity building taking place, parents are legally empowered but practically disempowered." Educational challenges experienced in South Africa are similar to those encountered in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

According to Dhingra *et al.* (2008), it was found that in schools in Botswana, where parental involvement was highly visible, teacher effectiveness was apparent and this contributed significantly to the improvement of learner performance. The involvement of parents in reading not only had a positive influence on the children, but parents' knowledge base was also enhanced. Children felt confident about going to school in light of their parents' involvement at school. Parents tended to see themselves as playing an integral role, together with the school, in educating their children (Dhingra *et al.*, 2008).

Studies conducted internationally have therefore illuminated that when parents are involved in the education of their children, the children perform better at school.

2.4 Parental involvement in schooling in South Africa

According to Meier, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2006, p. 133), "...parents directly or indirectly help to shape their children's value system, orientation towards learning, and view of the world in which they live." Bush and Corington (2008, p. 171) state: "Parents have a new role. No longer are they the sage on stage, but rather the guide alongside. Not only won't schools do it, but you can't delegate this job to tutors, nannies, or anyone else" (Bush & Corington, 2008, p. 171). Central to the provision of quality education is the role parents could play in transforming the education process in the face of the many challenges education is confronted with.

Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2006, p. 132) posit that, "...when educators and parents improve the quality of their relationship and make it part of school practice, parents increase their interaction with their children at home and feel more positive about their abilities to help their children. In addition, parents have a better understanding of what is happening in school resulting in a feeling of empowerment." Mitchell and Pillay (2007) concur with Hargreaves (2009) who states that schools, more than any other organization, can play a pivotal role in promoting community participation and partnership in developing a coherent and relevant approach to dealing with children and young people in rural areas. Van Niekerk and Wydeman (2008) advise that schools develop programmes that encourage work that involves the whole family as well as the community.

Education in South African has changed significantly since the 1994 elections. Transformational documents such as White Paper I and White Paper II on Education and Training (1995-1996), the South African Qualifications Act (1995), the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), and other documents stipulate the state's expectations regarding parental responsibilities. SASA (1996), for example, gives authority to parents to act on behalf of the school and for the benefit of the school community. The School Governing Body, in particular, is placed in a position of trust towards the school and is expected to act in good faith in carrying out its duties and functions.

Section 16 of SASA (1996) creates ample opportunity for parents to be purposefully involved in school activities, to ensure that schools function optimally and to create a balance of power and a shared sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, the act provides school leaders (principals and governors) with an increased sense of autonomy, accountability and ownership, thereby weaning them of dependency on the state.

Michael, Wollhuter and Van Wyk (2012) believe that good family-school partnerships improve learners' academic achievement, self-esteem, school attendance and social behaviour. Moreover, they result in a reduction in school drop-out rate, more positive parent-child communication and improved school programmes and school climate (Sheldon, 2010). Parents are strategically positioned and, with positive involvement, will be effective in imparting their educational experiences to their children.

2.4.1 Areas where parents provide support

Parents as the primary educators of their children need to continue to support their children's learning in schools. Since educators and parents share similar educational aspirations, it is imperative that they work in unison. According to Mncube (2009, p. 83), "...at some schools in South Africa, parents are not yet playing their full role as mandated by legislation." He contends that "...parents at some rural schools are reluctant to participate in the decision making bodies such as School Governing Bodies as a result of their low educational level or of power struggles in SGBs."

Lemmer & Van Wyk, (2007) argue that in many families both parents work outside the home, making it difficult, if not impossible, to attend day school conferences and scheduled meetings. Evening meetings are a safety risk and care for children being left at home remains a challenge. Most parents and educators would want to do more but they may have difficulties in arranging the additional time. This absence of parents strains any teamwork relationship that may have been established. I believe the failure to establish a collaborative working relationship between parents and learners is an important factor that impacts negatively on teaching and learning.

Listening to parents, encouraging their participation and giving them more power and responsibility often result in better functioning schools. This is a view shared by authors such as Mncube (2009); Apple (1993); Bean and Apple (1999); and Davies, Harber and Schweisfurth (2002). This is corroborated by Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004, p. 202) who posit that "...educators who work with parents understand their learners better, generate unique rather than routine solutions to classroom problems and reach shared understanding with parents." I believe parents who are involved become informed, are empowered and develop a greater appreciation of their role and will participate meaningfully in a team.

According to SASA (1996), the SGB is expected to play a leading role in the life of the school attended by their children. They are expected to govern the school through the School Governing Body and its sub-committees. Parents are to get involved in school activities, make decisions about the school and its future, take care of the upkeep of schools and promote their functionality. They are expected to attend meetings and participate in structure such as: SGB's,

finance committees, disciplinary structures, and safety and security committees. They are expected to participate in drawing up school policies such as the schools' code of conduct and ensure they are up-held.

Stern (2003) advises that educators identify the relevant parts of the learning content for which to solicit the participation of parents. Community members who may be willing to take time from their daily schedule need to be invited to come and share some information with the learners. Caltz (2002), Meier *et al.* (2004) and Lemmer *et al.* (2006) concur that parents need to assist in the classroom by reading to groups of children or listening to reading, giving talks to learners, and supervising classes when educators are absent. By assisting with art work and teaching displays, serving as library assistants, preparing materials and equipment, listening to spelling, and others, parents will afford educators more teaching time.

According to Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008, p. 98), urban parents are better able to be involved in their children's schools despite poverty due to the fact that there is better support and infrastructure and a better chance of obtaining assistance from social services. Where facilities do exist in rural areas such as schools and clinics, they are not easily accessible because of the scattered nature of the settlements and long distances. As the majority of rural dwellers are either the very young or very old, the non-availability of transport facilities, even though for short distances, poses a further challenge to parental involvement.

Kruger (2005, p. 10) posits that "...parental involvement is an important aspect of education, but it does not happen spontaneously. The unique circumstances of each school determine how parent involvement is to be planned and managed at school. There is therefore no single ideal parent involvement plan to serve as a model for all schools." For any success to be achieved between parents and teachers in education, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) believe that there needs to be clear and open communication, honesty, accountability and commitment to agreed goals. Effective communication is essential to facilitate meaningful parental participation (Dekker, Dekker & Brown, 2007).

In the light of the above, and based on my personal experiences, I strongly believe that schools should devise mechanisms and strategies that will entice parents to visit the schools.

2.4.2 Attracting parents to the schools

Schools need to invest time and money into attracting parents if any success of a working relationship between the school and parents is to be established.

2.4.2.1 Establishing an environment conducive to parents' participation in school activities

Meier *et al.* (2006) posit that it is possible to involve virtually all parents, including those with a low proficiency in English, illiterate parents and parents of a low-income status in the education of their children. According to Lemmer (2010, p 158), "...an important aspect emphasized in global reform is that schools alone cannot resolve the supposed failures of the education system, but that it is the shared responsibility of communities. Co-operation – a joint effort from parents, educators and other community structures – is what is required. This is the reason for the urgent need for a home-school partnership." By fostering outreach and involvement programmes, many parents could become interested and consequently participate in the life of the school.

Clarke (2007, p. 60) argues: "In most successful schools there is a strong partnership between the school and all relevant stakeholders. The strength of this partnership is dependent on the extent to which the principal and the teaching staff make parents feel welcome and encourage their involvement in the activities of the school." However, if the extent of parental involvement is limited to attending meetings to discuss a child's limited academic progress and deal with unruly behaviour, then parental involvement is likely to be minimal (Lemmer, 2010).

Bush and Carington (2008) assert that parents have become more significant in the development of their children's talents. Clarke (2007) believes that when the school allows parents to become involved in a variety of activities involving their children such as gardening, catering for sports matches, cultural events and others, their involvement and commitment are likely to be far greater. Involved parents tend to develop an ownership towards the school, and because of this are likely to be more loyal and more generous in their commitment to the school and its activities. As they get to know the learners and their teachers better, they become more knowledgeable and they develop a sense of ownership and a commitment to the school and its ideals (Clarke, 2007).

According to Vernon-Feagans *et al.* (2004, p. 430), “...no matter what their socio-economic background or geographic location, almost all children come to school ready and eager to learn and with high hopes for success.” It is my contention therefore that if parents want their children to succeed, and when learners are eager and have high hopes for success, the possibility of an enhanced achievement is a reality. It therefore becomes necessary for the school and parents to invest in establishing collaborative working relationships where stakeholder expertise is effectively utilised.

2.4.2.2 Establishing a collaborative parent-school working relationship

Meier *et al.* (2006) encourage schools to acknowledge a variety of family types and household structures and to assist them in developing a versatile range of practices of family-school linkages. While some writers believe parental support to be one-dimensional, Kyriakides (2005) argues that parental involvement is multi-faceted: parents transmit their aspirations for their children’s academic achievement to their children; participate in school activities and structures, and communicate with educators concerning their children’s progress and how to be involved with homework.

The admission of a learner to a school sets the parent-teacher relationship in motion. Once learners have been admitted to the school, parents need to establish a relationship where they work in partnership in a shared vision with educators. However, Anderson (2007) warns that parents and educators define involvement differently. Parents take a more community-centric view that includes keeping their children safe and getting them to school, whereas teachers define involvement primarily as parental presence at school. Desforges and Abouchar (2003, p. 33) give the following advice: “Good parenting can be found amongst mothers of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds, and where it is not found it can probably be taught.”

Further, Anderson (2007) argues that the ability of families to comply with teacher expectation differs because of varying levels of resources. Middle-class families tend to have more flexible work schedules and easier access to transportation, making it easier for them to be present at school and to receive acknowledgement. They advise that one should consider that lower resource families, as is the case with most rural families, may respond differently than do

families with greater resources. However, this does not prevent rural parents from using traditional story telling around the fire-place as a means of contributing to the education of their children.

Heystek and Louw (2004) express a need for a change of attitude by parents as well as educators to develop a working relationship between the home and school that will benefit the children, and as such benefit the country. Chetty (2003) stresses that parents are important partners in the education process as pupils come to school with knowledge, values, beliefs and attitudes which they have acquired from them and the community. Parents can help teachers expand their knowledge and understanding of their learners which can improve the effectiveness of the educators' teaching, (Chetty, 2003).

Mncube (2009) concurs with many authors such as Davies, Harber and Schweisfurth (2002), Harber (2004) and Moggach (2006) when he asserts that listening to parents, encouraging their participation and giving them more power and responsibility result in a better functioning school. A study conducted by Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004, p. 305) found that "parents who spent quality time with their children, motivated them." The study found that learners who received support from their parents early in their school lives were more empowered to deal with school work independently later on in life.

Anderson-Butcher, Stetler and Midle (2006) believe that "schools in many communities are situated in the middle of potential resources in the learners' parents that can be harnessed in an effort to improve academic achievement." Where principals are not aware of these potential resources, they end up lying idle in the community. I believe schools that interact with parents by empowering them and making them feel welcome will reap the rewards of committed support from parents.

There is a wide range of facets of home-school relations and many advantages of a partnership between educators and parents. Authors such as Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007), Clarke (2007), Naidu, *et al* (2008) and others assert that parents can deliver a valuable service to the school by accompanying learners on trips and doing minor renovations to the school. However, they

advise that schools involve parents meaningfully, make them feel appreciated and return services to the community where possible.

I believe a community that receives support from a school will reciprocate when requested to do likewise. This, I believe would contribute to the establishment of a collaborative working relationship.

2.4.3 Essential support provided by parents

Schools are in need of a wide variety of services - some of which are essential - that can be provided by parents. To do this, schools need to keep records of the various skills that can be offered by parents in order to facilitate the recruitment of parental support.

2.4.3.1 Parental support of learners at home

According to Meier et al. (2006), schools need to assist families to establish home environments that support learners in their education. In this regard, schools should hold regular workshops or discussions on topics relevant to parents such as the developmental stages of the child, healthy living and life styles, safety, nutrition, discipline and guidance, as well as parenting approaches. Social partners such as school nurses, school psychologists, school counsellors and others could provide specialist support, information and assistance to parents. Parents who are familiar with school policies, programmes and procedures would be better able and willing to support the schools.

Michael *et al.* (2012) believe that learning at home entails the provision of information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning. Lemmer (2006) concurs with Middlewood *et al.* (2005) that schools need to provide opportunities for families to share information about their children's culture, background, talents and needs through workshops. They advise that schools consider parents as well as their home circumstances when they plan ways of assisting parents and getting information from them regarding their children (Meier *et al.*, 2006).

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 116) posit that "often, poor and illiterate (or semi-literate) learners are unable to access the help they need." They advise that "schools should provide

information to learners and families on any facilities available which could assist them in any way.” I believe, while it may be difficult for poor parents to provide complex health and social needs for their children, they could provide emotional stability, an environment that is conducive to academic effort, and time to do schoolwork so as to allow learners to obtain sufficient sleep.

2.4.3.2 Parental support of disciplinary matters

Well-disciplined schools are considered to be good schools by most communities. Where there is an opportunity for choice, the majority of parents and their children prefer schools which are perceived to be well disciplined. Clarke (2007, p. 98) argues that “parents and the community will certainly support any measures to improve the discipline of a school.” Dhingra (2009) believes that without parental support, it becomes difficult for teachers to be effective in disciplining children. This is one of the key elements that will determine whether any school performs well academically.

In my experience, when ill discipline prevails at school, much time is consumed bringing learners to order. This makes inroads into teaching and learning time. Often the school programme is disrupted when teaching staff, managers and the SGB must conduct tribunal hearings to deal with serious learner misbehaviour. Often, when parents visit the school to attend to matters involving the misbehaviour of their children, home-school relations are strained when learners ‘convincingly’ deny allegations against them. This often causes conflict which has the potential of severing working relationship that may exist between the school and the home.

Clarke (2007) advises schools to include parents and the community in formulating and implementing strategies to maintain discipline. The act of consulting and involving them is likely to have an immediate positive effect on student behaviour. Keeping them informed of good progress and of difficulties will ensure their continued support. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 44), schools benefit “...from the involvement of fathers as it enriches the resources the school can draw on. It has also been found to reduce misconduct by learners at the school.”

2.4.3.3 Parents serving as volunteers in special interest groups

Epstein *et al.* (1997) define a ‘volunteer’ as “...anyone who supports school goals and learners’ learning or development in any way, at any place and at any time – not just during the school day and at the school building.” Schools are urged to recruit and organize parental help and support by designing programmes which will attract parent volunteers. However, parent volunteers need to be trained to meet the school’s needs. Meier *et al.* (2006) advise schools to create a climate that is conducive to recruiting and using parent volunteers for the right reasons, building parents’ self-esteem, training parents for the tasks they are expected to perform and thanking all volunteers. They recommend that parents serve as classroom assistants, are invited to assist in, and organize and manage extramural activities as well as with the day-to-day running of the school. Middlewood *et al.* (2005) concur with Lemmer *et al.* (2009) who advise that parent volunteers are needed to serve in classrooms to assist educators with routine tasks, engage in parent patrols to assist with the safety and operation of school programmes, and serve as peer mentors to other parents.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) advise that schools establish ‘special interest groups’ based on parents’ expertise. This will consist of those groups of parents whose interests relate to parenting skills, drug abuse, social integration, and student health issues such as eating and behaviour disorders, to mention a few. These groups are usually driven by two or three individuals with a passion for a particular issue which they believe needs the wider involvement of the parent community and the school.

Clarke (2007) argues that, at times, parents can test the patience of the principal and staff because of their relentless commitment and zeal. There are, however, often committed parents who need to be indulged wherever possible, especially in rural schools where the services mentioned above do not exist. Schools that embrace the support of enthusiastic parents willing to support, empower and establish an effective working relationship with them will benefit when parents perform their roles adequately.

2.4.3.4 Parents participating in decision making

Meier *et al.* (2006) posit that parents can also be involved in decision making at classroom level by including them in class or grade committees. This is an effective, informal way of bringing parents and educators together, which provides opportunities for them to get to know one another and for parents to support each other in various educational endeavours. An inviting, comfortable “parent room” could be set up where parents are able to meet on a regular basis.

Furthermore, parents have the obligation of performing certain educational functions such as drawing up school policies in accordance with the national mandates which may have legal ramifications. According to SASA (1996), every public school is a juristic person with legal capacity to perform its functions in terms of the Act. It is therefore vital that policies drawn up and decisions made by parents are in line with legal and constitutional guidelines.

Epstein *et al.* (1997) argue that decision making means a process of partnership and of shared views and actions towards shared goals, and not a power struggle between conflicting ideas. The aim of such a partnership is to develop parent leaders and representatives. At school level, all schools are compelled to institute structures such as a school Finance Committee, Admission Committee and others that are to engage in decision making on matters involving the school as established by SASA (1996). Van Deventer (2008, p. 95) believes that “making things happen as we wish them to in a school, as well as preventing unwanted events, depends on the skills of solving problems by taking and implementing effective decisions based on sound school policies.”

Van Wyk and Lemmer, (2006) believe that when parents are collaborating with educators, it increases the educators’ understanding of the children in the family and provides information which may be valuable when dealing with specific children. Further, collaboration between the school and parents increases resources available to the school. Parents’ expertise may help with the development and maintenance of the school buildings and grounds. Parents may provide a link with businesses, agencies, cultural institutions and other resources within the community. A link with the community could have multiple positive results, could result in cost saving and

improved services through collaboration, could increase access to school resources and facilities, and could increase capacity to solve community problems and enhanced community pride.

2.4.4 Schools providing support to communities

Parents are likely to support the only school in the community; however, if there are more than one school, they are more likely to support the school which supports and participates in the activities of the community. It also follows that schools need to allow parents to benefit in some way from the services they provide to the schools. Therefore schools should have programmes in place for parents and communities to benefit from the support and services they provide to the schools.

Lemmer (2004), Naidu *et al.* (2008, p 138) and Van der Westhuizen (2000) are in agreement that schools in turn need to support parents and the community. In smaller, rural and less advantaged communities, schools often need resources and expertise that may not be available or accessible in the community they serve, so they have a duty to help members of the community in order to engender reciprocal services (Lemmer, 2004).

Naidu *et al.* (2008) and Van der Westhuizen (2000) concur that schools need to ensure that they provide services to the communities in which they are located. Schools can conduct courses or workshops on parenting and literacy as well Adult Basic Education. In this way, 'community schools' that foster life-long learning among adults will come to fruition. Schools that open their doors to accommodate educational and other important activities involving parents attract parental support. This will establish links with surrounding communities and create a sense of ownership and develop a safe-guard for the school.

According to Samual (2005, p. 113), "...most of the teachers in rural areas are involved in some form of community activity, not necessarily in the communities in which they teach, but where they live: in the church, community infrastructure improvement work such as the 'electric committee', the 'water committee' and the 'health committee', sports, funeral and burial societies, as well as cultural activities, youth development and women's organizations." I believe such services would be greatly appreciated if they were rendered by the educators of the

local school to the local community in an effort to establish a collaborative working relationship where it does not exist, or to consolidate an existing working relationship.

While ‘partnership’ is part of the rhetoric of school reform and has become the buzz-word in various aspects of governance, it is seldom part of the action agenda (Naidu *et al.*, 2008, p. 132). However, Michael *et al.* (2012) warn that language difficulties could result in parents not understanding the participation opportunities given to them, which often leads to educators labelling such parents as uninterested. Key in getting parents involved in supporting schools towards the achievement of educational goals is effective communication between the school and home. Van Wyk (2009) asserts that parents will share their ideas and skills freely when they believe their inputs are appreciated.

2.4.5 The need for effective communication between parents and the school

Schools should communicate significant information to parents so as to ensure that they are kept abreast of developments at the school as well as in education. Similarly, parents should ensure that relevant information regarding their children’s education is communicated to the school.

2.4.5.1 Influence of effective communication on parental involvement

Prinsloo (2005, p. 156) describes communication as “...a message conveyed by a sender to a recipient/s, either verbally or non-verbally, with regard to activities, management tasks, and/or relationships between staff, parents and learners in the school.” Further, Prinsloo (2005, p. 171) advises that, “as communication can greatly affect the efficient running of a school, everyone in it should strive for effective communication.”

Writers such as Ngcongo (1995), Prinsloo (2005) and Van Wyk (2009) concur that through effective communication the parents will understand the school’s objectives and work with educators towards achieving the school’s goals. The school’s vision and mission will be best understood if they are effectively communicated to all involved. However, to ensure that everyone is on board, the most suitable way of communication is to be decided upon, and then it is to be tried and tested for effectiveness.

According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), parents wish to be kept informed of developments taking place at school regarding their children's progress. Meier *et al.* (2006) warn that parents come from different backgrounds with different values, traditions, languages and communication styles. Since a person's cultural background can create a barrier through which a message has to penetrate, schools need to devise effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication strategies to secure parents' support. A school has the responsibility of informing the parent community about the school's needs and creating an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning.

Educators need to be know the parents in order to communicate effectively and to be able to work together to achieve set goals. The creation of effective communication links is therefore essential to ensure that stakeholders share common objectives.

2.4.5.2 Communication link with parents

Cochran and Dean (1991, p. 265) warn that schools "...tend to involve parents in one-way communication rather than [in] a partnership where each partner is truly respected as having something valuable to contribute. Where parents and educators do know each other or talk to each other about matters concerning their children, they may wrongfully see each other as uncompromising and not even try to discover mutually beneficial options."

Lemmer *et al.* (2006) advise that communication between the school and the home can take various forms such as open days (which can be held on a regular basis), providing parents with the opportunity to visit the school, and talking to parents and allowing them to peruse their children's schoolwork. When necessary, regular informal contact between parents and educators - written or face-to-face - is a valuable means of monitoring learners' progress on a regular basis. Meier *et al.* (2006) warn that if parents and educators don't talk, they may mistakenly see each other as uncompromising and fail to see mutually beneficial options.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) propagate that educators visit learners' homes. They believe parents speak more freely in the safe and familiar environment of their own homes. An educator who is interested enough in the child to take the trouble to visit the home is deeply appreciated by both the child and the parent. A home visit with a child's parent(s) does wonders in breaking

down the barriers of class and ethnicity which may exist between home and school (Van Wyk and Lemmer, 2009).

2.4.5.3 Verbal communication

According to Prinsloo (2005), verbal communication is most convenient and invites immediate feedback. It is usually quicker and cheaper than written communication. It is more personal, less formal and can be an accurate way of conveying information. Where necessary, questions need to be asked to clear misconceptions. Verbal communication goes a long way to ensuring that parents and educators understand one another. The possibility of conflict is minimised and the possibility of creating a friendly atmosphere is enhanced.

However, to communicate effectively, one has to listen. Listening provides teachers with the feedback they need in order to respond and it is a skill that must be developed (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Schools should also devise methods of communicating decisions taken at meetings with those parents who could not attend planned meetings for reasons that were beyond their control. Parents need to be aware of developments taking place at the school. Where possible, a regular meeting with parents will help ensure that parents are kept abreast of developments taking place at the school and of where additional support is needed.

2.4.5.4 Written communication

According to Prinsloo (2005), written communication is the second most important medium of communication where simplicity and clarity are of utmost importance. Some advantages of this form of communication are that it can be kept as evidence and be duplicated to reach many people. Clarke (2007) advises that schools write notes to update parents on developments concerning the school or their children. However, he warns of the risk that letters get lost in the bottom of a school bag "...with a mouldy sandwich or an old football sock". Letters are often mislaid which means schools have to do follow-ups to ensure that messages reach parents.

Academic reports are regarded as the most crucial form of communication as they contain messages about the core function of the school. Chetty (2003, p. 121) posits that "...reports need to inform parents about the child's academic potential and what the parent and the child can and should do to ensure that he/she realizes his/her potential." A challenge for the school will be to

ensure that written messages are understood by illiterate parents who may not be able to read as this is common among rural parents. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004, p. 183) advise that home-school communication needs to aim at giving parents a voice and should avoid patronizing them.

Effective communication between the school and parents is essential if set educational goals are to be achieved. Meier *et al.* (2006) posit that where effective communication is established and sustained in a comprehensive parent involvement programme, there are many positive outcomes for learners, parents and educators. However, there are several challenges that stifle the level of parental involvement in the life of the school attended by their children.

2.5 Impact of parental involvement on learner achievement

Epstein *et al.* (1997, p. 121) argue that, “when parent involvement is viewed broadly, it is possible to involve virtually all parents in the education of their children, including parents of low income status and those who are illiterate or have a very limited proficiency in English.” Most authors share a common view that when parents are involved the education of their children, there are positive academic, social and cultural outcomes. The Countryside Agency Report (2005, p. 51) found that the educational performance in England since 2005 showed that pupils from rural areas “...generally performed well” in national tests and public examinations. According to the report, this was in part due to the support schools received from parents.

Kyriakides (2007) cites Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) and Watkins (1997) who posit that parent involvement in teaching activities at school would influence students’ achievements. This would be possible due to parents’ ability to offer modelling reinforcement and instruction that support the development of attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours associated with successful school performance. Dauber and Epstein (1993), Dixon (1992), Loucks (1992) and Prinsloo (1996) concur that children are more successful students at all grade levels if their parents participate in school activities and that they go on to do well later in life.

Anderson (2007) posits that parental involvement in education has been associated with a variety of positive academic outcomes. These include higher achievement or grade points in reading, writing and mathematics, and homework completion. Other benefits include lower dropout rates, fewer retentions, and special education placements. Positive behavioural outcomes

associated with parental involvement include increased ability to self-regulate behaviour, higher levels of social skills, and evidence of casual relationships. Further, when families participate in specific programmes aimed at increasing their involvement, improvements are seen in overall achievement (Anderson, 2007).

According to Kyriankides (2005), an attempt by a primary school in Cyprus to implement a policy on partnerships that would encourage parents to work with their children in school proved most beneficial. Before the introduction of the school policy, student attainment was similar to that of students at a primary school that had not introduced a partnership policy. Six months after the partnership policy had been implemented, students at the experimental school achieved higher attainment in each core subject. Moreover, parents claimed that their classroom visits contributed significantly to improved teacher communication and to student behaviour at home.

Anderson (2007) contends that the ability of families to comply with educators' expectations differs because of varying educational levels and available resources. Middle class families tend to have more flexible work schedules and easier access to transportation than do working-class families, making it easier for them to actively participate in the life of the school. They visited the school regularly to check on children's progress and attended planned empowerment programmes. Parents provided invaluable support when they participated in the school extramural and co-curriculum programmes.

In the South African context it has also been shown that parental participation greatly improves learner performance, as I had the opportunity to observe in my own school. However, Middlewood *et al.* (2005) concede that schools have traditionally been poor at acknowledging what parents can bring to the learning partnership. They posit that the emotional support that parents can give to children can be very significant, yet the only time schools contact them is when there is a problem. Parents need not fear ignorance of content, but help the child cope with getting something wrong; sticking to something instead of giving up; and be willing to seek help and finding out where to get it from.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007) posit that students are the key to a successful school and family partnership as the child is the reason for the connection between the home and the school. They

agree that increased parental and community involvement can bring multiple benefits to educators and the school: the educators' work will be made more manageable; parents who are involved will have more positive views of the teacher and the school; and the parents and others who participate are likely to be supportive of the school, as alluded to by Davies (1993).

Middlewood *et al.* (2005) advise that parents should realise the importance of providing a quiet place of study for their children to carry out their schools tasks. They contend that some people learn best when surrounded by noise and activity, some need quiet isolation; while some learn by chatting to others. They cite Briggs (2001) who emphasises that the environment needs to enable learners to 'tune in to' learning; in this way learners feel respected and sense that their needs have been assessed and attended to.

Middlewood *et al.* (2005) posit that parents are also able to learn from their children. They cite the example of the advent of new technologies such as cell phones and digital cameras, which are a normal part of the modern child's life. They argue that in most families adolescent children can demonstrate to at least one parent how a new technological development operates. The patience and instructional skills needed for a child to do this are in themselves invaluable. The difference between the child and the parent is their mindset. To children, the newest technology is not something to be consciously learned, it is just there! To many adults, it requires a conscious learning exercise.

2.6 Challenges to parental involvement in schools

Nelson Mandela, the first president of a democratic South Africa, stated, "I have often said the most profound challenges in South Africa's development and democracy can be found in its rural hinterland. Foremost among the challenges facing rural South Africa is the task of improving the quality of education" (Mandela as cited by Samuel, 2005). The socio-economic disparities in the South Africa society have left many rural citizens disempowered. Parents harbour the feeling that they do not know enough of what is being taught in their children's classes to enable them to help (Middlewood *et al.*, 2005). This is corroborated by Bauer and Shea (2003) who contend that parents feel that they have nothing to contribute, do not know how to get involved, or are reluctant to interfere in the educators' work. Further, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 17) argue

that “most parents and educators want to do more but they have difficulty in arranging the additional time.”

2.6.1 Socio-economic challenges

There exists a range of social differences, especially in rural areas, that inhibit the establishment of effective parent-teacher relationships. Parents from deprived social backgrounds tend to feel inferior and avoid situations where they have to interact with their children’s educators. Educators need to be mindful of such challenges parents experience, and create an environment where they make parents feel welcome and respected.

“In South Africa, many learners live in communities that, apart from socio-economic deprivation, are plagued by the difficulties that come with single parents, working parents, children without adults in the house-hold and problems brought about by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This means that many children come to school with a baggage of social, physical and emotional problems that prevent them from achieving success in the school. Educators are challenged by needs and problems that are often outside the school’s control. Such challenges can only be addressed where a solid working relationship exists between the school and parents” (Clarke 2007, p. 176).

Joubert (2007, p. 26) posits that “growing up in a rural region in Southern Africa often means growing up without a good quality education.” Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) concur and argue that the high incidence of poverty, lack of easy access to libraries, cultural institutions, health services, recreation and high transport costs incurred by families in disadvantaged communities deter otherwise committed parents from playing some role in the educative process. Rural people are caught in the vicious cycle of having no access to the services and opportunities that might lift them out of poverty - education, gainful employment, adequate nutrition, infrastructure and communication (Joubert, 2007).

According to Samuel (2005), labour migration and the emphasis on traditionalism have given rural areas their distinctive character. Women head a large majority of these households. Child malnutrition and food insecurity plague families in provinces such as the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (the latter being the province within which the study was undertaken).

Patterns of daily life which are shaped by domestic economies as alluded to by Samuel (2005) include household chores such as minding animals, collecting wood and water, collecting social grants and looking after siblings. These socio-economic and cultural practices impact on the education of children in the rural context.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007) report that school programmes and educator practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parental involvement at school and at home. Redding (2005) and Edwards (2004) believe that programmes aimed at engaging parents must target the local needs of the school. Schools need to develop strategies that will address the specific needs of the school and the community it serves. Parents are more likely to become partners in their children's education if they perceive that schools are inclined to involve them.

However, educators also need guidance to support parents, as few educational institutions and school systems provide new and inexperienced educators with information on working with families (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2007). Success in the provision of quality education is possible where team-work exists between parents and educators. However, I believe that knowing the school community and establishing a partnership where the school and the community may work as a team will create an environment where parents will be encouraged to participate in the life of the school.

Michael (2012, p. 71) posits: "The low level of meaningful contact of the school with parents, especially Black parents, has led some educators and principals to conclude that such parents lack sufficient interest in their children's education and do not want to work with the school. In reality this is quite the contrary; almost all parents want the best for their children." The truth of the matter is that contextual factors hinder parents from engaging fully in the education of their children. These challenges will be difficult to overcome without a concerted effort from the school to convince parents that their involvement is essential and appreciated.

2.6.2 Contextual challenges

According to Van Wyk (2004, p. 51), "...a common problem experienced by many parents in South Africa and abroad is the lack of or inadequate expertise within the field of education which has a negative impact on parents' ability to support educators." Chikoko (2009) and Mncube

(2009) concur that although parents are part of school structures, most of them are not actively involved in the life of the school. They argue that even though parents have been elected to serve on the SGB, some parents, especially those in rural areas, have only basic literacy skills and are not always given sufficient opportunity to participate in crucial decision making on matters affecting the life of the school.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007) argue that many disadvantaged parents are seriously handicapped in supporting their children's education by their own limited education or lack of proficiency in English. This impedes their effective interaction with educators, their understanding of school work and their ability to assist children academically at home. While parental involvement is crucial in achieving educational objectives, it has become necessary to deal with those factors that hamper the education process. It was hoped that the introduction of ABET classes would address this challenge. Unfortunately, many parents are not part of this programme for various reasons.

There are learners who intentionally give parents incorrect information about educators or who give educators incorrect information about their parents. This occurs to a point where parents and educators have misconceptions of one another. A relatively high probability therefore exists that judgments are being made as a result of differing problem identification. Moreover, the past of teachers and/or parents becomes a barrier in attempts to set up mutual strategies, and parents and teachers quickly become confused and mutually antagonistic (Miller, 2003).

Miller (2003) believes that parents and educators often have conflicting experiences with learners. Parents may be seen as being unwilling to accept that there is a problem, whereas they may genuinely not be experiencing the same difficulties in the home setting. Similarly, parents who mention difficulties with their children at home, when these children are models of conformity at school, may be inaccurately perceived as 'fussing unnecessarily', 'neurotic' or 'incompetent' as parents. This adds further confusion to the unstable home-school relationship in the rural context.

Desforges and Abouchar (2003) and Samuel (2005) cite the lack of education of parents, especially those in rural schools, as a barrier to parent involvement. While I agree that illiterate

parents may need more time for the translation and interpretation of written information, I believe they will make a vital contribution by participating in the education of their children as they know what they want for their children. It is here where educators could train and encourage learners to convey or read messages correctly to their parents.

According to Miller (2003, p. 58), the details from a range of well conducted studies “...show that if a particular type of working alliance can be forged between educators and parents, considerable improvements in classroom behaviour can be attained.” While Mncube (2010) posits that programmes and interventions that engage parents improve learner performance, (Miller, 2003) warns that bringing about such a working partnership is far from easy.

Squelch (2007, p. 144) stresses that “...a school’s organizational culture and school climate directly affects the establishment of an atmosphere that is conducive to participative decision making and collaboration, and ultimately the participation of parents.” Schools with an inviting atmosphere will attract parents to the school where they could share information about their children’s culture, background, talents and needs. This two-way exchange may prevent problems from developing between the school and the home that will negatively affect learner achievement.

2.6.3 Challenges associated with inequalities

Based on a survey, the Human Rights Watch (2007) revealed that rural schools are generally neglected. This is corroborated by Samuel (2005) who report that rural schools lack basic services such as water, electricity, roads and sanitation. This means that parents need to provide water to their children when water tanks at the school run dry. When gas used for cooking runs out, schools need to procure fire-wood, which becomes more limited. The poor physical structure of rural school buildings means that parents often have to do minor repairs and renovations.

The poor telecommunication network in rural areas negatively impact on the level of communication between parents and the school. The lack of qualified teachers who venture into rural school has forced SGB’s to recommend unqualified educators for employment. The lack of resources compromise teaching and learning processes which often leaves many parents

disgruntled as their children face poor quality education. For cultural and economic reasons, some parents choose to let their children care for family livestock while girls are often coerced to work as labourers like men (Samuel, 2005).

Studies have revealed that the poor learning conditions in rural schools have led to anti-social behaviour. De Lange *et al.* (2007), for example, posit that violence against girls and young women in rural schools, as was revealed by the South African Human Rights report (2006), remains a critical area of concern. They cite Sathipassad (2006) who points out that in South Africa, male students continue to see it as their right within their culture to hit their girlfriends and to engage in coercive sex. De Lange *et al.* (2007) revealed that, in South Africa, many girls and young women in rural areas end up leaving school because of pregnancy. Moreover, they continue to be at high risk biologically and socially as they may become infected with HIV/AIDS. They receive very little or no help through care and counselling. Parents have to care either for newly born babies or sick children, which plunges them into despair.

While life in a rural setting may be perceived as static and bleak, I concur with Balfour *et al.* (2008, p. 103) who assert that "...rural schools can and should be places where at least some of the complex intellectual work required to deal with rural problems is done, acknowledging however that this is far from easy to accomplish." Further, Corbett (2007) advises that it is critical to build pockets of resistance against a "diseased and deceased" discourse in relation to rural life and to circumvent a type of hopelessness that is often presented to the youth.

Research by the Rural Teacher Education Project (RTEP) in South Africa found that parents welcomed young educators from cities moving into their [rural] communities. They also commended the presence of White and Indian educators in their communities and described the positive impact it was having on their children. I believe this project and others such as Funza Lushaka go a long way to deploying young qualified educators to rural areas. These educators could, in turn, invest some of their time into empowering parents. Balfour *et al.* (2007) advise that initiatives such as RTEP will be sustained only through a deep commitment on the part of the government and of National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education to the plight of rural communities.

However, I concur with Squelch (2007) who argues that efforts to empower rural parents to participate in the life of the school as legislated by SASA (1996) have not yielded much success. This has hindered the creation of a co-operative working relationship between educators and parents and has therefore resulted in the lack of a collaborative working relationship between parents and educators of rural schools. Rural parents experience challenges of illiteracy, poverty, social deprivation and isolation that leave them feeling helpless and unable to influence the quality of education rendered to their children.

In my experience as an educator and later as a manager of a rural primary school, many rural parents are unable to perform tasks as envisaged by educationists. There are rural parents who have had very little schooling; some cannot read and lack the confidence to work with educators and learners. There are parents who take care of households and who seldom find time to leave their homes to tend to school matters. Some parents work long hours for farmers, while others work in forests or as domestic workers who are allowed two or three days off in a month. Female parents who remain at home have their hands full taking charge of new born babies and family livestock, while they have to engage full-time in the upkeep of their homes. Child-headed homes are common occurrences in rural areas. Adolescent pregnancy, truancy, substance abuse, poor discipline and other social evils take root where parent supervision has been compromised.

I believe that rural schools need to invest in developing strategies to persuade parents to play their rightful roles of supporting their children's education. Schools need to create an inviting atmosphere where parents feel welcomed and where they are allowed to experience a sense of ownership with an important role to play. Through effective communication, schools should make parents aware of their responsibilities and encourage them to play their part. Parents and educators should collectively work through challenges and devise ways of ensuring the provision of quality education to all learners.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided both national and international lenses on parental involvement in the education of their children. It critically engaged with the role of parents in supporting schools in

an effort to improve the quality of their children's learning experiences, especially in rural areas. Areas where parents could support the schools were highlighted and factors that hindered their participation, such as disempowerment due to the level of inequalities that exist in rural communities, were alluded to. The impact of effective communication and the different types of communication were discussed. The next chapter will provide a discourse on the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of literature pertaining to the roles parents play as well as their responsibilities towards the education of their children. This chapter provides a discourse on the theoretical frameworks pertaining to parental involvement in schools. The study was underpinned by three theories. The first was Epstein's (1997) integrated theory of family-school relations which posits that schooling is characterized by a set of overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein eludes to six types of involvement namely parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community.

The second theory used was Coleman's (1988) seminal theory of family and community capital. This theory relates to the support schools expect from parents such as financial capital, human capital and social capital. Lastly, Burge's theory of rurality, which depicts rurality as a sense of place, was linked to the fact that the study focused on rural schools.

While the theoretical frameworks illuminate the interdependence between the school and parents, they also include guidelines on social networks that can be created to establish home-school relationships and the resources parents may provide to contribute to school life. These theoretical frameworks further illuminate the effects of a rural location on schools with a view to the provision of quality education.

3.2 The theory of overlapping spheres

Epstein's integrated theory of family relations is characterized by a set of overlapping spheres based on three underlying perspectives which are: separate responsibilities, shared responsibilities and sequential responsibilities of families and schools. This framework denotes the methods applied and the social resources available to children to support their educational growth. According to Epstein (1995), the work of the most effective families and schools

overlap and they share goals and missions. The spheres of influence that overlap occur internally and externally. Some practices are conducted separately by schools, families and communities, while some are conducted jointly to strengthen children's learning.

Epstein (1995) posits that there are three contexts in which children learn namely the family, the school and the community which can be drawn together or pushed apart. Some activities are conducted privately by schools, families or communities. This will occur when educators keep a professional distance and choose to work independently with learners while parents develop personal relationships with and individual expectations for their children at home. However, some are conducted jointly, where a collaborative working relationship is established to ensure that learning takes place.

Berger (1987), Thomlinson (1991), MacBeath (2000) and Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) concur that for almost the entire history of the human race, the responsibility for education was vested in the family. Epstein (1996, p. 6) posits that "if the school, parents, and the external community all have the same educational goals for their children, they will probably succeed in achieving such goals. Parents contribute and receive services on an equal footing and share responsibilities and accountability with the professional staff in schools with regard to the education of their children."

According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), some schools stress the separate responsibility of families and schools. This is characterized by the incompatibility, competition and conflict which may exist between parents and educators. School bureaucracies and family organizations are directed by educators and parents respectively. The model recognizes that some practices are best performed independently by schools and families. The separate responsibilities emphasise the need for specialized skills by teachers for school training and by parents for home training. This results in the division of labour where parties perform specialized roles which pull family and school influences apart.

The perspective that focuses on the shared responsibilities of families and schools, which was the core perspective of the study, emphasizes a collaborative working relationship where schools and families work in unison. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2007), when parents and

educators share responsibilities, the child's educational needs are met. Various common goals in the education of children are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work together. Epstein (1995) posits that families and schools bear the responsibility of developing the learner holistically. In an effort to support educators in providing quality education, parents will perform educational activities at home that will be in line with activities carried out by educators at school, and therefore they overlap.

When parents and educators emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalization of skills required by educators and by parents to produce successful learners. Their combined endeavours push the spheres of family and school influences together, thus increasing interaction between parents and the school and creating school-like families and family-like schools. Epstein (1995) posits that a family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Such schools welcome all families and not just those that are easy to reach. A school-like family also recognizes that each child is a learner and it reinforces the importance of school, homework and the activities that build academic skills and feelings of success (Epstein, 1992).

Moreover, the sequential perspective suggests that parents and educators contribute to the education of the child according to the child's development. Parents teach needed skills until the child is at a school going age, from where educators assume the primary responsibility for children's education (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). The model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that, although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, others reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators for children's learning.

According to Epstein (1987, p. 130), "...the model of overlapping spheres assumes that the mutual interests of families and schools can be successfully promoted by the policies and programmes of organizations and the actions of individuals in organizations. The internal model of interaction of schools, families and communities shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school and in the community." Further, Epstein (1997, p. 3) posits that "...these social relationships can take place at an institutional level or at an individual level."

According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007, p. 198), "...when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalization of skills required by teachers and by parents to produce successful students. Their combined endeavour pushes the sphere of family and school influence together, increases interaction between parents and school, and creates school-like families and family-like schools." Epstein (1992, p. 502) concurs and posits that "... a school-like family recognizes that each child is also a learner and it reinforces the importance of school, homework and the activities that build academic skills and feelings of success." Moreover, "...family-like schools recognize each child's individuality and make each child feel special and included."

Atkins, Bastiani and Goode (1988, p 65) assert that parents represent a valuable, but often unacknowledged, resource which could be tapped into with great effect in the education of children and young people. Sterling and Davidoff (2000, p. 69) concur, saying parents have skills and talents that schools could draw on to make the school a creative and dynamic centre of learning. Wolfendale (1992) advises that a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, sharing of information, responsibility and accountability are important for the partnership to succeed.

Further, Epstein (1995) believes that communities also influence learners' schooling. She believes groups of parents create school-like opportunities, events and programmes that reinforce, recognize and reward learners for good progress, creativity and excellence. Communities also create family-like settings, services and events to enable families to support their children better. Community-minded families and learners help their neighbourhoods and other families. Schools talk about programmes and services that are family-friendly.

3.2.1 Epstein's typology of parental involvement

Epstein *et al.* (1997) allude to six major types of involvement that fall within the overlapping spheres that have evolved from many studies and the work of educators in schools. However, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 34) advise that "...effective programmes of parental involvement will look different in each school. Each individual school will develop programmes of parent involvement to meet the needs and interests, time and aptitudes, ages and grade levels of learner and their families."

The different areas where parents could be involved are described as follows:

3.2.1.1 Parenting

Epstein's model (1995) describes parenting as the help given to families by the school in order to establish a home environment that supports children as learners at all ages and grade levels. Desforges and Aboucher (2003, p. 33) advise that "educators need to be aware that good enthusiastic parenting can be found amongst mothers of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds, and where it is not found, it could be taught." Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009) advise that schools provide information about parenting to all families and not just to the few that may attend a workshop at the school.

Meier *et al.* (2006, p. 139) advise that "schools should consider parents as well as their home circumstance when they plan ways of assisting parents and getting information from them regarding their children. When the school provides support to families, parents develop skills and confidence and support their children as they proceed through school." In the rural context where schools have inadequate resources, it would advantage the school to invest in skilling parenting to provide support. However, for any success to be achieved, effective communication between the school, parents and community should prevail.

3.2.1.2 Communication

Meier *et al.* (2006) advise that educators need to learn about parents' social, cultural and educational background so that they can communicate sensitively with them. The communication should include aspects such as information on school programmes and children's progress, and should allow for feedback from the parents. "It should also be kept in mind that parents' language difficulties could result in them not understanding the participation opportunities given to them, which often leads to educators labelling such parents as uninterested" (Van Wyk, p. 2010).

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009) posit that good communication includes, among others, meeting with parents to suggest ways to improve grades, sending learners' home with work for parents to review, regular delivery of notices about extramural activities, clear communication of school policies and regulations and delivering report cards.

Good communication means that parents will grasp school policies and rules, share important information about learners with educators, and both parents and learners will have an understanding of their academic progress and the steps needed to improve their grades. Educators will develop an appreciation for the parents' contribution to the development of the child and the parents' knowledge of the child will increase by their supporting the school as volunteers.

3.2.1.3 Volunteering

Wolhutter *et al.* (2012, p. 61) describe volunteering in the educational context as "...anyone assisting with children's learning or development in any way, at any time and place." They advise that "flexible schedules should be made for volunteers, allowing those who work to participate." Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 26) advise that volunteering "includes the design of a programme in which parent volunteers are recruited, trained and organized for a variety of activities aimed at meeting the needs of the school."

Meier *et al.* (2006) advise that, to get a strong volunteering programme on its feet, schools should recruit parent volunteers widely so that all families know that their talents are useful and appreciated. Schools should make the programmes for volunteers flexible so that working parents can also participate. They should also organize and coordinate volunteer work and provide training for the parents so that these volunteering programmes are productive.

As parents become more familiar with school routines and gain a better understanding of teachers' tasks, they will become more at ease on the school premises. As they gain skills, they will develop self-confidence and participate in more formal educational programmes. Teachers can gain much from the presence of volunteers. They could be relieved from routine tasks to give quality time to children's learning, build a one-on-one relationship with parents, and become aware of strengths and talents of individual parents.

3.2.1.4 Learning at home

Clarke (2008) concurs with Van der Westhuizen (2002) when he argues that "...communities value education and parents can make a significant contribution in supporting the school if properly guided and welcomed. Schools function best when parents and other members of the

community feel a sense of belonging and ownership of the school and its activities,” (Clarke 2007, p. 174). Schools therefore need to provide parents with information and ideas about how to help children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning.

Berger (1987, p. 103) shares Long’s (1986) view, stating that “parents are already involved as the primary educators of their children before school or nursery, and it makes sense to continue and utilize this involvement in the early years of formal education. By extending the context of learning beyond the confines of the classroom and the school, the child finds a wider range of constructive learning situations.” Learning at home therefore supplements work that starts in the classroom

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 27) argue that when parents are actively involved in the teaching and learning process, the ill-discipline around homework issues is reduced and learner progress is enhanced when children regularly practise routine skills (such as spelling, reading and mathematical principles) at home. However, the involvement of parents in school matters is most effective when parents have participated in plenary activities and taken decisions collectively.

3.2.1.5 Decision making

Van Deventer (2008) posits that participative decision making can result in more effective functioning of the school and education. By involving more people in the decision making process, more expertise and knowledge are made available and this results in decisions of a high quality. Training should be offered to parents who are inexperienced in management and leadership so that they too can aspire to positions of leadership. Van Deventer (2008, p. 225) advises that an “important step in the decision making process is obtaining information (facts, feelings and alternative solutions) on which to base the best decision. Information is not an end in itself – it is a means to provide support for the decision making process.”

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 27) posit that “...the benefits of involving parents in decision making are far reaching. Parent leaders can provide input into school policies on both local and national levels. They develop a sense of ownership in the school and in the decisions taken by

the school. They become aware of meeting procedures, budgeting and legal requirements and develop their civic responsibility.”

In this way educators become aware of parents’ views and opinions which feed into school activities, policies and educational reform. When parents are convinced that their inputs are taken seriously and that they have a share in leadership, the status of the parent serving on committees and governance structures is enhanced and collaboration is guaranteed.

3.2.1.6 Working collaboratively with the community

Michael *et al.* (2012, p. 62) describe collaborating with the community as “identifying and integrating resources and co-services from the community to strengthen school programs and student learning and development.” Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007) believe that collaboration between the school and the parents also increases the resources available to the school, thus helping to individualize and enrich student work. Parents may also provide linkages to partnership with business, agencies, cultural institutions or other resources in the community.

Shields and Knapp (1997) and Calitz (2002) concur that school improvement is more likely to happen when a collaborative professional culture is developed at the school. They believe parents need to be able to perform certain responsibilities if their participation is to achieve the required objectives. According to Shields & Knapp (1997, p. 292), “it is therefore crucial that time and money is invested in empowering parents.”

Hymes (1974, p. 8-9) asserts that “parents love their children and children love their parents. If the teacher feels the same love, then a healthy working relationship will exist between parent and teacher, and teacher and child. Show your interest in a child and parents are on your side. Be casual, be off-handed, be cold towards the child and parents can never work closely with you... To touch the child is to touch the parent. To praise the child is to praise the parent. To criticize the child is to hit at the parent. The two are two, but the two are one.”

It is therefore evident that, unless a working relationship is established where the school and the community work collaboratively and cooperatively, the goal of providing a quality education to the child will be missed.

Another theory that highlights areas where parents need to provide support is the Human Capital theory.

3.3 Human Capital Theory

When discussing Coleman's Human Capital Theory, Halpern (2005) identifies three kinds of capital that parents provide, namely: financial, human, and social capital.

3.3.1 Financial Capital

Financial capital is roughly equivalent to income. According to Coleman (1988), the socio-economic status of the community determines the quality of education the child will receive. Parents who have financial resources are better able to provide additional educational resources which could enhance their children's educational progress. Since most rural schools are no-fee schools, when school funds are depleted these parents could be approached to provide financial support to the schools to undertake school activities as outlined in SASA.

According to Samuel (2005, p. 25), "poverty and unemployment are starkly present in the everyday realities, speech and activities of people living in rural areas." Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007) posit that in the light of the importance of the contribution of schools in poor communities with limited capital, it is important how teachers regard learners from impoverished families and what attitudes they demonstrate towards such families. This largely determines the nature of home-school relations in schools in such communities. Concerns are that most educators have no formal training in parental involvement strategies, that they are teaching in under-resourced and overcrowded schools, and that they have little support in coping with disadvantaged learners and families (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2007).

Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds who have limited financial resources talk about the importance of education and express a strong interest in their children's education. Some parents make sacrifices from their meagre earnings and contribute toward school activities. Berger (1987, p. 104) alerts us that "parents come from diverse backgrounds and they have had different encounters with education. In some districts, in particular, the burden of poverty consumed the parents. Parents concerned with mere subsistence have little energy left for self-fulfilment or for meeting their children's emotional and educational needs."

3.3.2 Human capital

The second capital Halpern (2005) alludes to is human capital, which is used with reference to parents' academic level of attainment. Of interest to the study is to what extent human capital is put to use in assisting the learner. My experience is that parents with greater formal education tend to provide home environments that support and encourage educational and associated activities. Where parents have attained a high educational level, they are better able to create a learning environment that is conducive to home learning and to support learners with their schoolwork.

However, I concur with Dauber and Epstein (1993, p. 53) who assert that "...children are more successful at all grade levels if their parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home, regardless of the parents' educational background or social class." Redding (2005) believes an interest in the child's education, a positive attitude towards education in general, and a belief in the value of schooling, are more important than home circumstances.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009) posit that, traditionally, parents were perceived as clients as they did not have any influence on matters affecting the life of the school attended by their children. Presently though, most governments throughout the world have acknowledged that parents have skills that, when put to effective use, are very useful to the educative process. Therefore the systematic involvement of parents in the educative process cannot be over emphasized.

3.3.3 Social capital

The third capital that parents provide is social capital which, according to Putnam (1995, p. 25), refers to "the social networks, norms and trust that facilitate educational achievement, especially those established among parents, learners and schools." Putnam (2000) posits that child development is powerfully shaped by social capital. Coleman (1998) identifies two types of social capital category inputs. The first is opportunities, demands and rewards which come from the school. The second category of inputs comes from the child's closer, more intimate and more persistent environment. These inputs can be loosely described as attitudes, efforts and conception of self which are instilled mainly by the social environment of the home.

Samuel (2005, p. 8) posits that the land of the forefathers is the gold and diamonds where cabbage and other vegetables are planted. Parents wish their children to be taught agriculture as they have the land to cultivate. Parents tend to feel that the school should reinforce values such as respect, discipline, responsibility and appropriate sexual behaviour. It is crucial that respect for traditional norms, values and expectations is maintained. At home and in the community children are taught to respect others, especially adults, irrespective of whether they are their parents or not.

Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004, p 301) and Heystek *et al.* (2004, p. 1) share the opinion that “parents send their children to school believing that their children will receive a quality education in order to secure their future with a decent vocation. However, the child’s attitude towards the importance of education will be determined by a high level of parental expectations as well as high levels of parent-child interaction.” What is imperative therefore is for parents to instil sound skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that will propel children toward educational attainment.

Putnam (2000) asserts that in states where social capital is high, there is a high educational performance. This similarity implies that parents are more associated with their children’s education. According to Hargreaves (2001), schools with high social capital will strengthen their intellectual capacity which will benefit learners. Schools with low social capital will impact negatively on learner achievement. Most rural schools serve poor communities where most inhabitants have received very little schooling. However, these parents bring skills to the relationship which could benefit the child.

According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2007), in extremely and persistently poor families, learners suffer a lack of all three categories. Families lack finances and are severely pressured by the demands of daily living. Poorly educated parents possess limited parenting skills and have little access to good child-rearing practices. Single-parent, grandparent and stepparent homes are associated with limited social capital.

However, Atkins *et al.* (1988, p. 12) posit that evidence has shown conclusively “...that where parents and educators work together, academic success is achievable, even when those children

have started from a position of serious under-achievement as well as in the face of shrinking resources. Parents possess crucially important knowledge and experience which not only complements that of professionals, but is valuable in its own right. In educational terms, parents are an essential resource and also have unique opportunities as educators, a powerful combination,” (Atkins *et al.*, 1988, p. 12-13).

Singh *et al.*, (2004, p. 305) found that learners who received attention from their parents early in their school lives were more empowered to deal with school work independently later on in life than those who never received attention at home. Halpern (2005) argues the cumulative effects of family, community or school capital will determine whether learner’s learning is enhanced or hindered. It becomes crucial, therefore, for parents to play their rightful roles and support the schools attended by their children in an effort of ensuring the provision of quality education to their children.

3.4 The need to involve parents

Long (1986, p. 3) and Berger (1987, p. 102 -105) concur with Wolfendale *et al.* (2000, p. 19) who state that parents share many common expectations as “...they want the best for their children in schooling; in particular, [they want] a high quality, holistic education in an effective institution. Where there are problems, they need to know them and especially help in identifying ways in which they can support their children’s learning.” Most parents want to be acknowledged. They want to make inputs and be listened to in order to contribute to the life of the school and to work in it for their children’s benefit (Wolfendale *et al.*, 2000, p. 19).

Heystek and Louw (1999) concur with Berger (1987) who asserts that if schools and the community join forces and co-ordinate efforts to support families and children, they can have an enormous impact. The school and home also have a natural opportunity to work together. Parents who are aware of their roles in the educational development of their children can help promote the successful completion of their formal education. Mncube (2009, p. 83) believes that “encouraging parents to participate and affording them more power and responsibility would result in a better functioning school.”

However, Squelch (2007, p. 142-144) expresses a concern when he states that "...not all schools have the good fortune to be serving skilled professionals. When there are professional parents or governors on the SGB, it does not mean that they are necessarily familiar with or knowledgeable about complex educational matters. Schools need to provide training to parents and afford them the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that will enable them to participate more meaningfully in transforming and improving schools." It is therefore incumbent on schools to empower parents regarding the tasks they are expected to perform.

3.5 Tasks requiring parental support

Lemmer *et al.* (2006), Wolhuter *et al.* (2007) and other commentators concur that parents as well as other members of the community can perform a variety of routine tasks that are essential to the day-to-day running of the school. These tasks include: administering financial affairs, maintenance and repair of school facilities; protection of school facilities; accompanying learners on field trips; and class supervision.

Calitz (2002, p. 118) advises that "...parents be encouraged to offer their support in the organization and management of extramural activities. Working parents can be invited to be involved in evening activities and weekend events." Extramural activities where parents could participate include: organizing and coaching sport and cultural events, transporting learners, accompanying learners when they go on excursions or to compete in sport and cultural activities, catering and others.

However, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) raise a concern that while parents and educators are perceived as equal partners in education, in practice this is seldom true. They advise schools to raise the status of parents, recognize their efforts and welcome them into the school. Swap (1993) believes that educators who work successfully with parents experience support, appreciation and a rekindling of their enthusiasm for problem solving. Parent involvement improves and promotes positive home-school relations, reduces misunderstandings and conflict, and prevents the school from becoming isolated from the community. Schools that invest in securing their parents' support increase the chances of experiencing success.

3.6 Theories of Rurality

Burge's (2006) theory of 'Rurality as a Sense of Place' is the theoretical framework that underpinned the rurality aspect of the study. Bushnell (1999) posits that 'rural' designates an isolated region, often the now-fragmented remnants of a once flourishing farming community. Rural areas are characterized by low socio-economic status, disconnected from metropolitan areas and low in population density.

3.6.1 Background to rurality

Different countries in the world have different experiences with regard to education in rural communities. Internationally, for example, Burge (2006) contends that in America, many rural communities are in economic distress. Isolation, oppression and historical tension cause learners and parents to be apathetic and to have limited aspirations which prevent them from seeing beyond the rural setting (Burge, 2006).

Authors such as Sherwood (2000), Herzog and Pittman (2003), Lewis (2003) and Burge (2006) posit that because rural schools and communities are quite diverse, it is difficult for rural education researchers to define the concept of rurality or to establish a universal set of characteristics to describe or define rural schools and communities. Samuel (2005) concurs, stating that, in South Africa, there is no agreement about what constitutes rural and urban areas. Depending on who uses them and for what purpose, definitions of what constitutes urban and rural areas differ considerably.

3.6.2 Rurality as a sense of place

Weber (1996) and Gruenewald (2003) describe 'place' as both that which is inhabited and that which is moved within. Budge (2004, p. 5) identifies six habits that define a sense of place: "...connectedness, development of identity culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics, activism and engagement." Having grown up in a rural area and spent much time in rural milieu, my experience is that when people have lived in a particular place for a long time and got involved in cyclical patterns of behaviour and community involvement, they tend to develop a sense of 'place' or rootedness – i.e., they feel secure and at home there.

Research has indicated that many inhabitants of rural settings have a salient attachment to place (Burge, 2006; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Howley *et al.*, 1996; Kemmis, 1990; Porter, 2001). However, this does not mean that rural people exclusively experience a sense of place, but the concept appears to be more pervasive in the literature on rural schools and communities than on urban and suburban places (Burge, 2006).

According to Gruenewald (2003, p. 622), "...as an educational construct, there is no single axiomatic theory of place that might inform educational studies. It is imperative to have an understanding of place in order to understand the nature of our relationships with each other and the world" (Gruenewald, 2003). However, the power of the 'sense of place' in our lives is profound. Hummon (1990) posits that through our place of residence, we form our world view and our understanding of other persons as well as ourselves.

Budge (2006) believes that people in rural areas articulate their own attachments to place as a privilege of experiencing a sense of an extended family, the place where people return to stay for many years, and/or want to raise their families. People rally around each other for support and everyone feels safe. Educators tend to know not only their students, but their family members as well - parents, brothers and sisters - and they care about each other as colleagues.

I concur with Budge (2006, p. 5) who contends that "...geographic characteristics provide inhabitants in rural areas with a life style that can be valuable - the physical geography of the valley, mountains, pristine rivers and lakes, and close proximity to a national park provide the residents of the area with many opportunities for recreation and renewal. The value of living close to the mountains for hiking and backpacking is immense. People enjoy the peace of life, not being in the traffic every day, [and] not being in town."

Moreover, Smith and Martins (1997) regard the small size of classrooms, a pleasant personable atmosphere and a nurturing environment as strengths rural schools could put to effective use. The potential of becoming a highly effective school exists in most rural areas. Yarrow (1999) posits that rural education has the potential to be a wonderful laboratory for educational innovation and improvement.

The physical setting of the school, school rituals, the school curriculum and other school activities contribute to the rural construction of the school place (Bushnell, 1999). For education to be part of rural development, the school and the community need to be connected.

Burge (2006, p. 2) cites Michael Tierney, an activist working in rural West Virginia, who states that “there is something very powerful about the sense of place in rural communities that helps them transcend the challenge of poor infrastructure and few resources. Exploring the influence of rurality and place on rural leaders’ beliefs about the purpose(s) of local public schooling and their theories of action could help determine the potential relationship between schooling and the well-being of rural communities (Burge, 2006). Scientists from a variety of disciplines have confirmed that our behaviour, emotions, dispositions, and thoughts are “indeed shaped not just by our genes and neurochemistry, history, and relationships, but also by our surroundings” (Gallagher, 1993, p. 12).

According to Marschall (2008, p. 16), the high rates of poverty among parents in Latino, Chicago, mean that they face great challenges when it comes to their children’s schooling. She found that parents and communities did not support or co-operate with schools and this resulted in low academic achievements and increased drop-out rates among learners. Poverty and the consequences thereof hampered parent participation in the life of the school.

Each rural community is unique. However, authors such as Beesen and Strange (2003), Budge (2006), Collins *et al.* (2001), Coverdale (1974), and Stern (1994) and others contend that many rural places possess similar strengths and face similar challenges such as a low population density and isolation, school and community interdependence, oppression as lived experience, a history of conflict regarding purposes of schooling, an out migration of young talent and a salient attachment to place.

Rural areas are known to have the highest levels of poverty and unemployment and the lowest levels of educational attainment. According to Griffith (1968), there is poverty which is not as abject as poverty of the cities, but the general level of poverty is nevertheless likely to be very low. There will be few, if any, substantial houses. There will be no hospital or doctor; the shops

will stock only the simplest requirements. Books and newspapers will be very few because the majority of men and most women will be illiterate.

Samuel (2005, p. 2) concurs and posits that "...being there is not romantic. To be there is to be engaged in a struggle to live, and to hope. Money and jobs are scarce, the land itself harsh and demanding, and the schools, which straddle the old rural routines and the glittering prospect of a different life heralded by political and economic change in the far-away cities, are often ill-equipped, under-resourced and poorly staffed."

Rural school buildings are of simplest construction. The classes for the youngest children are often overcrowded, but higher up the school the classes get smaller and smaller. The bigger children are wanted to help at home or in the fields, or they may have got bored and left school, or their families, especially those with increasing family members, may no longer be able to afford the fees. Moreover, some educators working in these areas will have had two years at a teacher training college, but many will be untrained. They will not be the intellectual cream of their generation because there are so many more attractive careers than teaching.

3.6.3 Being connected to a rural setting

In the South African rural context, people are dependent on one another for multiple reasons. They also remain connected to their surroundings. Samuel (2005) posits that rural schools enjoy a spatial advantage. Learners enjoy first hand experiences with geographical concepts such as contour farming, river patterns, a place where they learn to milk cows, a place for ancestral worship and where customs are honoured and rituals are performed. Middlewood *et al.* (2005) and Samuel (2005) corroborate and give practical examples. For example, through the establishment of a school vegetable garden, the local economy can be boosted as parents are also motivated to grow and sell vegetables at home. By selling vegetables to the community parents can raise extra funds to educate their children. Moreover, livestock and land are referred to as 'banks' because such resources are regarded as essential to the rural areas' economy.

Maynard and Howley (1997) found that parent involvement programs for rural communities worked best when they were designed to meet specific needs of the communities they serve. It is not clear, however, if rural communities are any more or less likely than urban or suburban ones

to involve parents in the educational process. Research provides conflicting findings. A study of 296 schools in Missouri by Sun, Hobbs and Elder (1994), for example, found that parent involvement was higher in rural than in urban communities. In contrast, findings from a large national survey of eighth-grade students suggest that parent involvement tends to be higher in urban and suburban communities than in rural communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994). Two areas of concern with regard to rurality is the socio-economic situation of the rural areas and the nature of the education provided.

Even if parental involvement turns out to be more prevalent in rural than in urban and suburban schools, rural educators may still face special challenges often associated with rural life. Among these challenges are isolation, poverty, and lack of job opportunities. The poverty of many rural communities limits parents' ability to provide for their children and to augment their children's education with resources in the home. Finally, the lack of job opportunities makes it harder for rural students to see any financial benefit to attendance or success in school (Bickel & Lange, 1995).

Burge (2006, p. 4) observed that, in rural areas, "...instead of the school experience building up student confidence and exposing them to options and opportunities for their future, students were viewed as apathetic and having limited aspirations. Students questioned the relevance of education to their lives. This resulted in learners failing to 'see the big picture' which prevented them from looking ahead. Many parents and community members were thought to have limited aspirations for their children and /or had a limited understanding of what their children would need to be successful in the future."

3.7 Challenges experienced by rural primary schools in South Africa compared to other African schools

In my endeavour to illuminate the phenomenon of rurality, the study attempted to compare certain challenges encountered by rural primary schools to those experienced abroad and in other African countries. Rural education on the rest of the African continent has experienced similar challenges to those that were expounded in this study. According to Harber and Davies (1997, p. 13), "the decrease in funds available for public expenditure has affected spending on education

in many African countries.” Botswana, for example, like South Africa, experiences challenges associated with the poor funding of primary schools.

3.7.1 The effects of poverty on education

Farren, Haskins and Gallagher (1980, p. 47) define poverty as “a physical and socio-psychological environment in which individuals have severely limited amounts of power, money and social status.” Berger (1987, p. 85) posits that, to exist in the culture of poverty, means to “...feel depressed, powerless to make change and unable to control your own destiny. Alienation, isolation and depression are common partners with poverty. Parents who are depressed and unable to control their own world pass that feeling on to their children” (Berger 1987). Schools could help by providing information on social services available to parents.

Tsayang and Bulawa (2007, p. 65) posit that challenges in Botswana’s rural education include “poor transport facilities, the near absence of support staff, the poor standard of meals provided to primary school children, and an uneven supply and poor distribution of stationery and other learning and teaching materials to schools.” They complain of a shortage of furniture, which means that “some children have to sit on a cold floor or on the earth outside during lessons”, and state that this is yet another result of the poor funding of primary education. They also refer to “a lack of service facilities such as telephones and photocopiers, as well as the general poor maintenance of both the infrastructure and other resources of primary schools, is partly a result of inadequate funding as well as poor supervision.” As was clearly demonstrated by this study, similar situations are experienced in South African rural schools.

In South Africa, many learners live in communities that, apart from socio-economic deprivation, are plagued by the difficulties that come with single parents, working parents, children without adults in the household and problems brought about by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This means that many children come to school with a baggage of social, physical and emotional problems that prevent them from achieving success at school. Educators are challenged by needs and problems that are often outside the school’s control and which can only be addressed where a solid working relationship exists between the school and parents (Clarke, 2007, p. 176).

Joubert (2007, p. 26) argues that "...growing up in a rural region in Southern Africa often means growing up without a good quality education. Rural people are caught in the vicious cycle of having no access to the services and opportunities that might lift them out of poverty - education, gainful employment, adequate nutrition, infrastructure, communication and a lack of discrimination on the basis of gender" (Joubert, 2007).

In South Africa, very little has changed with regard to rural education. Poverty and illiteracy remain overwhelmingly a rural phenomenon. There is a high level of unemployment. Where people are employed, they are paid very low salaries. The scourge of child-headed homes is rife and often results in teenage pregnancies of girls as young as 12 and 13. According to the educators, this often resulted in learner drop-outs from their schools. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009, p. 195) argue that in extremely and persistently poor families, "...learners suffer a lack of three categories of capital: financial, human and social."

Like in many African countries, South African rural schools are disadvantaged as parents are poor and are unable to support the school in acquiring additional resources the schools may need. Berger (1987, p. 84) defines poverty as: "...a physical and socio-psychological environment in which individuals have severely limited amounts of power, money and social status. To exist in the culture of poverty means to feel depressed, powerless to make change and unable to control your own destiny. Alienation, isolation and depression are common partners with poverty." Parents who are depressed and unable to control their own world pass that feeling on to their children.

It became clear through the study that it was predominantly women who carried the responsibility of caring for school going children, yet they formed a greater percentage of poor people than men. Historically, women had less access to education and paid jobs. Women have worked, but have never been paid as housewives. Women generally earn less than men, yet they do the most work. Evidence from the respondents was that women were responsible for the majority of learners' education. This was also evident in the male to female ratio of educators at the schools. This therefore had an impact on the quality of the support the school received from these parents. It was also evident that most homes had single-headed female parents or grandparents. Most elderly people depend on pensions paid by the state. Families share the

pension meant for the grandparents as they provide for their grandchildren. According to Samuel (2005, p 25), there is a high dependency on social grants and pensions in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, where the three schools researched are located.

According to Country Report, South Africa (2005), in spite of some gains in education, the fight against poverty remains a challenge in South Africa. At the centre of this challenge is poor education for rural people. The responses revealed that some parents were unemployed, which meant that they stayed at home. It was also revealed by the respondents that parents had themselves received little schooling. According to Capper (1993), parents who themselves lack personal experience in education beyond basic skills often fail to see its importance for their children. Further, they may feel intimidated by school procedures and expectations. Kiros (1982) alludes to a survey which found that parents lacked sufficient competence to undertake supervision of the school.

Poverty in many rural communities limits parents' ability to provide for their children's education with resources in the home. Female parents take care of learners while their husbands go out to provide a living for their families. They, in turn, work for low wages which means they are seldom at home. This is double exploitation as male parents are deprived of quality family life and they are often excluded from contributing to the rearing of their children. In this regard Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009, p. 195) posit that in single parent or child-headed households, learners are deprived of growing up under the care of both their parents who are responsible for instilling acceptable morals and values. Parents who had a poor education possess limited parenting skills and have little access to child-rearing practices.

Poor parents normally feel inadequate and are not comfortable with assisting the school. They fear rejection. Some of them are ashamed that they cannot converse in English. According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2004, p. 205), South African educators often cite the lack of education of parents as a barrier to parental involvement. They cite Desforges and Aboucher (2003, p. 420) who state that there are three reasons why parents who are not well educated may not be involved in their children's schooling:

- They come from a culture of poverty in which parents place less value on education.

- Some parents have less social capital networks and skills. They do not know the ‘right sort of people’. As a consequence, they feel less equipped to meet or negotiate in terms of the demands of schooling.
- Schools are seen as middle-class institutions that accept involvement only on their own terms.

My experience as a manager of a rural primary school was that many parents lacked finances and were severely pressured by the demands of daily living. This impacted on the availability of parents to support learning at school and at home. However, when parents worked and donated money towards the school’s upkeep, the school was able to pay them a stipend for the work they did which, in turn, enabled them provide for their families. I believe it is crucial that parents commit to supporting the schools attended by their children in some way, failing which the provision of quality education will remain a dream.

In South Africa post 1953, education became the responsibility of the state. Leeb (1989) argues that the education of black children received very little attention. Further, in spite of some improvements, Ardington (1989) observed that rural dwellers and farm workers in particular, lived in isolated, widely dispersed and low density situations. Teachers who were teaching more than one standard in their classrooms found it extremely difficult as did teachers who had to share a classroom whilst teaching different classes. The classes were large, the pupil-teacher ratio did not tally and the educators were either unqualified or under-qualified.

3.7.2 The effects of poverty in South African schools

The Country Report, South Africa (2005) states that in spite of the gains, the fight against poverty remains a challenge in South Africa. At the centre of this challenge is poor education for rural people. According to Capper (1993), parents who themselves lack personal experience in education beyond basic skills often fail to see its importance for their children. Further, they may feel intimidated by school procedures and expectations.

It also became evident from the literature review that many homes in rural areas have single-headed female parents or grandparents. Most elderly people depend on pensions paid by the state. Families share the pension meant for the grandparents who provide for their grand-

children. According to Samuel (2005, p. 25), “there is a high dependency on social grants and pensions in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.”

Development study materials produced by the University of South Africa’s (UNISA’s) Adult Basic Education (ABET) Department (2011) revealed that, in South Africa, approximately half of the population is defined as poor and living below the poverty line. The difference between the wealthy and the poor is very big and in some ways we have the developed world and the developing world living side by side in one country. Poverty is mainly rural – about two thirds of the country’s poor people live in rural areas and more than two thirds of rural people are poor.

According to the Development Studies Report (2011), women form a greater percentage of poor people than men. Women have historically had less access to education and paid jobs. Women have always performed unpaid work as mothers, housewives and housekeepers. Many are employed in poorly paid jobs such as domestic or farm workers. Even within poor households, women usually earn less than men and property possession is often inherited by the man. The UN found that although women perform nearly two thirds of the world’s work, they receive only one tenth of the world’s income and they own only one hundredth of the world’s property.

Further, the report revealed that poverty has a severe affect on children. Some of the poorest house-holds in South Africa are those headed by children where parents are either ill or have died from AIDS or other causes. Even in families where parents are still alive, children are very badly affected when male parents leave home to the cities to earn a living for their families. Some come home only after several months while mothers also had to leave home to eke out a living in urban areas. Many children suffer from malnutrition which means they easily get diseases and either die young or have a poor physical and mental development as a result.

Poverty limits the access children have to educational opportunities, especially early childhood development (ECD). Many poor children also leave school before matriculating. Most poor older people survive on the monthly pensions paid by the state. They often look after grandchildren and perform unpaid domestic work for their families. This especially applies to older women. Due to the high unemployment rate, many families share the pensions meant for the elderly and it ends up being insufficient for their needs.

Poor parents normally feel inadequate and are not comfortable with assisting the school as they fear rejection. Some of them are ashamed that they cannot converse in English. Lemmer and van Wyk (2004, p. 205) posit that “...in South Africa, educators often cite the lack of education of parents as a barrier to parent involvement.” According to Desforges and Aboucher (2003), parents who are not well educated may not be involved in their children’s schooling. Where parental support is lacking and resources are limited, learners suffer.

AIDS increases poverty as families lose income if an earner falls ill. Often another one of the family members stays at home to look after the sick person and income is usually lost. Families incur increased costs when they spend on caring for the sick or paying for funerals. In most cases orphans are cared for by relatives who are already living in poverty – the additional burden they carry deepens their poverty. Some parents cannot afford employing people to take care of newly born babies, so mothers stay at home to tend to their babies and cannot afford to assist the school.

3.7.3 The effects of HIV/AIDS on education

Statistics released at Christ the King Hospital, which is a hospital that services the areas where the case study schools are located, revealed that between 1998 and 2008, 75% of the deaths recorded of people from rural areas were HIV/AIDS related. Many rural citizens move to the cities to find employment but are often without accommodation. They often erect their own shacks or cohabit in such dwellings as temporary accommodation. This often leads to the contraction of the HIV virus which results in multiple infections and, in many instances, in death. Young children, including those who attend school, become orphans and grandparents are expected to care for them.

According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009, p.195), in extremely and persistently poor families “...learners suffer a lack of three categories of capital: financial, human and social. Families have limited financial means and are severely pressured by the demands of daily living. Parents are usually poorly educated, possess limited parenting skills, and have little access to child-rearing practices.” Further, Nkabinde (1997, p. 33) argues that many learners from rural settlements “...come from socio-economically deprived backgrounds in which educational

support services are limited. Some live in poverty and trauma where domestic responsibilities are placed on children by families.” The dirt roads and long distances to the rural communities limit the number of visitors the community and schools receive, especially those assigned to provide support.

3.7.4 The effects of inadequate resources in schools

Samuel (2005, p. 132) posits that in South Africa today, rural education, in particular, still lags behind educational development in other parts of the country. Poor education is linked to inadequate employment, poor infrastructure, poor nutrition, ill health, and a lack of exercise and entertainment of the rural poor and vulnerable groups in rural areas. Further, the poverty of many rural communities limits parents’ ability to provide for their children and to augment their children’s education with resources in the home. The lack of job opportunities makes it harder for rural students to see any financial benefit to attendance and success in school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Further, Samuel (2005, p. 94) found that “some educators are not well qualified and they are a problem to learners who are willing to learn. Due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the educators, learners are forced to study what they don’t like or want and in which they are not interested. We have teachers who hate teaching but they are teaching, the reason being that they will be earning [a salary] at the end of the month.” When learners are taught what they have the least interest in, the possibility exists that they will show very little interest.

SASA (1996) categorizes schools according to quintiles which determine, among other aspects, schools’ funding. The allocation of funds to schools and the schools’ Post Provisioning Norms (PPN) which determine the number of educators that may be employed at a school, are calculated in relation to the number of learners enrolled at the school. Since rural schools have comparatively fewer learners they have smaller allocations and fewer educators employed. Educators therefore often have to teach all learning areas in multi-grade classes (Employment of Educators Act, Act No. 76 of 1998).

Poverty, inadequate facilities and the inability of most rural school to provide quality education through a lack of qualified educators, the irrelevance of curricula, large multi-grade classes,

limited resources, and lack of libraries, to mention a few, cause some parents to see very little value in the education offered to their children. This conclusion gains support from the finding that rural parents have lower educational attainment than their urban and suburban counterparts. As the argument goes, parents who lack personal experience of education beyond basic skills often fail to see its importance for their children. Further, they may feel intimidated by school procedures and expectations (Capper, 1993).

Samuel (2005) and Joubert (2007) concur that rural schools and students are disadvantaged in comparison to their urban counterparts and that poverty and illiteracy remain overwhelmingly rural phenomena. Smith and Martin (1997, p. 15) argue that “in rural areas there are higher poverty rates, a higher percentage of poor school districts, and fewer dropouts who return to finish school as compared to urban areas.” Social services seldom reach far flung rural areas which add to the isolation rural dwellers endure.

3.7.5 The effects of isolation on rural schools

A notable characteristic of rurality is a scattered settlement spread around a small school or church with poorly constructed gravel roads and families that are engaged in subsistence farming. The distances learners travel from home to the nearest school add to the hardships rural communities endure. The lack of transport facilities and the cost of travelling to the nearby villages restrict the movement of rural communities. According to Burge (2006), isolation severely limits the quality and quantity of experiences students need to prepare for their future. Capper (1993) and Bickel and Lange (1995) argue that isolation restricts rural schools and communities from making use of urban-based resources such as museums, research libraries and colleges and universities that might enhance educational programs.

Being far removed from social services further exacerbates rural misery. For example, rural communities harbor many learners with special needs. According to Hornby (1995), caring for a child with special needs places immense strain on families and imposes heavy financial constraints on them. When children must take care of siblings, they experience isolation from other children and experience feelings of guilt, anger and resentment. Grandparents are usually

an important source of support as they provide guidance, child care, emotional support and financial help. However, accessing social grants and other social services is problematic.

Many rural parents are withdrawing their children from rural schools, admitting them into urban schools. This further isolates learners from their peers. Gaganakis and Crewe (1987) believe school education is no doubt a major mobilizing factor associated with rural exodus. The system of education is so organized that higher levels of education are available only in progressively larger urban centers. Unless existing inequalities between rural and urban education are addressed, the promise of a better quality education will not be realized for rural dwellers.

3.8 Collation of theories

Theorists refer to in the study concur that parental involvement is crucial to the successful education of children in general and, even more so, to those in rural schools. Further, most people living in rural areas have chosen the places where they live as their permanent dwelling places. It becomes necessary therefore that parents and schools establish a working relationship that will ensure the provision of a quality education for their children. In the rural context, the school and parent need to differentiate responsibilities and actively engage in providing support to each other. Parents providing support need to overlap the capitals they provide as the population numbers are low and those who do offer support are few. Challenges presented by poverty, HIV/AIDS, isolation, and inadequate resources exacerbate the challenges experienced by schools in rural areas and intensify the need for all parents to come on board the educational train in order to accompany and support their children on this important journey.

Moreover, recent demographics have shown an upward spiral of healthier people migrating to the cities, leaving grandparents and young children to eke out a hand-to-mouth existence and a depleted community dependent on social grants for survival. Resources in rural schools usually lag behind those of urban schools, resulting in a vicious circle where rural schools are unable to recruit the services of qualified educators such as those who make a beeline for better equipped urban schools. The shortage of suitably qualified educators causes a sense of despair in the remaining staff and adds to the mindset of the parents that their schools are inferior. The

traditional teaching methods employed in rural schools and the resultant poor achievement of these learners leave parents with little hope that their children have a future.

The above challenges do nothing to make for healthy school, parent and community involvement and communication. However, challenges are just that - challenges. It is for this reason that rural dwellers with school going children need to join hands and support the school through the provision of social, financial and/or human capital. Though there is often a closer bond between the community and parents in rural schools because of the strong sense of place, this is seldom carried into the school as the less educated community is afraid of the comparatively 'wealthy and academically' superior educators.

Despite this dark picture, however, there are stories of how, against all odds, ordinary men and women were able to transform a community. This was done by encouraging people to rise above their circumstances. A principal who can motivate his/her educators to involve the parents and community in the ways shown above, such as educating themselves and the parents and community on how they can invest financial, social and/or human capital into their schools, and to take a personal interest in each learner in spite of the disadvantages, can definitely reverse the negative trend into a positive one.

The positives of living in the country away from the pollution of noise, air and water and where space and isolation open great opportunities for improvisation and innovation can far outweigh the negatives. It needs determined people to recognize and make use of such advantages.

3.9 Conclusion

It is evident that family-school relations need to be established where the school and parents perform their responsibilities in a coordinated manner. Cognisance has to be taken of separate responsibilities, shared responsibilities and sequential responsibilities as alluded to by Epstein (1995). Further, much can be achieved through a well planned strategy to persuade families and communities to invest all capitals in supporting the education of their children. However, this however necessitate that schools acknowledge challenges and embrace opportunities. The next chapter will provide a discourse on the research methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the study. This chapter describes the research design and methodology used to undertake the empirical study. The study was located within an interpretivist paradigm and used a case study approach as opposed to survey research and experimental research. Case studies investigate instances in their natural setting and focus on elements which provide more insight compared to where many instances are used. A case study focuses on relationships and processes and provides detail using a variety of research methods and sources (Denscombe, 1998).

The chapter defines the sampled schools and provides the three methods of data collection used namely interviews, document reviews and observations. The administration of the research instruments used and the methods of analysing the data are provided. Limitations of the study are highlighted and the methods of ensuring the trustworthiness and confirmability of the study are espoused.

4.2 Research plan

The study adopted a qualitative research approach that was underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm. According to Best and Khan (1986), if research is to be conducted in a public school, it is essential to acquire permission from the relevant stakeholders, namely the Superintendent General of Education, the school principal and the School Governing Body. For this reason, I wrote a letter (Appendix B) to the current Superintendent General, Caciús Lubisi, for permission to conduct the research in the selected schools under his jurisdiction. His subsequent approval of my request (Appendix L) enabled me to conduct the study in the identified schools. Further, the study participants, particularly the learners, were protected from any possible physical or psychological harm or danger that might arise from the research procedures.

4.2.1 Ethical considerations

Bertram *et al.* (2003) argue that the collection of data often gives rise to ethical concerns. It is imperative that respondents' rights to privacy be protected. Cohen *et al.* (2007) advise that the relevance of the principle of informed consent becomes apparent at the initial stage of the research project, which I adhered to. Bell (1999) advises that researchers gain permission to conduct a research project early. With fully informed consent gained, participants should be informed of the benefits of the research. The first stage would be to gain official permission to undertake the research in the target community. According to Durrheim and Wessena (2002), these principles of consent include: autonomy; non-malefic (non-harmful); and beneficence (doing well). I wrote letters to all selected participants (Appendices C, D and E) requesting them to participate in the research and received their written approval.

Further, Bertram *et al.* (2004) advise that the researcher must respect the autonomy of all the people participating in the research. I ensured that information supplied by participants was treated in the strictest confidence. Schools and participants were all allocated given pseudonyms. I explained to participants that their voluntary participation in the study implied their freedom to withdraw at any time. Also, I heeded the advice by Cohen *et al.* (2000) who suggest that researchers need to reflect an attitude of compassion, respect and gratitude without being too evasive.

When I received the ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research, I visited the selected schools to negotiate the conduction of the research and to select participants. I wrote letters to the selected participants, formally requesting their participation. Firstly letters were written to principals and SGB members of the schools requesting their permission to conduct the research at their schools. Another letter requested their participation in the research. A letter was also written to the learner's parents requesting their permission for their children to participate in the research. Letters were also written to selected educators, parents and learners for their permission to participate. Provision was made to have letters translated into isiZulu where there was a need. When I received approval from participants, I then undertook the study. Letters may be found among the appendices (C, D, E, F, G, H and I) at the back of the study.

The data collection process spanned a period of approximately nine months. However, the initial interview process with parents and learners yielded inadequate responses as respondents seemed intimidated by my presence. This necessitated that I revisit the process. The second attempt enabled me to extract sufficient information that proved to be valuable for the purposes of this study.

4.2.2 Research paradigm

Bertram *et al.* (2003) allude to three key ways of understanding the nature of the world in research: a positivist approach, an interpretivist approach and a critical approach. In the positivist approach the researcher "...believes that the world is stable and that there are patterns and order that can be discovered in what they are researching. Generally, these researchers use a scientific method of research and they believe that the relationship between things can easily be measured" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 28).

Further, Cohen *et.al*, (2000) argue that positivists view social reality as external to individuals imposing itself on their consciousness from without. Haralambos (1980) adds to this explanation by stating that behaviour in the social world, according to his view, is governed by laws in the same way as behaviour in the world. Positivists therefore hold the assumption that both man and matter are a part of the natural universe and that the behaviour of both is governed by natural laws. Just as matter reacts to external stimuli, so man reacts to forces external to his being.

Social and natural behaviour are therefore determined and can be explained in terms of cause and effect. School leaders, who subscribe to the positivist view of social reality, would inadvertently support Skinnerian's stimulus response techniques to manage schools by attempting to condition and manipulate people to achieve some predictable outcomes (Glencoe, 1986). This approach would, however, be in contradiction to the principles of democracy, freedom of choice, participation in decision making and volunteerism which formed the basis of this study.

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), epistemology is that branch of philosophy which has to do with the nature of knowledge. Positivists view knowledge as hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible forms, whereas anti-positivists claim that knowledge is of a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind based on experience and insight of a unique and

essential nature (Cohen & Manion, 1996). The critical approach/the critical theory/emancipatory theory, however, is not simply to describe or understand the way the world works, but also to change society so that it becomes a more equal and democratic place for everyone (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

This particular study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p. 124), interpretive research "...relies on first-hand accounts, tries to describe what it sees in rich detail and presents its 'findings' in engaging and sometimes evocative language. This paradigm is used to research peoples' behaviour, attitude, beliefs, and perceptions. These are things that cannot always be measured. People can think and interpret the world according to their experiences." Social scientists work within an interpretivist approach, believing that the world is changeable and that it is people who define the meaning of a particular situation. They do not believe that it is possible to discover all the rules and laws of the social world, but that it is possible to understand how people make sense of the context in which they live and work (Bertram, 2004).

Interpretive research methods attempt to describe and interpret people's feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement. The interpretive approach is characterized by a particular ontology, epistemology and methodology. Researchers working in this tradition assume that people's subjective experiences are real and should be taken seriously (ontology), that we can understand others' experiences by interacting with them and listening to what they tell us (epistemology) and that qualitative research techniques are best suited to this task (methodology) Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999).

Chetty (2003) argues that one's view of social reality has a direct impact on how one engages with the world (albeit a school) at large in an effort to improve or develop it. She cites Barrel and Morgan (1979) who identify assumptions that people have about social reality. Two of these have relevance to this study, namely ontology (which focuses on the nature and essence of the social phenomenon) and epistemology (which concerns the very basis of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and how it is communicated to other human beings). According to Mouton and Marais (1988), the term ontology refers to the study of being or reality. It is concerned with the question what IS.

Parents have educational aspirations for their children and it is within their rights to participate in drawing up educational objectives rather than to respond to predetermined objectives. When the latter happens, the parents' input in shaping their own reality is undermined. Parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement cannot be conceptualized without the subjective contribution from all relevant stakeholders. Berger (1987) supports this view and insists that human beings have the right to create their own world. Parent participation in enhancing learner achievement is based on the anti-positive stance believing it is the right of all stakeholders to recognize, create and develop their social reality within the education system.

The interpretive perspective leads to naturalistic research. Naturalistic research is conducted in natural, uncontrived real-world contexts with the researcher not being intrusive (Cohen et al., 2000). This means that social research needs to examine a situation from the view point of the participants. In this research, I used a case study to capture comprehensively the feelings, views, thoughts and emotions about parental involvement in the life of rural primary schools in order to determine whether their involvement enhanced learner achievement.

4.3 Case study approach

I chose a case study approach guided by several authors who have varied and interesting descriptions of case studies. Dyer (1995) for example portrays case studies as being descriptive and detailed with a narrow focus, combining subjective and objective data. Wellington (2000) posits that case studies are illuminating and insightful and, if well written, they can be attention holding and exude a strong sense of reality and are often accessible and engaging for readers.

Three major categories of case studies are distinguished, namely historical organizational case studies, life history form case studies and an observational case study. I chose the observational case study guided by Cohen *et al.* (2007), who assert that events and situations in case studies speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the research. Further, (Robson, 2002, p. 178) believes that "a case study strives to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation; to catch a close-up view of reality and lived experience of thoughts and feelings about a situation. I believe that by conducting a case study, I was able to look at situations and the observed phenomena in their real-life contexts.

Wellington (2000) advises that case studies derived from research can be of great value in teaching and learning. They can lead to subsequent quantitative research by pointing to issues which can or should be investigated over a wider range. They can also follow on from a broad survey or a quantitative approach by going about it in an exploratory, explanation-seeking fashion, thereby enriching them.

According to Nisbet and Watt (1984), a case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles. Case studies fall under the umbrella of 'naturalistic' research, which is conducted in a real world context. They are a style of research that is often used by researchers in the interpretivist paradigm. In this study, I aimed to capture the reality of the participants' lived experiences of and thoughts about the involvement of parents from rural communities in the lives of the schools attended by their children

Cohen *et al* (2007, p 255) argue that case studies "...provide fine-grain detail and can be used to complement other, more coarse-grained, often large-scale, kinds of research." Robson (2002) suggests that there are: an individual case study; a set of individual case studies; a social group study; studies of institutions; and studies of events, roles and relationships. All these, he argues, find expression in the case study method.

Further, Robson (2002) adds to these the distinction between a critical case study and an extreme or unique case. The former, he argues, is when your theoretical understanding is such that there is a clear, unambiguous and non-trivial set of circumstance where predicted outcomes will be found. Finding a case which fits, and demonstrating what is predictable, can give a powerful boost to knowledge and understanding (Robson, 2002).

However, Cohen *et al.* (2007) cite Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2003) who suggest that case studies often lack a high degree of control and treatments are rarely controlled systematically; yet they are applied simultaneously and with little control over extraneous variables. This, they argue, renders it difficult to make inferences to draw cause and effect conclusions from case studies and there is the potential for bias in some case studies as the

therapist is both the participant and observer and, in that role, may overstate or understate the case.

Moreover, it has been argued that case studies may be impressionistic and that self-reporting may be biased. In this regard Cohen and Manion (1994) argue that the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit, a child, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of the case studies employed in this project was therefore to “probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena that constituted the life cycle of each unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which the unit belonged”, as advised by (Cohen *et al.*, 1994).

I was further enticed by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 322) who suggest that “the case study approach is particularly valuable when the researcher has little control over events.” They argue that a case study has several hallmarks, namely:

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events.
- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up reports.

I therefore carefully planned and executed the case studies to ensure that they provided valuable information and insights. I conducted them in three rural primary schools in Ixopo in the Ixopo Circuit, in the District of Sisonke, KwaZulu-Natal, to establish the perceptions of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement in schools. I chose primary schools because that is where the foundation of academic excellence is laid. The schools were located approximately fifteen kilometres apart with a similar population distribution, learner enrolment and geographical setting. A case study of each school was conducted.

4.4 Demarcation of the research area

To conduct the case studies, I chose three rural primary schools in the Miskoffil Ward in the Ixopo Circuit, which is located within the Sisonke District. Miskoffil Ward was the ward of choice because I taught in another school in the ward at the time. I chose to conduct the study in this area as I was conscious of the many challenges that I had noted within the ward. Prior to my study I was aware that some primary schools in the Miskoffil Ward in the village of Ixopo had been producing relatively good results and were attracting rural learners. However, the majority of the primary schools in the area, including those that I selected for the research, were not producing good results, hence my decision to undertake the study.

The schools and participants were given pseudonyms for the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity. In the study the schools are referred to as Thuthuka Primary School, Sipehelele Primary School and Siyaphila Primary School. I chose these schools for their similar characteristics which were: communities with a similar social background, an even spread of population, and similar infrastructures and geographical landscape. Moreover, the schools were located within one ward, had the same quintile rankings, and each was located within a cluster forming the ward.

4.4.1 Thuthuka Primary School

The school was situated in a scattered settlement approximately thirty kilometres from the town of Ixopo. The road to the school was a dirt road and it was difficult to reach the school when it rained. It was a Quintile I no-fee school with an enrolment of 154 learners and five educators. It was attended by Black learners, and engages in multi-grade teaching. The principal was a Black male with a low qualification in some learning areas but taught all learning areas in grades six. There was no deputy principal or head of department. The principal attended many meetings and also conducted regular meetings with his staff, SGB members, parents and other stakeholders which resulted in his classes left unattended.

The school had an unreliable feeding scheme as it was run by co-operatives. The school had no running water and the pit toilets were most unhygienic. The learners were not afforded

opportunities to participate in sporting events and cultural activities. Most learners were cared for by grandparents as many of them had lost their parents. Grandparents could not pay the required transport fees for learners to go on planned school activities. The working relationship between educators and parents was poor. The Department of Education erected classrooms but very little educational progress took place at the schools.

4.4.2 Sophelele Primary School

The school was situated in a sparsely populated area with houses that are far apart. The school was a Quintile I school with no electricity and running water. It was a no-fee school that lacked basic resources. However, there was a gradual increase in the learner enrolment which, at the time of the study, stood at 190 learners. It was attended by Black learners and has three multi-grade classes and five teachers with no deputy principal or head of department. Most parents were pensioners who survived on state grants. The access road to the school was a dirt road which was dusty during winter and muddy during summer.

The learners participated in organized social, cultural and sporting events. The principal was a class teacher who taught five learning areas in grade seven. The principal had a very busy schedule which took him away from his classroom. The school had a feeding scheme which was run by co-operatives who were reported to be unreliable. At times learners were often asked to fetch wood from the forest when the gas ran out and were asked to cook when the co-operatives failed to remunerate the honorarium. The parents complained when their children had to cook as they lost learning time. The principal was a male, who, while he tried to win support from parents ran the school on his own.

4.4.3 Siyaphila Primary School

This was a Quintile I, no-fee school located in a scattered settlement with 157 learners. The school enrolled grades 1-7 learners and had an efficient feeding scheme. The principal, a black female, assumed her position as manager in 2000. The school was attended by black learners and had three multi-grade classes. The school used a card system for its electricity which was used as little as possible to avoid high running costs.. The water system that served the school often ran dry and learners had to provide their own water. The school premises showed signs

that learners were trying their best to keep it clean, beautify their school, Parents were seen doing minor renovations. A sports field that is located on the school premises was inadequate.

Many of the learners' parents or guardians worked in the local Sappi Forest, while some were pensioners. The principal tried to involve parents by inviting them to parents' day functions which a number of parents attended. According to the community members, much development had taken place since the arrival of the new school principal. The school participated in a variety of organized social, cultural and sporting activities. The SGB meetings were held at least once a term. Active sub-committees were in place but they never meet. The enrolment increased gradually and the condition of the facilities showed signs that some development was taking place.

4.5 Methods of data collection

The study used three methods of collecting primary data in the order: interviews, document reviews and observations. The interviews involved individual interviews with principals, educators and SGB chairpersons, and focus group interviews with parents and learners. Individual interviews were conducted over a period of between forty five minutes to one hour. Group interviews were conducted over a period of approximately one and a half hours. I chose to use the three methods of data collection in compliance with the principle of triangulation which enhances the authenticity of findings from analysed data. Denzin (1970) for example posits that the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question enhances confidence in the ensuing findings. Literature reviewed was used as secondary data.

4.5.1 Interviews

I chose to use interviews to allow me to engage in personal contact with respondents. This process allowed me to communicate on a one-on-one basis with the respondents to find what they knew (knowledge and information); what they liked or disliked (values and preferences), and what they thought (attitudes and beliefs), as described by Cohen *et al.* (2000). Since I conducted a qualitative research, I used a semi-structured interview to allow for flexibility such as rephrasing questions to remove any ambiguity or misunderstanding. A particular advantage of

the interview is that the researcher is present and can clarify any ambiguities that may confuse the respondent.

I was also able to ask other questions to find out more information if the respondent had not really given sufficient detail. However, I was mindful that the interviewer's presence "...should not affect a respondent's perception of a question or an answer given", as alluded to by Babbie and Mouton (1998, p. 251). One of the ways of achieving this is to match the interviewer and respondents on several characteristics. In this regard I took the following characteristics into consideration:

- The ability to speak the home language of the respondent is essential.
- It is desirable to match their grouping, sex and age category – e.g., young interviewers may have difficulty in interviewing their elders (Babbie & Mouton, 1998, p. 251).

Fortunately I speak Zulu which allowed me to elicit information without employing an interpreter. I switched from English to isiZulu as the need arose to add clarity where there was a need. Among other disadvantages of interviews, I was mindful of the large quantities of textual data generated by interviews and therefore I audio taped the interviews. This allowed me to make verbatim transcriptions before translating them and to return to a specific point in an interview for purposes of clarification.

Moreover, I remained cognisant of the several other problems that might arise in conducting interviews. Cohen *et al.* (2007) warn that a number of problems should be anticipated. Ideally, these should be prevented to ensure that the interview proceeds comfortably. For example, interruptions from outside should be avoided (e.g., telephone calls, people knocking on the door) by placing a warning message on the door. Arksey and Knight (1999) further advise that the interviewer should always appear to be interested and avoid giving signs of approval or disapproval of responses received. Also, s/he should be prepared to repeat questions at the respondent's request. To address possible challenges in this regard, I asked the schools to allow the use of the least used venue. Further, I requested respondents to switch off cell phones, repeated questions when there was a need, and I tried at all times not to bore the respondents.

I explained the “rules of the game” as advised by Cohen *et al.* (2007, p. 362). I explained the purpose, scope, nature and conduct of the interview, the use to be made of the data, ethical issues, and the likely duration of the interview to the respondents. By so doing, the interviewees were left in no doubt as to what would happen during and after the interview. I also heeded Cohen *et al.* (2007) who caution that the researcher using interviews has to be aware that time is expensive (i.e., interviews may take up much valuable time) and that they are open to interviewer bias. Interview times may be inconvenient for respondents and the issue of interviewee fatigue may hamper the interview. Moreover, anonymity may be difficult to maintain.

The participants in the interviews were selected from three primary schools in a particular rural area. The interviewees included: the school principal, the SGB chairperson, an educator, and a parent and learner focus group per school. The choice of having parents and learners in groups was to encourage them to speak without fear or the feeling of being intimidated.

The aim of using interviews was to have interviewees speak freely and openly about their experiences with regard to the role parents played in the life of the school. For this to happen I needed to apply certain techniques, recommended by (Cohen *et al.*, 2007) namely:

- The establishment of rapport. The interviewer should use subtle encouragement, and silence, as helpful techniques. Respondents should be given ample time to stop and think, and be provided with encouragement through the use of neutral interested facial expressions and supportive phrases.
- The interviewer must use a carefully selected vocabulary. Not only must the chosen words be clearly understood by the respondents, but they must not be ambiguous.
- Avoid loading interviews with emotion. The use of technical vocabulary may intimidate the respondent and inhibit honest answers, while using the language of the group can facilitate communication and reduce social distance.

I also used the advice of Cohen *et al.* (2007) by having an informal post-interview conversation with the respondents for four reasons. Firstly, these conversations helped the respondents feel satisfied with their performance and provided clearer information about the research goals.

Secondly, they helped in directing some inhibiting elements of the interview situation and in obtaining information which was not initially offered. Thirdly, they assisted me in obtaining re-interviews and in preventing negative information from reaching other potential respondents. Fourthly, they also aided me, as a social scientist, in retaining access to my intended research population (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

4.5.2 Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were interesting as the groups participated enthusiastically. I found information that I would otherwise not have been able to access, as mentioned by Babbie and Mouton (2007). The focus groups allowed a space in which people got together and created meaning among one another rather than individually. The method involved discussing individual opinions in a group, shaping and reshaping opinions and thus creating a completely new set of data. I also used the advice of several authors in preparing and conducting the interviews.

In particular, I took note of the advice by Morgan (1997, p. 8), who posits that the main advantage of a focus group in comparison to participant observation is “the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time, based on the researcher’s ability to assemble and direct focus groups.” He warns, however, that this form of ‘control’ is also a disadvantage because it means that focus groups are, in some sense, in unnatural social settings. I therefore tried not to be too controlling.

Further, Morgan (1997) argues that the comparative advantage of focus group interviews as an interview technique lies in their ability to observe interaction on a topic. Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analysis separate from each respondent.

I noted, however, that individual interviews had clearer advantages over focus groups as alluded to by Chetty and Morgan. Chetty (2003) and Morgan (1997) concur that in the case of an individual interview, the interviewer has greater control of the situation and is able to obtain much more information from the respondents through probes and rephrasing questions to get as

much information as is possible. In focus group interviews it is necessary for the interviewer to pay great attention to each response and provide less depth and detail of individual opinions and experiences of any one participant.

However, I found that focus group interviews run practically like basic individual interviews as described by Babbie *et al.* (2007, p. 293). They argue that “once the introduction is done and ground rules are set, you can proceed in much the same way as you would in the basic individual interview. The difference involves facilitating the conversation for the whole group and the group process.”

Morgan (1997, p. 10) advises that when you use focus groups, you need to bear in mind the size of the group and the number of groups you will use. The following guidance is offered:

- Choose enough participants so that the focus group does not fall flat if some members choose to remain silent.
- Bear in mind the amount of information you want from each participant and do not choose so few members that individual dynamics in the group outweigh the group dynamics.
- Try to steer clear from friendship pairs, ‘expert’ and uncooperative participants.
- It is much more difficult to manage the interviewing process in a large group than in a small group. Beware of people breaking off into small conversations or talking at once.
- Large groups require a high level of moderator involvement and skill.
- The rule of thumb is to over recruit by 20% to compensate for members not showing up.
- Try to have between three or five groups. You may need more for certain subjects, but in general, more groups seldom provide new insights (Morgan, 1997, p. 10).

I ensured that the guidance provided was put to effective use by asking educators to recommend several parents and learners whom they regarded as potential candidates who would speak out.

Selected participants were contacted a few days before the interview to remind them of the appointment. Further, during the pre-discussion session, I discussed the purpose of the study to

allay possible fears and I invited them to participate fully and honestly. They were assured about the confidential nature of their involvement and that all discussions would be held in the highest confidence within the group. I made every effort to obtain the cooperation of participants, ensuring that they would not reveal what was discussed and by whom after the group discussions.

4.5.3 Observations

Observations represent the lived experiences witnessed by the person conducting the research either as a participant or purely as a person looking on. Participant observers engage in the very activities they set out to observe. Cohen *et al.* (2007) regard observation studies as superior to experiments and surveys when data are collected on non-verbal behaviour. Observations in case studies take place over an extended period of time; therefore researchers develop more intimate and informal relationships with those they are observing and they are less reactive than those researchers who conduct experiments and surveys (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). In my opinion, people who have become 'immune' to being observed as they become used to the presence of the observer, provide authentic data.

Kelleher (1993) believes the biggest advantage of observations is that they can be done anywhere. Babbie (2007) concurs and regards the presence of an observing, thinking researcher on the scene of the action as one of the greatest advantages. They recommend that full and accurate notes of what is observed should be recorded as cameras and tape recorders cannot capture all the information regarding social processes.

Lofland & Lofland (1995) recommend that notes be taken as an observation is in progress. If this is not possible, it should be done as soon as possible afterwards. I heeded the advice and took detailed notes during observations and data capturing. I also looked out for incidental moments and added the detail to my notes. I found note taking to be one of the most important activities in the observation phase of my study as these notes provided details of and beyond what I sought to unearth. I ensured this was done unobtrusively, since people are likely to behave differently if they see you taking down everything they say or do, as advised by Lofland and Lofland (1995).

How much to record comes into question. Babbie (2007, p. 295) advises that, “initially, one should even record those things that do not seem important as they may turn out to be significant later on. However, many of the notes that are recorded are never used, which can be time consuming and costly.” Lofland and Lofland (1995) advise that notes be taken in stages. The initial stage should include taking sketchy notes (words and phrases) in order to keep abreast of what is happening. Notes should be written in more detail in private, soon after the events observed, to allow for a recall of most of the details. They warn that the longer it takes to record events as they happened, the less likely it will be to recall things accurately and fully (Lofland and Lofland, 1995).

Kelleher (1993, p. 126) alludes to some advantages of observation:

- It forces the observer to familiarize him/herself with the subject.
- It allows previously unnoticed or ignored aspects to be seen.
- Peoples’ actions are probably more telling than their verbal accounts and observing these are valuable.
- It is unobtrusive, and when obtrusive, the effects wear off in reasonable time (Kelleher, 1993, p. 126).

Incidental observations, comments, occurrences and discussions were noted as they occurred to capture the unexpected.

4.5.4 Document Reviews

Reviewing documents is a way of collecting data as existing documents are perused for specific or general details. Reviewing documents helps the researcher to understand the operations of the institution being observing. “Case study researchers often study written communications that are found in field settings. Many of these researchers believe that the meaning of a text can vary depending on the reader, the time period, the context in which the text appears, and so forth” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005, p. 312).

Official Departmental documents, school records, and minutes of meetings provided valuable information that could either confirm or refute what respondents said in the interviews and what

I observed during data collection. The Department of Health and Human Services (2009) advises that once you have secured access to the documents, you should request only those documents that will answer your evaluation question. It is also suggested that a data collection form be created to summarise the data gleaned. The form could have the type of document reviewed, a way of referencing each document and the information that answers each applicable question. The form may be used to compile and analyse findings.

Further, it was found that reviews are relatively inexpensive and unobtrusive. They may also bring up issues not noted by other means. However, the process may be time consuming if you review and analyse many documents. Information may be out-dated, incomplete or inaccurate at times.

Interview schedules, and observation and document review schedules can be found as appendices in the thesis (Appendix O)

4.6 Data analysis

Field notes, interview transcripts and documents obtained from the field setting enhanced the soundness of my findings as this facilitated the process of triangulation as alluded to by Gall *et al.* (2005). Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions. Data reduction involves organizing and sorting data into codes or categories and then looking for patterns or relationships between these categories. Data must be organized in some way, and researchers start to do this by looking for topics or categories in the data, and coding these.

The researcher started by reading the data set (the interview transcripts, the field notes, the observation notes) as a whole to get a sense of it. I wrote down the ideas that came to mind as I read through the notes. I simultaneously identified the topics which emerged from the data. A topic is the descriptive name for the subject matter of a piece of text. The researcher wrote down the topics in the margin. A list of topics that emerged from the different data sets was written down to establish if any duplication occurred. Essentially, a set of topics with which to classify or categorise the data was created.

Classification means that you put similar things together in the same group. I applied this provisional classification system on all the data sets. I abbreviated the topic to a code and then wrote the code next to the appropriate piece of data. I applied the above guidelines when I analysed the few documents the schools made available. However, while the schools had class schedules as records of the academic progress of learners, scant record of financial and other relevant school activities were kept.

4.7 Preparing for the field

Babbie *et al.*, (2007) advise that the first phase of the research is to search for relevant literature, filling in your knowledge of the subject and learning what others have said about it. The next phase should involve making contact with the people you plan to study. Hence, once I had perused the literature and clarified the research design, I set out to identify the schools where I was to conduct the research. First I had to apply for departmental permission to conduct the research. When I had received permission to conduct the research, I visited the schools to inform them of my intended project and I sought their assistance in identifying suitable participants.

A purposive selection of parents was conducted. The sample targeted male and female, employed and unemployed parents as well guardians, grandparents and foster parents of both genders. I asked the school principals to assist and we randomly selected respondents keeping the above criteria in mind. Educators and learners from the upper grades were randomly selected. Once selected, I wrote letters to all the selected respondents asking their permission to involve them in the study. I also sought permission from the principals and the SGB chairpersons of the selected schools to conduct observations and review school documents.

When I visited the schools, I carried a tape recorder and batteries as a back-up in case of power failures. I also had extension cords and two or three blank cassettes. I allowed myself enough time to introduce myself to the participants. I took time to brief them on procedures and once more stressed the fact that all proceedings would be treated in the strictest confidence. I also used this time to answer any questions that the participants asked. Lastly, the purpose of the study was recapitulated. With all uncertainties addressed and with everyone in agreement, the interviews commenced.

4.8 Administration of research instruments

I used semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, observations and document reviews to collect data. Interviews were conducted in both English and IsiZulu. English speaking interviewees were interviewed in English and IsiZulu speakers were interviewed in IsiZulu. Fortunately, I could conduct the interviews in both English and IsiZulu so errors which commonly occur during translations using translators were avoided. I used an audio-recorder to record all interviews and wrote detailed notes on the observations made. I analysed minutes of meetings which dealt with parent participation, learners books and mark schedules as well as finance related documents.

Table 4.1: Frequency and types of interviews conducted at the schools under study

School	Thuthuka Primary	Siphelele Primary	Siyaphila Primary	Total
Individual interviews Principal, educator, SGB chairperson	3	3	3	9
Group interviews Learner focus group, parent focus group	2	2	2	6

4.8.1 Interviews with individual respondents

Bertram (2004) posits that interviewing is not simply a data collection exercise but it is a social, interpersonal encounter. Individual interviews were conducted with principals, educators and SGB chairpersons. It was assumed that, being public figures, they would respond freely and frankly to the questions asked. Focus group interviews were held with parents and learners which allowed participants to speak freely, especially among peers in the case of learners, and with no fear of victimization (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

I believe that in terms of age and stature I was well matched with my respondents as advised by Babbie and Mouton (1998), except for the learners. However, having been an educator for several years in a primary school, I was able to communicate effectively with the learners. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for flexibility such as rephrasing questions to remove any ambiguity or misunderstanding. An advantage of note during the interviews was that I had direct contact with the respondent/s and could therefore rephrase question when necessary to ensure clarity. I was also able to ask probing questions to garner more in-depth information if the respondent did not give sufficient detail (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

The interviews aimed at establishing whether parents participated in the life of the school and, if they did, how it was done. One interview schedule was used for principals, educators and SGB chairpersons. Different interview schedules were used for parent and learner focus groups as the information sought differed to some extent. Biographical information was obtained from parents to establish the level of parenthood, whether they were biological, foster or grandparents. The level of academic attainment that was determined for the parent sample added valuable information in terms of the extent to which parents participated in the life of the school.

4.8.2 Interviews with focus groups

Focus groups of five parents and five learners were selected randomly from each school. Group interviews were scheduled for a period of one hour. However, where there was a need, the time was extended. Learners were selected from grade 7 as they were seen as senior pupils who could have more information and be better able to hold their own during interviews. The random selection of parents and learners was to ensure that all potential participants were provided with

probable opportunities to participate. Focus groups were intended to prevent individuals from feeling inhibited. However, in most cases the parents initially looked very uneasy which forced me to take time to assure them that the process was a research project that would not jeopardize them in any way.

In all three cases, the introduction of a tape recorder made participants visibly uneasy. With some subtle persuasion, their hesitance to participate soon evaporated and the interview process went ahead without any glitches. As interviews progressed, respondents relaxed and participated freely. Evidence of the success of the exercise was revealed by the replay of the tape recordings. Tape recordings were translated into English and transcribed. I translated the recordings which prevented possible errors in the presentation of the data. I took cognisance of the tone and meaning of responses provided which added value to the translations. At the end of all the interviews I gave the participants pens and sweets as tokens of my appreciation.

4.8.3 Observation processes

When conducting the observations, I was guided by Cohen and Manion (2007) who posit that in observation studies, investigators are able to discern on-going behaviour as it occurs and they are able to make appropriate notes about salient features. In the non-participant observation, which is the approach I applied to allow me to observe participants in their natural environments, the participant stands aloof from the group s/he is investigating. However, I was not 'under cover', as Cohen and Manion (2004) suggest that cover is not necessarily a prerequisite of participant observation. This approach, I believe minimised possible distractions as my active involvement could have interfered with the focus of my observations.

At appropriate times I conducted close-up observations of individual units to probe deeply and analyze intensely the multifarious school life phenomena. This was done to establish what aspects of the school life promoted or inhibited parent involvement. I used unstructured observations as one of the tools to gather information on incidental occurrences and that which I could have missed or could not capture in the interviews. This allowed me to compile 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations. I observed that which was taking place in reality rather than relying on second-hand accounts, as advised by Cohen *et al.* (2007).

I adhered to the basic principles of field notes and recorded details of activities as they occurred. I believe this added value to the research as Robson (2002) advises that what people do may differ from what people say they do. Cohen *et al.* (2007) posit that observing something live provides a reality check; it allows the researcher to look afresh at everyday behaviour that otherwise might be taken for granted, expected or go unnoticed.

I conducted observations from the first day I set out to visit the schools. However, I used four categories which served as a checklist for the observation and data capturing. I gave particular attention to the involvement of parents in the schools' curricular programme, the school structures (such as finance committees), extramural and co-curricular programmes, and school development programmes. I observed parent involvement in the schools' programmes under the following categories: parents assisting educators in the classrooms; assisting educators with playground duty, the schools' nutrition programme, sport and cultural activities, as well as parents accompanying learners on sport trips and excursions.

Furthermore, I observed activities taking place over week-ends and during holidays to determine the level of involvement of working parents. I attended sports outings or excursions and observed the interaction between parents and educators or parents and learners. However, I tried unstintingly to ensure that the observations were conducted without interference so as to capture the involvement of parents as it occurred naturally.

I kept a record of dates and activities schools planned for the year. I kept contact with the schools to ensure that scheduled activities occurred as planned before I visited them. I also requested educators responsible for extramural and other activities to keep me informed where possible of date changes or additional activities the school planned to undertake.

I also acquired ward, circuit and district year programmes in the hope of observing parental involvement in school activities at levels outside the confines of the school. I sought and received permission from all relevant school structures to conduct the planned observations. I diarized planned school, ward, circuit and district activities and sought contact numbers of relevant persons to stay updated on the progression or cancellation of planned activities. The categories of activities observed were as follows:

Table 4.2: Observation categories of possible activities that could involve parents

CATEGORY	POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES
Academic Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping learners with reading/storytelling • supervising classes when educators are away on official duty/sick leave
School meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGB meetings • participation of parents in drafting school policies • budget meetings • sub-committee meetings (discipline, safety and security meetings (DSSC); school nutrition, etc.) • any meeting where the participation of parents is discussed
School improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school improvement plans (the involvement of parents in strategic planning for school improvement)
Extramural programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching learners in sport • accompany learners on trips • assistance in cultural activities (e.g., creating traditional attire and musical instruments for plays)

When conducting the observations I was guided by the advice of Cohen *et al.* (2007) in terms of validity and reliability. They posit that a researcher must decide whether to focus only on certain people rather than on the whole group. I also conducted close-up observations of the interaction between parents and learners; parents and educators; and parents and other stakeholders such as social workers. It was important to engage in holistic, wider focused and wider ranging observations with a wide angled lens to obtain a full-field view of the parents' participation in the schools' support services such as the extramural programme, involvement in fundraising activities and others.

However, I was mindful that observations are potentially intrusive, or could change the dynamics of a situation. Brown and Dowling (1998) cite an experiment at Hawthorne, USA, where workers' productivity increased simply because they were being researched. I therefore anticipated that as I engaged with participants in the various activities, they could behave differently. Cohen *et al.* (2007) warn that an observation exacts its price: it may take a long time to catch the required behaviour or phenomenon, it can be costly in time and effort and it is prone to difficulties of interpreting or inferring what the data mean.

Further, researchers such as Wilkinson (2000), Moyles (2002) and Robson (2002) caution that observation situations "...carry a risk of bias"; e.g., such as expectancy effects, reactivity, and attention deficit, to mention a few. I was mindful of these challenges and planned proactively to deal with them. I strove to develop some trust and to create a non-intimidating atmosphere where I was present so that people being observed would not view me as spying on them or trying to expose weaknesses.

Attention was also given to incidental activities which 'popped up' and added value to the study. For example, in one incident I observed the principal dealing with an angry parent who visited the school with a complaint. In other incidents parents sought clarity on or assistance with a certain issue. The observations concentrated on the nature of the complaint, the manner in which the principal and parent/s dialogued, if or how an amicable solution was found through the implementation of 'agreed' school policy, and how or what assistance was provided to parents.

4.8.4 Reviewing of documents

In order to triangulate the responses from interviews and observations, I reviewed documents to ascertain whether parent involvement formed part of the schools' strategic plan to achieve the set goals. The documents I analysed are listed under the names of the schools in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: List of documents perused to establish evidence of parental involvement

SCHOOL	DOCUMENTS
Thuthuka Primary School	School year plan; minutes of SGB and committee meetings, financial record, learner exercise books, school's academic records and ANA schedules
Siphelele Primary School	School year plan; minutes of SGB, sports committee and DSSC meeting, learner exercise books, school financial records, school academic and ANA schedules
Siyaphila Primary School	School year plan; minutes of SGB, sports and recreation committee and DSSC meeting, school improvement plan, school achievement profile, learner exercise books, school financial records, September Exams and ANA schedules

Perusal of these documents informed me about what was happening at the school; i.e., what should have been happening that was not happening and what was not happening that should have been happening.

Most learners' books indicated that their parents did not help them with their schoolwork. The absence of parent's signatures in learner's homework books confirmed this as principals indicated that they appealed to parents to support learners with homework and to sign their books. Parents' meeting attendance registers revealed that very few parents attended meetings. This was an indication that decisions regarding the schools' functionality were left to educators. Evidence provided indicated that the schools seldom held SGB meetings. SGB members had not been inducted nor attended empowerment workshops.

The internal policies that existed at the schools were old and no evidence existed that they had been reviewed in a long time. School mission and vision statements had very few changes to those provided by the Department of Basic Education as exemplars. Most official documents supplied to the schools were displayed but very little evidence existed to indicate that schools had used these to empower parents. Very scanty record keeping was a common occurrence at all three the schools. Some financial records reflected the names and amounts contributed by parents for the end-of-year functions. The monies were kept by educators and not banked. Receipts from purchases made were taken out of handbags in some instances, which did not tally with the amount of money parents paid. This indicated that schools did not keep accurate financial records.

4.9 Analysing data

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993, p. 486), qualitative researchers "...integrate the operations of organizing, analyzing and interpreting data and call the entire process, data analysis." Mncube and Harber (2010) argue that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to a mass of collected data. Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest that data analysis is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, but also a creative and fascinating process. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) describe qualitative data analysis as primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories.

A number of categories and patterns emerged from the data obtained for this study. Once the interviews had been concluded, the recordings were listened to several times in order to appreciate subtle features such as tone, pitch, intonation and other crucial aspects such as pauses, silence and emphasis. I transcribed the responses verbatim and translated all the interviews into English where necessary, before embarking on the data reduction process.

The data consisted of interview transcripts and notes, summaries of field notes accumulated during observations, and document reviews. All these rough data were transcribed and analysed according to Giorgi, Fiske and Murray's (1975) phenomenological steps.

Firstly, each transcript was read to get an overall sense of the whole. Secondly, the transcripts were read to identify the transaction in the experience, with each transition signifying a separate unit of meaning. The general unit of meaning referred to the range of issues interviewees mentioned and these in turn were related to the overall focus of the research. This process was followed in order to find the deeper meaning in what the respondents had been saying. Thirdly, the redundancies in the units of meaning were eliminated, leaving me with the remaining units as they related to one another. Fourthly, the respondents' language was transformed into the language of science and, finally, the insights were synthesised into a description of the entire experience of the participants.

Once the data had been obtained and classified, patterns (or themes) were identified. In searching for patterns, I tried to understand the complex links between various aspects of people's situations, mental processes, beliefs, and actions as recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (1993). To do this, a data display was conducted. This process was an organized, compressed assembly of information that allowed me to draw conclusions and take action. The final stage of analysis was the drawing of conclusions and verification; however, much of this process took place from the start of data collection.

4.9.1 Credibility of data

Data retrieved from research should be accurate and reliable. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research trustworthiness is measured by interpretivist investigators using the criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Dane (1990) emphasizes that the responses to questions are not proof that the answers given reflect a respondent's true feelings.

The one-on-one experience enabled me to encourage respondents to respond honestly and sincerely. I had to rephrase questions where necessary, use different methods to persuade respondents to answer questions, and encourage respondents to ask questions if they wished to do so. A major challenge involving observations was the risk of bias as alluded to by Moyles (2002) and Robson (2002), such as selective attention by the observer and reactivity.

The careful use of the data collection tools selected and staying intently focused on the objectives of the study helped overcome this challenge. To ensure that the data I retrieved was authentic; indicators were applied fully, consistently and securely with no variation in interpretation as advised by Cohen *et al.* (2007). Further questions were carefully designed in such a way that relevant information was elicited and irrelevant information was avoided.

Shenton (2004, p. 63) points out that one of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers is “...that of internal validity, in which they seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended”. According to Merriam (1998), credibility deals with the question: “How congruent are the findings with reality?” Qualitative researchers are therefore advised to strive to establish confidence in the truth of the findings for the particular respondent and context in the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985), advice that credibility involves two aspects: first, carrying out the study in a way that enhances the believability of the findings and second, taking steps to demonstrate credibility to external readers.

4.9.1.2 Dependability of data

According to Shenton (2004, p.71), “...in addressing the issue of reliability the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated in the same context with the same methods and with the same sample of respondents, similar results would be obtained.” Further, it is argued that credibility cannot be attained in the absence of dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the close ties between credibility and dependability stating that, in practice, a demonstration of credibility goes some distance in ensuring dependability. This may be achieved through the use of overlapping methods such as both focus group and individual interviews.

4.9.1.3 Transferability of data

Merriam (1998, p. 39) believes that validity is concerned “...with the extent to which the findings of one can be applied to another situation.” According to Shenton (2004, p. 69), “...in positivist work the concern often lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand could be applied to a wider population.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) concur and argue that the

responsibility of the investigator is to provide sufficient descriptive data in the research report so that consumers can evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts.

Shenton (2004, p. 66) believes that, where appropriate, "...site triangulation may be achieved by the participation of informants within several organizations so as to reduce the effects on the study of particular local factors peculiar to one situation. Where similar results at different sites are retrieved, findings may have greater credibility in the eyes of the reader."

According to Anderson and Burns (1989), transferability responds to the question: "To what extent can the findings or conclusions of a particular study be said to be representative of other settings, with other people, and at other times?" Griffith (2000) advises that there are three things which a case study needs to show in order to produce generalisable findings: typicality, detailed description, and multi-site research.

Bertram (2004, p.155) advises that sampling is important "...to enable us to know whether a conclusion can be generalized to cases which were not included in the research."

4.9.1.4 Confirmability of data

Conformability refers to objectivity, which involves the potential to draw congruencies between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning. This criterion involves establishing that the data presented represent the information respondents provided and that the interpretation of the data is not conjured up from the inquirer's imagination. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.539) assert that for this criterion to be achieved, "...the findings must reflect the respondents' voice and the conditions of the inquiry, and not the biases, motivations, or perspective of the researcher."

To enhance the possibility of retrieving valid responses, the questions I posed were relevant to the topic and phrased in an unambiguous way. Terminology used was simple and clearly defined to ensure it had the same meaning for all the respondents. Responses to all questions were captured on audio-tape and analyzed through a process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (1993).

I was also guided by Cohen *et al.* (2007) who provide criteria for a valid interview and the careful planning of questions. They suggest that, to ensure that the particular interview used in the study will be suited to measure that which it is designed to measure, frankness and openness when responding are vital. These are realized by guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents which were, in this study, educators, parents and learners. Where necessary, interview questions were asked differently to test and retest responses as advised by Fraenkel (1993).

4.10 Conclusion

The discussion above mapped the route I took in preparing and conducting the data collection process. The process involved seeking permission from all relevant stakeholders; selecting the research tools; stating the methods of their implementation and the advantages and disadvantages of each; selecting participants; providing brief reports on the selected schools; and providing a table describing how each tool would be used. A brief elucidation was provided on the analysis of the data. The principle of the trustworthiness of the study which includes reliability, validity, limitations and ethical consideration was highlighted. I described the vigorous data collection and analyses processes. The findings will be presented in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION: THE NEED FOR A WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND PARENTS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study. This chapter presents and analyses data generated from the interviews conducted with principals, educators, SGB chairpersons and parent and learner focus groups. It also presents and analyses the data generated from other data collection methods namely: document reviews, observations and notes taken during the data collection process.

The main thrust of the study as reported in this chapter was to establish whether:

- a) there was a need for parents to support the school attended by their children;
- b) the school's needs were communicated to parents and,
- c) whether parents were empowered to provide the support the schools required.

The chapter examined whether the schools saw a need for parental support and, if so, whether effective communication methods were used to inform parents about their needs. The programmes designed to empower parents to enable them to provide support were examined.

The research study encompassed case studies within three primary schools. For the purpose of subscribing to the research ethics of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used and the schools are referred to as Thuthuka Primary School, Siphelile Primary School and Siyaphila Primary School. However, it must be reiterated that the documents reviewed at the schools were scanty and planned activities that actually took place at the schools were few.

5.2 Data presentation and analysis

In the presentation and analysis of the data, I present the findings under grounded themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data in terms of the research question: The main research

question read: **Do parents from Rural Primary Schools support the schools attended by their children and, if so, does their support enhance learner achievement?**

The first sub-question read: **Do parents participate in the life of the school attended by their children? Why or why not?**

Responses to the questions indicated that there were indeed parents who supported the schools.

5.2.1 Parental participation in school activities

According to the respondents, parents provided support which ranged from providing learner needs such as medical needs, clothing and food, enrolling them into schools, ensuring they attended school, and assisting them with their schoolwork. Parents felt they brought the children into the world, therefore they were responsible for caring for them and providing for their needs, one of which was a quality education.

Principals indicated that a relationship between the school and the home began when parents enrolled their children at the school. They therefore saw a need for parents to provide support to ensure the provision of a quality education for their children. They were also in agreement that there was a need for a collaborative working relationship between parents and the school. The principal of Siyaphila Primary School said:

The initial relationship between the home and the school occurs when parents enrol learners at the school. There are parents who are admitting their children on time and take an interest in their children's education which we welcome and encourage. We need to establish a collaborative working relationship between the school and parents where everyone commits to doing the best to ensure learners benefit optimally.

A similar view was expressed by the educator of Siphелеle Primary School:

When the parents enrol their children, parents and educators are responsible for ensuring the child receives a good education. We inform parents about the need to establish a partnership at the outset and invite their participation in the

learners' educational journey. We stress the need that we work as a team to ensure that learners benefit optimally while at school.

These views are in line with the statutory obligation devolved to parents by the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, which stipulates that: "Every parent must cause every learner for whom he or she is responsible to attend a school from the first school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of seven years until the last day of the year in which such learner reaches the age."

Parents indicated that although they had missed educational opportunities themselves, they wished for their children to receive an education that will allow them better life opportunities. In this regard they committed to providing support to the school. A parent from Siyaphila Primary School said:

I want the best for my children. I will do whatever possible to ensure that my children receive a good education. I have worked all my life in the forest because I was not well educated. This should never happen to my children. I want them to have better opportunities in life, to pursue careers of their choice, and to accomplish their life ambitions. This can only happen if we support our school. That is why we are here!

From the above it is evident that parents and educators had a common desire which was that learners should receive the best education possible. Educators and parents were in agreement that the common goal in education was raising the educational attainment of learners. However, for this to be realized in a rural context there was a need for a cooperative working relationship between educators and parents:

We enrol our children at schools with the hope that they will receive a quality education. However, we are aware that the teachers' job is not easy and that we as parents have to work together with our educators to dedicate more time to provide support where we can and to ensure they are able to provide our children with a good education like that enjoyed by children in urban schools, through our help (Thuthuka Primary School parent).

According to Cheney and Osher (1997), collaboration involves relationship and partnership building, coordinating services and explaining service options and flexibility. In the developing world, particularly in South Africa within which this study was located, rural education still remains challenged with little improvement having taken place with regard to collaboration within the rural context (Samuel, 2005).

McEwan (1999) concurs with Joubert (2007, p. 20) who states that rural schools and students "...are disadvantaged in comparison to their urban counterparts throughout the developing world and poverty and illiteracy remain overwhelmingly rural phenomena." According to Smith and Martin (1997, p 15), in rural areas "...there are higher poverty rates, a higher percentage of poor school districts, and fewer dropouts who return to finish school as compared to urban areas."

While educators acknowledged that parents experienced challenges, they saw a need for all parents to make a concerted effort to provide some support to the school. This responsibility seemed to rest with a few parents. They expressed appreciation for the support these parents provided and invited other parents to do like-wise. The educator at Siyaphila Primary School said:

I believe all parents should support the school in some way. We are aware that poverty and illiteracy are rife among our parents, but for them to ignore efforts by the school to solicit their support has a negative impact on the teaching and learning process. We really appreciate the support some parents provide and ask more parents to support us.

According to the SGB chairpersons, most parents in rural areas were employed by farmers who had stringent working conditions. Workers started their day very early in the morning and worked till late. Farmers offered accommodation within their premises to ensure that workers reported for duty on time and worked for as long as the farmer needed them to. Parents were compelled to comply for fear of losing a job and a place to stay. This was a dreaded reality. A parent said:

We live where we work which means we do as we are told by the employer. We wake up early and only return home when the farmer allows us to leave as we

fear losing our jobs. There is no time to support the school. Helping our children with their homework poses a challenge. We only have a two hour break in which we do washing and cooking so children eat when [they] return from school (Siphelele Primary School parent).

This was double-exploitation as parents worked long, odd hours for low wages and were kept away from their families. Mncube's (2009) study found that when schools held meetings during the day, employed Black parents had to obtain permission to attend the meetings. In most cases their employers refused to give them time off. Moreover, family relations often broke down when parents were forced to leave their children alone when they had to work to provide a livelihood for the family. When children were left unsupervised they often went astray and engaged in anti-social behaviour which impacted negatively on the educative process.

According to Anderson (2007), domestic and employment demands contributed largely to the failure of parents to provide support for their children's school. This is corroborated by Lemmer and van Wyk (2007) who assert that in many families, both parents work outside the home making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to attend scheduled meetings or school functions. Dekker and Lemmer (1998, p. 157) raise a concern, arguing that educators "...cannot perform their educational tasks without a full partnership with the parents." It is therefore imperative that parents make time to support the schools.

Learners provided mixed responses with regard to parents providing support to the schools. While some learners were happy when their parents visited the school, some learners detested it. They believed parents did so to keep a check on their behaviour. They also suspected that educators informed their parents when they did something untoward. A learner from Thuthuka Primary School said:

We are happy when we see Mrs T and our school SGB chairperson Mr U at school. Mrs T usually cooks for us when the cook is absent. We eat nice food when she cooks for us. Mr U is a nice man. He often tells the boys not to misbehave and tells us to work hard. When we go out to sports or cultural competitions, he accompanies us.

However, a learner from Siphелеle Primary School said:

I am not happy when my mother comes to the school. She seems to be spying on me. The educators always threaten to inform my parents whenever I did not do my homework or when I did something that was contrary to the school's code of conduct. I live in fear that my behaviour will be reported to my parents. It is most unpleasant because you live in constant fear.

The principal of Siphелеle Primary School asserted that while he appreciated the support a few parents provided, he felt that more parents needed to come on board. He felt parents had the responsibility take charge of the learners' well-being and the up-keep of the school and to ensure that education was taking place in an environment that was conducive to teaching and learning. He complained that this was not the case at his school. The principal said:

The laws of the country, such as the Constitution of South Africa, SASA and other directives from DOE charge that parents play a prominent role in the life of the school. Parents have the responsibility of ensuring the school runs smoothly and that effective teaching and learning take place at schools. That is not happening here (Siphелеle Primary School principal).

The present South African dispensation has introduced reforms that compel parents to participate in school matters. However, Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) advise that authentic change must take place at local level where school managers, teachers and school governors play a crucial role in translating national initiatives into meaningful local policy and practice. Wolfendale and Bastini (2000) observe that a government wanting to raise standards in education will concentrate on enhancing parent support, involvement and obligation in their children's schooling.

However, while most respondents expressed a need for parents to participate in the life of the school, some parents had different opinions. They feared getting involved in their respective schools' academic programme as they had very little knowledge in this regard. They felt inadequate and preferred to assist with non-academic programmes such as extramural activities. A parent at Siyaphila Primary School said:

The educators persuade us to assist in academic work, which is difficult for us. I prefer to support by cleaning the school, cutting the grass, hoeing in the garden or assisting with the extramural programme. Educators should take charge of the academic work sector as they have been trained in this regard. I tried to help my child once and I confused her; it was an embarrassing experience.

While schools had empowerment programmes in place, only a few parents used the opportunity to acquire skills on how to help their children. Some parents had a sound knowledge of certain subjects in which they could provide much needed support. Epstein (1991) claims that gains in achievement may occur only in subjects in which parents feel confident about their ability to support their children's learning.

All the educators indicated that they were in need of parents' support as only a few educators could be employed at the schools according to the PPN ratios. They complained that the learners stood around idle during breaks and looked unhappy. A few learners at Thuthuka Primary School skipped while others played tin-games. According to the educators, learners seldom went out to competitions as there was no one to accompany them. At Siyaphila Primary School, boys played soccer while girls played netball. Parents cleaned and performed various activities while others tended the garden.

To establish whether parents were aware of the schools' needs and where they could assist, I set out to establish whether effective communication existed between the school and parents. Respondents were asked: **Are parents aware of the school's needs?**

Respondents at all three revealed that the schools communicated methods to inform the schools' needs, planned school activities and indicated where parental support was needed.

5.2.2 Communication with parents

According to the respondents, most parents were aware of their school's needs. The schools used a variety of methods to communicate with parents. Parents were invited to meetings where the school's needs, learner progress, and relevant information were passed on to the school community. Learners conveyed verbal messages, especially where parents could not read or write. In some instances, the educators spoke directly to the parents. However, when there was a

need, the school wrote letters or used mobile phones to contact parents. Hanhan (1998, p. 107) posits that, to promote effective communication with families, schools should "...design a variety of school-to-home as well as home-to-school communication strategies with all families, each year, about school programmes and about the learners' progress."

5.2.2.1 Engaging with parents in plenary meetings

Responses from principals indicated that the schools held plenary meetings which all parents were expected to attend. Schools used a variety of communication methods to encourage all parents to attend and make their heard. Letters informing parents about meetings were sent out timeously. Messages were conveyed to parents who could not read through learners. Some parents were informed about meetings when they visited the school. The SGB also took on the responsibility of conveying messages to parents about planned school meetings.

Parents from Siyaphila Primary School and Thuthuka Primary School confirmed that they were informed about school meetings and made every effort to attend. A parent from Siyaphila Primary School said:

We decide at our annual general meeting when we will have our meetings. The school usually sends notes with our children to remind us. However, when something urgent crops up that needs our input, the school conveys verbal messages with our children. Sometimes the educators inform us about meetings and we pass the word around as well.

However, parents at Sipehelele Primary School indicated that they sometimes received messages about meetings at very short notice or after meetings had already been held. One parent said:

We have a serious problem; we often hear about meetings days or weeks after they were held. We often get messages about meetings at church. Sometimes our children inform us about meetings that are to take place at the school on the day of the meeting which makes it almost impossible for us to attend. When we don't go to church or our children forgot to tell us, which often occurred, we missed important meetings at times.

When schools have effective mechanisms in place to inform parents about school meetings, they may be encourage to attendance which will allow parents to have their voices heard. However, in my experience parents find it difficult to keep time. When they arrive late at meetings they often do not participate fully and see little value in attending meetings. Epstein *et al.* (1997) advise that, if schools truly want parents to be partners in education, they must "...allow parents an ample opportunity to voice their opinions, concerns and views in a co-equal relationship with educators."

5.2.2.2 Informing parents about the schools' needs

Educators often communicated a school's needs directly to parents when they visited the school. Parents also often passed by the school on their way to the village or to collect their post. This made it possible for educators to communicate directly with parents. Further, the majority of the parents lived in close proximity of one another and the school encouraged parents to pass the word around when messages from the school needed to be communicated. This made it possible for educators to communicate directly with the parents. The principal said:

Parents are also in regular contact with the school as they are engaged in a number of ventures around the school. Parents pass by the school often, especially when they are on their way to the village, so we inform them about the school's needs. People live close to one another and pass messages around easily. Parents pass by the school to collect their post, so the school is able to ask parents for the support they need from them (Siyaphila Primary School principal).

I noted that Siyahpila Primary school was located in a fairly nucleated settlement in comparison to the other two schools with a small scatter of homesteads located a distance from the school. This enhanced the possibility of community members communicating verbally and passing messages from one to the other.

The SGB chairpersons indicated that some parents were familiar with their respective schools' needs as they attended meetings when they were invited. This enabled them to engage in discussions and make decisions concerning planned school activities. It is here where strategies

of addressing the school's needs were devised, policies designed and support was sought from parents. According to the SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School, the school went to some lengths to persuade parents to attend meetings to ensure their aspirations were voiced. He said:

We used a variety of methods to get parents to attend meetings as we believed their participation in meetings was vital. We asked learners to convey messages to their parents. I spoke to parents personally at times, inviting them at church or public gatherings. Where there was an urgent need, the school wrote letters or telephoned the parents. Parents discussed the school's needs and devised strategies of addressing them. Some school policies emanated from the discussions. It was at meetings where we up-dated parents on developments at the school and sought their support where there was a need.

According to the educators, when parents attended parents' meetings, they found time to discuss learner progress and sought their support. They indicated that where parents assisted their children, the learners' performance improved. Epstein (1995) regards it as the obligation of the school to communicate with parents to inform them about the learners' progress and school programs.

According to the educator at Thuthuka Primary School, they often reported learner progress to parents. Parents expressed an appreciation for the reports they received from the schools regarding their children's progress. This enabled them to give more support to the school and to learners at home. However, there were parents who indicated that they were unable to support the school due to other commitments. Some parents indicated that they needed to provide for their families, while others took care of babies or urgent family matters. The parents of Siyaphila Primary School said:

We appreciate it when our educators inform us about the challenges our children experience. This encourages us to provide them with additional support and to check on them to ensure they are spending time with their schoolwork at home. However, it is difficult at times to respond to invitations to attend

meetings due to domestic commitments. Some of us have young children to take care of. Others are forced to search for temporary jobs to provide for their families.

While most parents were unable to attend meetings, those who did rendered a valuable service when they supported the school. They also spent more time supporting their children with their schoolwork. According to Singh *et al.* (2004, p. 305), parents who spend quality time with their children are able to "...motivate them to perform."

The principals acknowledged that finding an effective method of communication posed a challenge. They acknowledged that learners often conveyed incorrect verbal messages. While letter writing was the preferred method of communication, some parents could not read or write. Often letters never reached parents which made it difficult to access the level of parent commitment in providing support.

5.2.2.3 Communication challenges

Parents were unhappy that educators often sent learners to convey messages to SGB and community members during school time. They argued that while they acknowledged that, at times, there were urgent matters, the school needed to find alternative ways to convey urgent messages. They complained that this took learners out of their classes which meant they lost valuable learning time. The chairperson of Siphhelele Primary School said:

We often find learners running to and fro conveying messages or to have me sign documents. We don't like it when our children are taken out of their classes as it disrupts the learning process. Some of us are community workers, so it is not easy to locate us at any given time. I believe other arrangements must be made to inform us about urgent matters or when the school needs us to sign documents.

The principals indicated that where parents did not attend meetings, they remained uninformed. This often caused conflict when the school was forced to make unilateral decisions when urgent matters arose. This often caused conflict when decisions were taken by staff members and the

few parents who attend meetings. It mainly occurred when decisions taken did not favour parents who did not attend meetings. The principal of Siphhelele Primary School said:

We sometimes ask parents to attend meetings where pertinent issues are to be discussed. When parents don't attend, we usually go ahead with the meeting if it is urgent. When a decision is taken such as parents paying for a planned trip when school funds are insufficient, some parents get angry and withdraw their children at times. It is sometimes difficult to avoid such situations and they usually affect learners negatively.

Responses from educators indicated that there were parents whom they needed to meet regarding the progress of their children. They sent messages, wrote letters, and even contacted them telephonically, but they never responded. The 'unavailability' of parents left educators disgruntled when learners committed offenses or refused to do their homework persistently. The educator at Siphhelele Primary School said:

It is disturbing when you appeal to parents to visit the school to discuss urgent matters involving their children's untoward behaviour and you receive no responses from them. Some learners, who knew that their parents would not attend when the school invited them, did not behave themselves or refused to do their work. In fact, when parents did not respond, it perpetuated bad behaviour from the learners.

The principal of Thuthuka Primary School expressed a similar view. She complained that some parents made no effort to support the school. She reported an incident where she appealed for support from parents in a matter that caused a threat to the learners. Despite the urgency of the matter, the parents did not avail themselves. She said:

Parents are disappointing at times. They do not respond when you ask them for support. I appealed to parents once to demolish toilets that were condemned by health inspectors. The parents promised to demolish the toilets free of charge. I waited for three months and nothing was done. I eventually contacted a group

of parents who always support the school and the toilets were demolished the following day, as a service to the school, (Thuthuka Primary School principal).

In my experience, when the school appeals for support and parents fail to respond, schools usually devise methods of coping without parental support which usually causes tension between the school and the parents.

When parents fail to attend meetings where they are able to make decisions about the education of their children, they unwittingly surrender their decision making powers to the school. I believe, however, that educators should strive to establish a communication system that suits parents' circumstances and ensures that communication between parents and the school is effective.

In this regard, van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) advise that schools should strive to maintain an effective communication mechanism with parents and to have a thorough knowledge of all its facets. They assert that, through effective communication, the school can recruit and organize parents' help and support. Sheldon (2010) believes that parents' awareness that they can help their children succeed in school will depend on the opportunities for involvement provided by the school or educators.

From the above it can be inferred that schools which effectively communicated their needs to parents secured their support. Where communication was ineffective, the school functioned in isolation with little or no support. Theron (1996) advises that when we communicate with a specific aim in mind, it is only meaningful if it is done effectively.

It was evident that parents at Siyaphila Primary School knew their school's needs and provided the necessary support. At Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools, communication between parents and educators was not efficient. Parents indicated that they often heard about school activities at very short notice and were therefore unable to provide support. I observed at Sipehelele Primary School that there was a break-down in communication between educators and parents where one blamed the other for some of the school's failures. The tension was evident during the interviews.

According to Marchel (2008 p. 16), their study found that where there was a break-down in communication, parents and communities did not support or co-operate with schools and “...this resulted in a low academic achievement.” It therefore becomes crucial for schools to devise effective communication strategies to ensure that parents attend meetings. Effective communication serves to empower parents.

5.2.3 The empowerment of parents and the outcomes there-of

To establish whether the school had programmes in place to enable parents to support the school, respondents were asked: **Has the school empowered parents to assist the school? If so, how?**

According to the responses by principals, all three schools had designed policies and programmes to empower parents. Where policies were implemented and parents attended the programmes, parents were empowered. They developed confidence, helped their children with their schoolwork and other school activities which provided much support to the school. However, a serious challenge schools had to deal with was getting parents to attend meetings.

While it was important to have parental support for the school, it was equally important to know what skills individual parents possessed. According to Mncube (2009), even though parents may be willing to help, they need capacity building so that they can take part in school activities successfully. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) advise schools to get parents to indicate the service they could offer, keep records and compile a list of skills and services they are prepared to offer the school.

The parents of Siyaphila Primary School expressed much appreciation for the empowerment they received when they attended workshops which promoted the development of a garden project. Consequently they assisted the school in developing gardens and taking care of them. I noted that many homes around Siyaphila Primary School had well grown vegetable gardens. By teaching parents how to grow their own seedlings and to lay out gardens, the project set the parents on the path to self sufficiency.

The parents acknowledged with much appreciation how the principal encouraging them to participate in the project and the skills they acquired. One of the parents said:

We are so grateful to the school for assisting us by providing us with skills, seed and showing us a few methods of preparing the soil and making compost. Formerly we used fertilizer when we planted. Planting crops became so expensive that it was cheaper to buy maize meal and vegetables. Now, we plant our own seedlings and make our own compost. It works very well; our gardens are doing well. People in the community have also established gardens. We encourage each other and plan to develop more gardens. We are selling vegetables to the local people (Siyaphila Primary School parent).

Squelch (2007) advises that schools need to provide training to parents and afford them the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that will enable them to participate meaningfully in transforming and improving schools. It was at this school where I saw multiple awards that the school had won for the project through the support of parents.

The SGB chairpersons revealed that they had attended workshops organized by the Department of Basic Education where they received guidance on their role and responsibilities as outlined by SASA. However, they expressed their gratitude to NGO Z (a non-governmental organization) who took the initiative to provide additional training which helped them cope in this intricate area of school management. One chairperson confirmed that the experience he had gained gave him insight into what was expected of his team. The chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School said:

I really appreciate what the school has done for us by securing the services of NGO Z to empower us. They often called us out to a day's workshop on policies and laws pertaining to school governance. Recently they took us for a whole week and work-shopped us thoroughly on the role we are expected to play as members of the SGB. The experience was very informative and worth our time out there. We feel much more confident and are familiar with most of our responsibilities.

Educators indicated that parents had skills in traditional and cultural activities which they imparted to learners as well as to educators. Educators at Siyaphila Primary School were

appreciative of parents who taught skills in beadwork, home-crafts and the manufacture of traditional musical instruments. According to the educators, the interaction with parents created a friendly working relationship. The educator said:

Parents took time to teach us, the learners, and other parents, skills such as beadwork, the sewing of traditional garments and to manufacture of traditional instruments such as 'isigubu' - a traditional musical drum. They also taught us how to do traditional dances which is quite a sophisticated art. The sharing of these skills in making home-crafts has created a close working relationship between the school and parents (Siyaphila Primary School).

As espoused to by Samuel (2005), where parents from rural schools areas are adequately empowered, they provide much needed support to enable schools to deal with the many challenges experienced such as the lack of resources and shortage of facilities.

However, learners raised a concern that the low numbers of educators employed at their schools deprived them of the quality education such as the education other learners such as those in urban areas experienced at their schools. They felt disadvantaged as most of their parents were unable to support them with their schoolwork. They suggested that all schools become ABET (adult basic education and training) centres to allow the parents an opportunity to receive some schooling. Some learners suggested that educators should visit their homes to motivate parents to assist and to understand the circumstances under which they live. They requested that educators speak to their parents about how they could support the school and assist them at home. Learners at Thuthuka Primary School said:

The Department of Education must employ more educators so that they can spend more time with us. Our educators are a few and the work is too much for them. Schools must introduce ABET classes to afford our parents the opportunity to study. Our educators must come to our homes; it is not far and witness how we live and to tell our parents what they must do, so that they may be able to assist us with our schoolwork.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) purport that home visits are a powerful communication tool, but advise educators to ascertain whether home visits will be the best medium to achieve their goals. Kruger (2005, p. 9) concurs and posits that "...knowledge of home circumstances of learners helps the educator in his instructional task."

According to the educators, it was difficult to empower parents as it was difficult to find the time when most parents were available was difficult. They complained that taking time off their busy work schedules to facilitate poorly attended empowerment programmes was disheartening. The educator at Thuthuka Primary School was unhappy that parents requested that workshops be conducted during school hours, yet only a few attended. She said:

It is discouraging and sometimes a futile exercise to spend much time preparing an empowerment programme and find that only two or three parents attend the presentation. We have on many occasions run empowerment programmes during school hours because many parents chose this as the most convenient time for them to attend planned school activities, yet they often failed us, by not attending (Thuthuka Primary School educator).

The SGB chairperson of Sipehelele Primary School complained that the school invited parents to attend school functions designed to empower them and the majority of parents did not attend. She said:

It is a wasteful expenditure when we arrange empowerment programmes at great cost at times and parents do not avail themselves of this opportunity. We have made efforts to empower parents on intricate issues such as discipline, safety and security, but parents never avail themselves. We may understand where parents are at work parents who are apathetic nullifying [sic] any efforts of empowering them. It is costly at times and discouraging.

However, the principal of Siyaphila Primary School reported that they held empowerment programmes over weekends to accommodate parents who worked. Where parents availed themselves, much empowerment took place. He commended parents for participating in the empowerment programmes because after a few workshops parents acquired skills, developed

self- confidence and became an asset to the school. They assisted learners in a variety of learning areas and other school activities. Some parents developed materials and ideas to support the curriculum and shared their expertise, as advised by Berger (1987). The principal said:

Empowering parents is a challenge as educators have a lot of work. We decided to have empowerment workshops on weekends. It is not convenient but it works for us. When parents availed themselves, the exercise was normally very fruitful. Empowering people becomes a pleasurable experience when one sees positive outcomes from the time invested in the process. However, it was disturbing when you requested specific parents who needed guidance, but they did not attend the programmes aimed at empowering them (Siyaphila Primary School principal).

In my experience as a school manager, it is difficult to find a time that will suit all parents. However, the time invested in empowering even a few parents is time well spent if it translates into the parents helping their children. This clearly supports schools. According to Epstein (1995), parents can reinforce what learners learned at school. For example, a parent can help a child understand or learn multiplication concepts.

The non-attendance by parents did not necessarily mean they were not interested in the efforts made by the schools to empower them or that educators locked parents out. Shield and Knapp (1997) suggest that it is crucial to invest time and money in empowering parents. This will instil confidence and provide parents with the privilege of contributing to their children's education. SGB members who occupy strategic positions in school committees need to know their roles, therefore the school needs to conduct empowerment programmes in this regard. Where necessary, the school may have to invite the support of professional bodies to ensure that empowerment does take place.

Parents from all the schools were in agreement that while the schools did have programmes in place to empower them, contextual factors prevented them from attending workshops aimed at empowering them. For instance, Siyaphila Primary School received a positive response from

parents when they hosted empowerment programmes for parents. However, Thuthuka and Siphhelele Primary Schools conceded that, while they appreciated the efforts made by the school to empower them, domestic responsibilities prevented them from making good the opportunities provided. According to Samuel (2005), daily life in the rural context is mostly experienced as a battle for basic survival.

However, when I perused the schools' year plans and budgets during the document review, I noted that at Thuthuka and Siphhelele Primary School, little time and money had been invested in empowering parents or creating a close working relationship with them. I believe parents and members of the school community are often in the best position to know what their schools really need and what problems there are in the schools.

A close working relationship between parents and the school is necessary to create a bond and a sense of unity among stakeholders. According to Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson (1994), schools are to establish a partnership where teamwork exists. Bell (1992) advises that teamwork reduces stress and pressure through mutual support. Investing in creating synergy and empowering parents would be investing in a worthy cause, therefore I believe more time and money should be invested in this endeavour.

5.3 Conclusion

From my observations and the responses from interviewees, it was evident that all the schools were in need of parents' support. It also emerged that the schools had mechanisms in place to communicate with parents to solicit their support, but that these were not always effective. Further, the schools had a variety of programmes aimed at empowering parents to provide support to the schools and to assist their children with their schoolwork. Such programmes had been initiated in an effort to ensure that schools' educative goals were met.

Siyaphila Primary School regarded parents as the source of support they could not do without. Parents participated in plenary meetings, attended several empowerment programmes and were aware of what was happening at the school. Empowerment programmes helped parents develop self-confidence which increased their level of participation in school activities. Parents who assisted in the school garden programme establish their own gardens and sustained their families.

Some crafted traditional regalia and sold them to the schools and community members. However, Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary School parents seldom visited the schools. They therefore knew very little about what was happening at their respective schools. The lack of communication disempowered parents as they missed social services and the empowerment the schools offered. The schools were also unable to communicate their needs to parents which meant schools had to function with very little or no parental support.

However, parents at Thuthuka Primary School who assisted with Grade R learners went on to become Grade R educators. One parent who had previously cooked for learners was employed in the catering department at Spar Supermarket. Learners at Sipehelele Primary School expressed much disappointment at their parents' 'refusal' to visit/support their school even when they invited them to do so.

The next chapter reveals the levels and the extent to which parents provided support to the schools attended by their children.

CHAPTER 6

THE EXTENT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was established that the schools were in need of parental support if they were to achieve their educational goals. Educators in particular stressed a need for parents to play a much more active role in supporting the schools to achieve their educational goals. In parents' view, providing for their children by nurturing and nourishing them at home was already a form of supporting them. Moreover, parents felt that they extended this support by admitting their children to schools timeously through completion of all the relevant documents and ensuring that they attended school regularly.

It emerged that schools used multiple techniques to communicate their needs to parents. Further, while the schools had empowerment programmes in place, very little empowerment took place because parents were seldom available for a number of reasons. The challenge schools grappled with was finding a time to implement school programmes when all, or large numbers, of parents could attend.

The main thrust of the study as reported in this chapter was to establish what parents did to support the schools. When schools are able to elicit and harness parental support, they are able to improve the services they provide. Kyriakides (2005, p. 281) believes that involving parents in instructional tasks "...has positive effects on learning." Atkin, Bastiani and Goode (1988, p.12) posit that "there is a growing perception of and support for, the view that when professionals and parents share the same goals and work together in a partnership, things can really begin to happen." However, for parental participation to evolve and become a school culture, schools need to establish a symbiotic relationship where all team members work in unison.

While it was evident from the responses that some parents made an effort to provide support, the majority of parents did not provide support. Where support was forthcoming, schools' goals were achieved. Interviewees alluded to a number of factors, some valid, others not so valid, that prevented them from providing support. These will be referred to during the discourse. The

schools also indicated that while they sought academic support, most parents were offering support in non-academic programmes.

6.2 Data presentation and analysis

In the presentation and analysis of the data, I present them under grounded themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data in terms of the research question. In order to solicit the appropriate information, interviewees were asked: **How do parents participate in the life of the school?**

6.2.1 The nature/ levels of parental support

Based on the responses from the interviews and findings of the observations, document reviews and discussions with respondents, I present a table and a discourse on the levels of parental participation. The extent to which parents provided support to the school is rated as follows:

- 1 Minimal parental support
- 2 Occasional parental support
- 3 Consistent/dependable parental support
- 4 Regular parental support

Table 6.1: Levels of parental involvement

	Thuthuka Primary	Siphelele Primary	Siyaphila Primary
1 Parents prepared learners for admission to school	1	1	1
2 Parents ensured regular learner attendance	3	2	3
3 Parents served on school structures and attended planned school meetings where they could make their voices heard	2	1	3
4 Parents participated in the upkeep of the school by cleaning the school and taking care of the school premises	2	1	3
5 Parents did minor renovations	1	1	3
6 Parents provided safety and security	1	2	3
7 Parents established vegetable gardens	1	1	4
8 Parents served as volunteers	2	2	3
9 Parents provided financial support and sought donations	2	2	3
10 Parents supported the learners with their schoolwork	2	1	1
11 Parents supported the schools' extra-mural programme	2	1	3
12 Parents supported schools in hosting Grade R graduations and grade 7 farewell functions	3	2	4
Total	22	17	34

6.2.2.1 Preparing learners for admission

Educators complained that they often admitted learners who were without birth certificates as they had not been registered with the Department of Home Affairs which contravened their school's admission policy. However, they indicated that some parents enrolled their children timeously, submitted their children's birth certificates, and provided proof of their immunization on the day the school opened for the new academic year.

Educators commended the parents who accompanied their children to school for the first time, often staying with them for the first few weeks to orientate them into the new environment. This enabled new learners, especially the Grade R group, to adapt to their new surroundings much sooner. Educators also commended parents, especially grandparents, who complied with enrolment procedures and saw to it that their children attended from the first day of school. An educator from Siyaphila Primary School said:

We appreciate the support we receive from our parents, especially grandparents, who provide good care and ensure that learners were registered properly, inoculated and who enrolled their children at the school early. They also provided valuable support when they accompanied the young children to school during the first few days of the school year.

Principals indicated that they often sent reminders to parents to enrol their children and to ensure they had the necessary documents. However, parents often turned up on the first day of school and asked to have their children enrolled without the necessary documents. They would promise to have the children registered which some of them never did. They often had to ask the Department of Social Services for help and they visited the schools to have learners and members of the community registered.

The SGB chairpersons complained that parents did not heed the schools' admission policies. They would leave the enrolment of their children for the first day of the new school year which would disrupt efficient functioning. It became complex and difficult to manage when some parents rushed to admit their children while others asked for deregistration. The SGB chairperson of Siyaphila Primary School complained that when parents did not register their

children early or did not send their children to school on time, the ten-day window for submitting learner statistics reflected a low enrolment rate which affected the employment of teachers negatively as educators are allocated to schools according to the teacher-pupil ratio. She said:

Some parents registered learners late, after the school had submitted learner enrolment statistics. When learners came in late and numbers increased, the school was not provided with more educators until the new learner statistics were captured. This was the main cause of the challenge where rural schools always seemed to function without a full complement of educators (Siyaphila Primary School SGB chairperson).

When I perused the admission registers, I noted that many learners had been admitted late – i.e., outside the 10-day period for enrolment submissions. Some learners were either not registered at birth or failed to produce birth certificates as the ID number column was blank.

When I visited the schools during the first few days of the new year, I noted that some parents queued outside the principals' offices seeking admission for their children three or four days after schooling had commenced. This confirmed that some parents ignored appeals to enrol learners timeously to facilitate the schools' planning programmes.

The above indicates that the majority of parents did not give the admission of learners the serious attention it deserved. The schools were therefore rated at level 1 as the responses from the educators revealed that the majority of parents did not see the need to register their children early in spite of the schools asking them to do so urgently.

According to Heystex (1999), the most important reason why parents are not actively involved in school activities is their negative attitude toward school. Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) believe that "most parents still need help to know how to be productively involved in their children's education at all grade levels." I believe schools should establish programmes which will help parents access the relevant documents required for admission as they are essential documents learners will also use later in life.

6.2.2.2 Ensuring regular learner attendance

According to parents, they ensured that their children went to school every day which minimised the disruption of teaching and learning. Some parents indicated that they informed educators when the learners were unable to attend school. When the learners would be away for a few days they informed the school and requested educators to send work which the children could do at home to help them keep abreast. A parent from Thuthuka Primary School said:

...some of us see to it that our children go to school every day. ...We take on extra chores and employ the services of casual labour when work becomes plentiful, to ensure our children are at school every day. When they cannot attend we inform the educators and ask them to send work with our neighbours' children so they do not miss out on work done at school.

The SGB chairperson of Siphелеle Primary School said:

Our grandparents cooperate fully. They take good care of the learners; they ensure they attend every day, clean and on time. In many instances, grandparents come to school to report cases of non-attendance by learners. Where learners refused to come to school they reported it to the school and asked for intervention.

Evidence from school registers indicated that many learners attended school every day. Educators alluded to the fact that most learners arrived punctually, daily. These ingredients cannot be over emphasized if any success is to be achieved in accomplishing a school's main goal, which is teaching and learning. This is in line with the assertion by Lemmer and van Wyk (2007) who purport that governments throughout the world have acknowledged that parents have a right to be involved in the education of their children. They further claim that this is closely related to effective schooling, which implies full attendance by learners.

Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools made a concerted effort to ensure that learners attended school regularly. They were therefore rated at level 3 in this regard. Siphелеle Primary School was rated at level 2 as it was evident that learners stayed away from school without valid reasons at times.

According to the principal of Siyaphila Primary School and the SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School, parents from the school community reported cases of non-attendance by certain learners who were of a school going age or who had stopped attending school. These parents formed a group made up of two or three individuals who had approached the schools and offered to provide support in an effort to get the children to attend school. They were a ‘special interest group’ as referred to by Clarke (2007) who put their focus on ensuring that all learners went to school.

The principal of Siyaphila Primary School confirmed that where there was a case of a child or children who did not attend school, parents within the community provided support and the learner/s were re-admitted into school. This was corroborated by the SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School who said:

When we discovered that there were learners who were not attending school, we informed the principal or went to the parents to talk to them. We tried by all means [sic] to ensure that every learner attended school and also made parents aware of the legal implications when parents allowed learners of a school going age not to attend school. Some learners had had babies and chose to abandon school; we talked them out of it and got them back into the school.

Parents who reported non- attendance by learners provided valuable support as this is a societal scourge eroding education in rural areas. The support the parents provided thus ensured that parents experiencing challenges were helped and that learners of school going age were afforded an opportunity to integrate into the education system. This also served to expose learners who chose to stay away from school or play truant.

However, some learners complained that they took care of the family’s livestock which made them get to school late or sometimes kept them away from school. A learner from Thuthuka Primary School complained that his parents subjected him to taking care of the family livestock which prevented him from getting to school on time and even prevented him from going to school at times. This confirms Burge’s (2006) assertion that there were some rural parents and community members who had limited aspirations for their children. Another learner at Sipehelele

Primary School reported that he had to take care of his grandfather's cattle which affected his school attendance. The learner reported that the parent did not respond when the principal called her to address the matter. The learner said:

I take care of my grandfather's cattle. I walk them to the paddock in the morning which sometimes makes me late for school. When my grandfather goes for pension, I take care of the cattle which meant I lost a day of schooling. I'm not allowed to complain as cattle provide a livelihood when used to plough the fields. When I performed poorly they were unhappy and threatened to withdraw me from school. My mother does not attend when the principal calls her to discuss the matter (Siphelele Primary School learner).

This was corroborated by the SGB chairperson of the school, who said:

I often see learners from certain families running to school when the school day has started. Some of them drive cattle to paddocks before going to school. I think parents must change their way of doing things. We have spoken to them with the principal, but little has changed.

The fact that there were learners who did not come to school because they had to tend to the family livestock at times was a contravention of a regulation by SASA (1994) which directs that parents, in partnership with educators, should take charge of their children's education which includes ensuring they attend school regularly. Chetty (2003) asserts that, since parent participation has become an indispensable part of the school organization, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to ensure that parents abide by regulations regarding learner attendance.

Responses from learners indicated that some would lose interest in their schoolwork or would stay away when their parents failed to provide financial support or to buy uniforms for them. Some dropped out of school when they failed. A learner from Siphelele Primary School said:

Our educators often asked us to ask our parents for money to pay for transport when the school planned to travel. When our parents are not able to assist us, some learners are excluded from school activities. We become isolated and

don't go to school sometimes. Some of us lose interest in our schoolwork. When our parents fail to buy us school uniforms, we don't feel like going to school and we sometimes just stay at home.

My experience with rural parents was that where money was a major issue, children placed a strain on the family finances. When a child failed, some parents lost hope and removed the child from school altogether. However, I noted that Siyaphila Primary School had a programme in place where the school had established a support network where international donors sponsored learners experiencing financial challenges. They often visited the school and donated resources and took care of selected learners' needs. The church at Thuthuka Primary School often provided support to learners who were in need of support. It was however disturbing that very little was done at Sipehelele Primary School to source external support.

6.2.2.3 Participation in school structures and plenary meetings

Parents made their voices heard when they participated in school committees where they provided input on matters affecting the school. According to the respondents, when parents participated in school structures such as SGBs, finance committees, or disciplinary, security and safety committees, school functionality was enhanced, discipline prevailed, and school funds were used optimally. The chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School said:

By working within school structures such as the school governing body, discipline, safety and security, and fund raising committees, we made decisions involving the functionality of the school, reported to parents regularly and schools functioned better. The discipline at the school is improved. Parents assist in raising funds to help the school to pay for services aimed at achieving the school's goals.

Learners expressed a need for their parents to serve on sports committees and participate in drawing up school programmes. They also felt that parents needed to prepare them for competitions and to accompany them when they went out for competitions, educational excursions and other activities because educators seldom found the time to do so. They also

complained that they were deprived of participating in sporting activities when parents when parents and educators did not avail themselves. A learner at Siyaphila Primary School said:

Yes, we think our parents should assist in planning the sports programme for the year. When educators plan the activities for the year, our parents should be there and have their input as the financial responsibilities are theirs as well as preparing us to compete in sport and other activities. We also need parents to come with us when we go out for sporting activities and educational excursions, therefore they need to know their roles, early. When no-one supports us, we do not participate in sporting activities and we don't look forward to coming to school.

I observed that learners played sport without supervision. It is my contention that parents or members of the community could support learners by supervising such activities as no child may be left unsupervised during the school day by law. A sports committee could assist to facilitate this. According to Sterling and Davidoff (2000), parents have skills and talents the school could draw on to make the school a creative and dynamic centre of activity. However, Calitz *et al.* (2002) contend that parents in rural and predominantly black communities are not actively involved in school activities and that this impacts negatively on learner performance.

Educators indicated that they invited parents to parents' days where parents perused learners' books and interacted with their children's educators and observed their children's progress. Where parents availed themselves, they engaged with educators and were offered guidance in areas where they needed to help their children. Where parents supported their children, their progress improved. An educator at Thuthuka Primary School said:

The school, in consultation with the school's academic committee, invited parents to a Parents' Day where they observed the learners' books to assess their progress. It is here where educators sometimes met the learners' parents for the first time. Parents used this time to discuss challenges learners experienced and together plan on how best to assist the learner. However, we found that meeting parents one-on-one did more to ensure that individual learners' needs were

addressed adequately. Where parents implemented the support we provided, the learners' schoolwork improved.

However, according to other respondents, some parents who were elected onto the school structures were unable to perform their responsibilities effectively. Parents either lacked the knowledge or expertise while others lacked confidence. Some had family commitments which prevented them from performing their duties. The SGB chairperson of Sipehelele Primary School said:

Parents were elected onto school structures such as the SGB, DSSC, and the fund-raising committee. Problems were encountered when we held meetings because we were seldom able to raise a quorum. This meant we had to reschedule meetings before we could make decisions or reach consensus. However, where parents availed themselves and implemented decisions taken, much progress occurred with regard to education.

Epstein (1995) posits that parents can be involved in their children's education by participating in school committees that influence decisions made in the school. However, parents complained that they had very little schooling and therefore found it difficult to participate meaningfully in educational matters. According to some parents, discussing curricula issues was a futile exercise as they felt incompetent and would not add value to any discussions. A parent from Sipehelele Primary School said:

I ended in grade five and I have stayed at home all my life. I never had a chance to learn or acquire academic skill. ... I therefore do not feel good enough to be part of a group that deliberates plans and provides support on academic matters as I would not contribute much to such discussions.

However, educators contended that parents who could not contribute to academic discussions could support the school's extramural programme. According to van Deventer (2008), since education involves transmitting people's knowledge, culture, attitude and skills to the next generation, it is appropriate for all the parents to make an input. This is in line with assertions by many writers such as Davies (1993); Lemmer, Meier and van Wyk, 2006; and Dhingra *et al.*,

2007) that parental involvement in child education generally benefits children's learning and school success.

According to the principals of the schools, parents participated in plenary meetings. These meetings were usually well attended by parents as parents were equally enthusiastic to get the year off to a good start. Parents allocated duties according to their expertise and availability and when there was a need, people with expertise were approached to assist. The principal of Thuthuka Primary School said:

Early in the new-year we often engage with parents in plenary meetings where we discuss and plan school activities for the year. School programmes are drawn up and the relevant structures are established. Responsibilities are allocated to parents and members of the school community based on availability and expertise. Where necessary, people with special skills are approached to assist.

Plenary meetings were used to draw up year plans and to allocate responsibilities and resources where possible to individuals. Prinsloo (2005) advises that the staff, learners and parent communities first have to be made aware that there is need for neat, well-cared for school building and grounds and that it is possible to create an environment which will positively influence the culture of learning at the school. According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2007, p. 201), "when parents show an interest in their children's education and have high expectations regarding their performance, they promote attitudes that are key to achievement." Mncube (2009) concurs and advises that encouraging parents to participate and offering them more power and responsibility will result in a better functioning school. In so doing, parents will develop self-confidence and experience a sense of self-fulfilment. This is in line with the findings of Lemmer, Meier and van Wyk (2006) who argue that when educators and parents improve the quality of their relationship and make it part of the school's practice, parents increase their interaction with their children at home.

Parents from Siyaphila, Thuthuka and Siphelile Primary Schools served on school structures and participated in the decision making processes at Levels 3, 2 and 1 respectively. According to the

parents from Siyaphila Primary School, by participating in school structures and participating in the decision making processes they felt they were part of the school. Parents at Thuthuka Primary School participated in fewer structures as they only participated in meetings when they could find the time. Evidence from school records revealed that parents at Sipehelele Primary School actively served on three school structures, namely the SGB, DSSC and the Finance Committee. Moreover, they had met occasionally.

6.2.2.4 Ensuring the upkeep and care of school premises

According to the interviewees, parents carried out activities such as cleaning the school, replacing broken window panes and taps, repairing broken door locks and furniture, painting and assisting wherever there was a need. The parents of Siyaphila Primary School indicated that they supported the school to ensure educators spend maximum time teaching their children as they were few and much work had to be done at the school. One parent said:

We as parents always support the school. We clean the school, cut the grass, work in the school flower gardens and do whatever needs to be done. Our educators experience challenges teaching our children and performing all other school related responsibilities. They are a few, so we have to provide support to ensure the school functions properly and our educators use teaching time to teach, because, if we don't, who will?

A similar sentiment was expressed by the SGB chairman of Thuthuka Primary School, who said:

We are responsible for ensuring this school functions optimally. It is our school where our children are schooling. The educators are doing their best to improve the school. The onus is on all of us as parents to get involved and to bring the changes we want to see in our schools and not to just take our children out and send them to schools in Ixopo. For me, that was not the right thing to do, learners should attend schools where we can have access to educators and the opportunity to provide support.

According to the educators where parents provided support, learners spent more time on their schoolwork, adopted a positive attitude towards their work and cooperated with educators.

Louks (1992) concurs by asserting that learners who received support from their parents and other adults in their homes are academically more successful.

The principal of Siyaphila Primary School explained that although the school had a general assistant, the assistant needed support as the work at the school often overwhelmed him. He contended that the school was big and it took much work to ensure it was properly cleaned. Fortunately, the school received much support from parents who frequented the school to help. The principal was appreciative of parents who acknowledged the school's plight and willingly supported the school. He said:

As you can see, this school is big and although we have a general assistant, he cannot clean the premises, tend to flowers, clean and dust all the classrooms alone. Our parents have come on board to assist the school as it would be difficult to keep the school the way it is without their support. What the parents do for us makes the school appreciate them very much and we feel secure knowing we can call on them (Siyaphila Primary School principal).

The SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School indicated that parents provided much needed support when they cleaned the church and the school over weekends. Learners entered a clean school on the first day of the school week. He was visibly unhappy that the school was without the services of a general assistant. He also commended parents who availed themselves when the school prepared to receive guests or held functions. He said:

Some parents support us when they clean the church and thereafter clean the school on week-ends. This ensures that education takes place in a clean environment. At times our parents also clean the whole school. When the parents responded in numbers, they made light work of what would have taken a long time for a few people to accomplish. This relieved educators of additional responsibilities which they appreciated as they often did the cleaning with the help of learners.

According to an educator of Sipehelele Primary School, certain parents made time to clean the school in preparation of receiving visitors or when important functions were held at the school.

However, on school days, cleaning was left to the educators and learners which took up teaching and learning time. She said:

Our parents only come in to clean the school when we inform them that there was going to be a special function at the school. When the school nurses or the councillor are to visit the school, we ask parents for support and a few come in and tidy up the school to receive the guests. On other days, cleaning of the school is done by educators and learners. ...Teaching and learning is disrupted when this happens.

When parents failed to see the need to clean the school, especially a school without general assistants as was the case at Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools, teaching and learning were disrupted when educators and learners had to clean the school. It is here where parents should make sacrifices and support the school to allow educators to give maximum time to teaching the learners. However, schools need to create an inviting environment at the school and invite on-going parent support. Calitz *et al.* (2002) advise that educators develop a positive attitude towards parents, incorporate their ideas and, where necessary, make them assist with specific tasks.

According to the respondents, parents at Siyaphila Primary School provided valuable support in the upkeep of the school which was rated at Level 3. It was evident from the responses that these parents felt an ownership towards the school and willingly provided support. At Thuthuka Primary School parent support in the school's upkeep was rated at level 2. Most parents had to be asked, more than once at times, to provide support. However, the majority of parents at Sipehelele Primary School provided very little support, resulting in a level 1 rating.

6.2.2.5 Performing minor school repairs and renovations

Educators expressed their appreciation to parents who did minor renovations at the schools. According to the educators, when they informed parents about a section of the roof that had been damaged in a storm and rusted and leaking gutters, parents came in and did the necessary repairs. This support proved to be cost-effective as schools had limited financial resources. This ensured

that educators worked under conditions that were fairly conducive to teaching and learning. An educator at Siyaphila Primary School said:

Parents provided much needed support in assisting with the maintenance of the school by doing minor renovations such as sealing leaks in the roof, replacing broken window panes, repairing furniture, painting and replacing leaking taps as water is scarce and often runs out in winter. They are aware that the school has no one to do this and that it is beyond us, as we are mainly ladies at this school.

According to the educators, the floors in the classrooms often developed holes which hindered movement. Sometimes, the gutters which trapped the water sagged, which resulted in very little tank water being trapped when it rained. When this was reported to parents, some of them came in and sealed the holes and secured the gutters. An educator at Thuthuka Primary School asserted that knowing parents would help when you asked them to, made you appreciate them and the support they provided. He said:

You really feel good when you know that you can call on parents when there is a leak in your classroom and parents respond to remedy the problem. Sometimes learners kick balls against the windows and break them. When we bought the window panes, some parents came by and fitted the window panes. Parents are appreciated for the services they offer to the school.

However, some parents assisted the school with minor renovations, on condition they were paid. A parent at Sipelele Primary School explained that they found it extremely difficult to provide for their family. They were unemployed and when the school offered her husband a small job they were able to buy bread for their children. She said:

My husband is unemployed and I earn so little, we sometimes go to bed without eating. When the school needs to have a job done my husband goes and does the job at a small fee. I know our children school there, but what can we do?

My experience as an educator where the school had a small budget for renovations, the school got much further with the allocated budget by negotiating and collaborating with parents with

expertise to assist the school. According to Wolfendale *et al.* (2000), parents want to be acknowledged when they make an input so as to contribute to the life and work of the school.

I noted that parents at Siyaphila Primary School worked around the school with enthusiasm and seemed to enjoy what they did. The cordial working relationship confirmed that the parents saw that doing minor renovations to the school was their responsibility. This was rated at level 3 as more parents should have been involved. There was very little evidence at Siphellele and Thuthuka Primary School that parents engaged in an on-going programme where they did minor renovations. For this reason they were rated at level 1.

6.2.2.6 Ensuring safety at schools

According to the responses from principals and SGB chairpersons, safety at the schools remained a serious threat. The absence of security guards compromised the safety of learners and educators. However, parents who lived close to the schools 'safe-guarded' the school after hours, especially over weekends and during holidays. Community members of Siphellele Primary School would inform the educators when they left the lights on which saved the school from wasteful expenditure on electricity. Furthermore, allowing the community the use the school facilities served to provide additional security for the school. The SGB chairperson at Siphellele Primary School said:

We, as parents, keep an eye on our school to ensure that nothing untoward happens to the school. If we see someone damaging anything at the school, we reprimand the guilty party and ensure they carry out the necessary repairs. It is a community initiative because if the school property is damaged, we as parents have to contribute to the expense of repairing what has been damaged.

The principal of Siyaphila Primary School was pleased with the working relationship that existed between the school and parents. The principal was pleased that parents took care of the school in the absence of the educators. He indicated that when he visited the school during the holidays, he always found the school intact, which pleased him. He said:

Parents are the backbone of our school and ensure that school property is taken care of by all community members. Our parents provide our educators with

accommodation and take good care of them. They feel safe and are at home away from home. They take good care of the school, especially during the holidays. When I come by during holidays or visit the school on week-ends, I always find things in order.

My experience as a manager of a rural primary school where a cordial and co-operative working relationship exists between the school and the community and where people are allowed the use of the facilities has shown me that they develop a sense of ownership and care for the facilities. Moreover, parents who are involved develop a greater appreciation of their role in the school as alluded to by Mncube (2009).

I observed at Siyaphila and Siphellele Primary Schools that while the fences were not entirely adequately enclosed, the schools were intact. Thuthuka Primary School was located within a church yard which meant the school enjoyed a level of security as rural communities treat church premises with reverence. While these schools were without security guards, there was an indication that rural people still held the view that schools were not to be vandalized. I believe where the community did not allow people to misuse their school, rural schools could be put to effective use by the community such as establishing ABET classes.

Heystek (1998) recommends that schools and other stakeholders take specific action to improve the involvement of parents in school activities so that parents see the advantages of being more involved. Siyaphila Primary School employed a general assistant who assisted in ensuring that the learners remained within the school premises, thus contributing to learner safety.

6.2.2.7 Establishing vegetable gardens at schools

Siyaphila Primary School invested in ensuring that the school's vegetable garden was productive and this was rated at level 4. However, while Thuthuka and Siphellele Primary Schools had established vegetable gardens, they were rated at level 1 because very little was produced in their gardens. It is in this area where, in my opinion, these schools could have been innovative and established gardens as the benefits would be far reaching.

According to the principal of Siyaphila Primary School, they establish vegetable garden in an effort to the alleviate poverty within the community. It is here where academically challenged

parents played a prominent role. The school took the initiative to establish gardens and invited parent participation. Parents provided support to a point where the school was transformed into a 'Health Promoting School'. Here was a typical example of the potential rural schools have when parents and the school work as a team. A proud principal said:

...we bought the idea and decided to lay out gardens to fight poverty. We established a garden, but when we realized the amount of work involved, we invited parent participation. The project has developed in leaps and bounds. Parents visit the school often to tend to the garden. When workshops are conducted, parents attend in numbers and have acquired gardening skills. The garden project supplements our nutrition programme and has transformed the school into a health promoting school.

Where schools have productive gardens, they could supply fresh vegetables in terms of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) to service providers or to the community as a fund raising initiative.

I observed at Siyaphila Primary School how parents willingly worked in the school gardens. The learners frequented the garden as well, where they acquired gardening skill which showed the potential gardening has in providing a livelihood. The school boasts a beautifully laid out garden which augments the school's nutrition programme.

Providing learners with fresh vegetables in their meals contributes to their nourishment and general health. According to Cueto (2008), poverty can lead to malnourishment where learners have been found to perform worse than learners that are better nourished. This phenomenon often increases the rate of school drop-outs.

However, the educators at Sipehelele Primary School and Thuthuka Primary School indicated that they had planted crops but that cattle and sheep had strayed onto the school premises and ate what they had planted. An annoyed educator at Thuthuka Primary School complained that the school invested money to buy seedlings and time and energy to care for them. However, all this was in vain because when the gates were left open livestock entered the school yard and ate the crops. At Sipehelele Primary School, the educator complained that careless community members

allowed animals to come onto the school premises and eat their plants. According to the educator, they appealed to parents who owned animals to contain their animals as a policy during the planting season. The school also appealed to parents to support by repairing the fence, but they never did. The educator said:

We spend our money and time to establish gardens and the community's animals come in and eat what has been planted. We asked parents to assist us repair the fence and to contain their animals, but they did neither. The learners chased animals off the school premises, but this posed a safety risk as the animals sometimes stalked learners. When the learners left for home, the animals ate the crops. This de-motivated everyone, and the garden project never really got off the ground.

It is difficult to prevent animals from invading gardens with lush green plants. If parents had invested time in repairing the fence they would have kept the learners safe and the animals out. It is my contention therefore, that since parents of rural schools enjoy the advantage of having space to lay out gardens; no school should be without a productive garden.

It was evident that Siyaphila Primary School had invested much time in establishing a vegetable garden and empowering parents with gardening skills. This benefited the school community immensely as people became entrepreneurs when they sold fresh garden products to the local community. Thuthuka and Siphellele Primary Schools had poorly developed and non-productive gardens. I believe that by omission, these schools missed a wonderful opportunity and therefore deprived learners of developing valuable life skills.

6.2.2.8 Serving as volunteers

The schools received support from parents as volunteers in a variety of school-related activities. According to the respondents, Siyaphila Primary School received support which could be rated at level 3 while the support at Siphellele and Thuthuka Primary schools was rated at level 2.

According to the educators, parents volunteered their services in a variety of activities. Some parents took care of learners' welfare, a few provided academic support and others supported the schools' extramural programmes. A parent who had taught catechism at the church for several

years at Thuthuka Primary School described how she saw a need to establish a Grade R but did not know where to start. However, when she became aware of an initiative by the Department of Basic Education to introduce the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programme at schools, she attended a few meetings and workshops. The church assisted her in establishing a Grade R class where she volunteered for four years. However, the programme is now under the administration of the Early Childhood Development programme. The educator said:

I always wanted to teach the very small ones but I did not know how to start. When I heard about the DOE's plan to introduce Grade R classes in rural schools, I used the opportunity to volunteer my services. I attended a few meetings and later workshops, and with support of the church, we established a Grade R class. Today I am employed by the ECD department of education. One member of the community supported me voluntarily, but is now receiving a stipend from ECD.

A parent at Siphelile Primary School reported how she worked as a volunteer general assistant at the school as she saw that the school needed support. When the DOE introduced the NSNP programme, she was offered employment as a cook, a job she holds today. She said:

When I walked past the school, I often saw educators cleaning the school. One day I went to the school to explain my late payment of school fees as I was unemployed. The principal offered me a job to clean the school one day a week as payment towards school fees. I cleaned the school two or three days a week. After some time I was offered work as a cook and I have been here ever since.

An educator at the Siyaphila Primary School expressed appreciation of the voluntary service provided by a community member who gave of his time to train learners in sporting activities. She said:

There is a gentleman who volunteers his services to the school. He often comes to the school and takes the boys and girls for training. He spends much time training the learners in athletics and cross country. He also does boys' and

girls' football. When learners have to go out to compete, he accompanies them as well which motivates them (Siyaphila Primary School educator).

Responses from educators indicated that parents volunteered to cook when the cook was away, while others stood in and took care of Grade R learners when the educators were away attending meetings or workshops, or when they were off sick. However, educators had to guide and orientate parents to avoid anything untoward. Van der Westhuizen (2002, p. 24) advises that “communities value education and parents can make a significant contribution in supporting the school if properly guided and welcomed.”

The schools benefited when volunteers provided services as alluded to by Epstein (1995). These included parents providing support during a school sports day, concerts, or going on a school trip with a class. However, I was intrigued when I saw parents walking by, turn into a school where learners and educators worked in the garden, and hoed for an hour before continuing on their journey. I believe the spirit of Ubuntu is well and alive in rural communities.

Parents from Siyaphila Primary School spent many hours volunteering their services to the school. At Thuthuka and Siphелеle Primary School, parents volunteered their services by cooking for learners. I believe the parents rendered a valuable service as the feeding of learners was crucial as it directly influenced their attendance and performance at school.

6.2.2.9 Providing financial support and making donations to the schools

With the limited budget rural schools receive, they are often only able to fund two or three planned school outings. However, at all three schools parents made a concerted effort to provide financial support when the school requested their support when learners had to attend additional school activities. When the learners won and had to compete further, the schools depended on parents' support in order to allow the learners an opportunity to compete at a higher level. This aspect was rated at level 2.

Rural schools have comparatively fewer learners and therefore have smaller financial allocations which are used to procure school materials. Further, according to the principals, most parents languished in poverty which restricted them from supporting school activities financially. Parents at Thuthuka and Siphелеle Primary Schools expressed the pain they experienced when

they could not pay for their children to go out to compete when they were selected. They reported that they often had to make the difficult decision to withdraw them from competitions. This confirms Berger's (1987) assertion that to exist in a culture of poverty means to feel powerless to make change and unable to control your own destiny.

However, according to the respondents, there were parents and grandparents who paid from their meagre earnings to afford their children the opportunity to participate in school activities. Learners at Siyaphila Primary School voiced their gratitude to their parents for making payments that enabled them to participate in a variety of school activities. The learners indicated that parents were often requested to provide financial support toward planned school activities such as educational excursions and Olympiads, sporting and cultural activities. A learner from Siyaphila Primary School said:

We really appreciate it when our parents provide us with opportunities to participate in cultural activities, sporting activities and educational contests by paying for us to go out. This allows us to showcase our skills and talents, and provides us with the opportunity to compete against other schools in academic, sporting and cultural activities and we do well. This provides us with an opportunity to be selected to compete at higher levels. The money provided by our parents pays for transport costs and to buy food along the way.

However, educators indicated that there were some parents who went the extra mile and made sacrifices from the little they earned to pay for their children's transport costs which enabled them to participate in planned activities. According to the learners, they performed at their best to ensure that their parents' sacrifices were not in vain. A learner from Siphelile Primary School said:

I am very encouraged by our parents who pay towards transporting their children from the little they have. They inspire us to commit ourselves when we prepare for an outing. Fortunately our learners give of their best as they are aware their parents have made the sacrifice and they don't wish to disappoint

them. Learners have won many competitions. Some have gone on to compete at district and some at provincial level.

Principals and educators were appreciative of parents who identified certain needs at the schools and sought support from other sources. The parents of Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools, for example, offered to appeal to their employers to provide certain services to the schools. The farmers sent their tractors driven by parent employees to deliver firewood or to cut the grass at the school. The principal of Sipehelele Primary School said:

Our parents ask their employers to cut the grass and provide the school with firewood. The grass grows very quickly in summer, and it becomes difficult to maintain. During summer the grass grows very fast and needs to be cut regularly. The school also often uses firewood to cook for learners, so when the wood runs out, our parents come to our rescue.

Further, the educator at Sipehelele Primary School expressed her gratitude to parents who donated fresh potatoes, cabbages and beans they received as rations from the farms where they worked. The vegetables were put to good use in supplementing the school's nutrition programme as the school's garden was not productive. She said:

Some parents give some of their rations of fresh spinach, cabbages, lettuce and tomatoes to the school. This helps a great deal in feeding our learners, as the vegetables reach us while they are fresh. The school presently does not have a productive vegetable garden; therefore, the support parents provide helps a great deal. Unfortunately, parents donate only when they receive rations from excess produce.

The SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School, an emerging farmer, donated fresh vegetables to the school at times. He was grateful that the school qualified for the NSNP programme and encouraged parents who planted crops to contribute towards this worthy cause to supplement the programme. He said:

We appreciate our Department of Education for feeding our children. However, we as parents could assist in some way as some of us produce vegetables in our

gardens. Our children need fresh vegetables. When possible, I give learners who pass by a few cabbages or a pocket of potatoes as a donation to the school. I encourage people who plant vegetables to donate some to the school as kids only have soup at times.

The resident priest at Thuthuka Primary School donated vegetables and other provisions such as clothes and a variety of other items to needy learners at the school. He also provided much support when he donated firewood to the school. I noted that Siyaphila Primary School gave excess vegetables produced from the school garden to parents who worked on the school's project or to members of the community who were in need. Parents at Siphелеle Primary School donated vegetables they received from their work place. This made it possible for the school to provide food with fresh vegetables to the learners.

6.2.2.10 Supporting learners with their schoolwork

Rural areas are without facilities such as banks, suitable accommodation and are not easy to reach on days when it rains. My opinion is that this makes it difficult for rural schools to attract specialist educators. This view is corroborated by Pretorius (2007) who argues that very few educators are willing to teach in schools that are located in inaccessible or poverty-stricken areas. Rural schools therefore often have to rely on under- or unqualified educators. This intensifies the need for parents to assist their children with their schoolwork.

While evidence has been presented that confirms that parental support enhances learner academic achievement, it was found that the schools were limited in this regard. Most respondents indicated that rural parents regarded the education of their children as the educators' responsibility. However, a few parents from Thuthuka and Siphелеle Primary School provided support and were rated level 1. Educators from Siyaphila Primary School indicated that certain parents provided support in reading, oral work and basic mathematical operations. The reasonable level of work in learner workbooks and the ANA results supported the educators' responses and the school was rated level 2.

According to the educators, only certain parents visited the school to enquire about their children's progress or responded when the school invited them to discuss learner progress. This

made it very difficult for educators to ensure that support for learners was provided collaboratively. Where parents were guided in how to assist with simple mathematical operations, tell stories, listen to their children read and check homework, much success was achieved. The educator at Thuthuka Primary School said:

There were parents who came to school when we requested them. They checked their children's progress. We got to meet some of the learners' parents for the first time. We engaged with the parents and we established how best to support the learners with the challenges they experienced. We tried to keep the support parents needed to provide as simple as possible to allow them to experience success and to avoid burdening them. The learner progress improved a lot.

Some learners indicated that they understood the work taught at school better when they received help from their parents. Educators corroborated and confirmed that learners who received help from parents who themselves had some education, participated meaningfully in class discussions, did their homework, demonstrated a better understanding of their work and produced better overall results. This is in line with Halpern's (2005) assertion that parents who have attained a high educational level are better able to create a learning environment at home. Learners indicated that other parents in the community, some of whom were retired educators, assisted them when their parents were unable to help. The learners of Sipehelele Primary School said:

When our parents assist us with our schoolwork, we have a better understanding of the work our educators teach us. We do our homework every day; engage in group and class discussions. We perform better in tests and examinations. Our parents help us with natural science and reading English when they find the time. They tell us about the history of our area and our country and help us with mathematical operations. We understand our schoolwork better because our parents explain in a simple way, which helps us understand better.

A learner from Sipehelele Primary School alluded to the fact that his parents visited the school regularly and held discussions with his class teacher about his progress. This put him under

pressure to perform well at school in order to keep favour with his parents and educators. The learner said:

Yes, my mother visits the school often to check on my progress. This forces me to perform well at school. I have no excuse not to do my homework as I am allowed ample time to do my schoolwork. Secondly, my mother helps me with mathematics, multiplication tables and natural science as she wants me to do well in these learning areas. She also helps me with reading and comprehension skills.

The educators indicated that they were encouraged when learners reported that their parents were helping them with their reading and homework. According to Edwards and Redfern (1988), parental involvement in reading not only has a positive influence on the learners, but the parents' knowledge is enhanced. Children whose parents take active roles in their education are likely to recognize virtue in academic achievement (Nkabinde, 1997).

Gabela (1983) believes that in extramural programmes, parents are able to enhance the quality of educational services, depending on their areas of expertise. It is therefore critical that they work in unison for the provision of a sound educational service. Dekker and Lemmer (1998) assert that educators cannot perform their educational tasks optimally without a full partnership with the parents.

From the above it can be inferred that learners benefited when their parents assisted them with their homework. Pretorious (2004) concurs with Davies (1999) and Epstein(2002) who argue that learners are more successful at all grade levels if their parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home. However, the lack of teacher training with regard to parental involvement is compounded by the shortage of teachers in general and the overall shortfall of qualified educators (Department of Education, 2006).

Some learners expressed appreciation for the support parents provided, especially by helping them with reading, multiplication tables and supporting them in extramural activities. They indicated that they experienced success academically and in other school activities which made

them enjoy school-life. I believe the support parents provided made learners appreciate being at school and helped them develop holistically.

6.2.2.11 Supporting the schools' extramural programmes

According to the educators, parents provided much needed support when they trained learners in sporting and cultural activities. Siyaphila Primary School parents support the school by preparing learners to compete in cultural competitions, music festivals athletics as well soccer and netball competitions. The support parents provided was rated at level three as learners participated in a variety of activities due to the support parents provided. Thuthuka Primary School was rated at level 2 as many parents provided support occasionally. However, parental support at Siphelile Primary School was rated at level 1 as a few parents provided support.

Responses from parents indicated that they were passionate about coaching their children in sport and teaching them about their cultural ethos. Learners indicated that their parents taught them skills in making beaded garments, pottery and mat making. Some parents spent time training them in sport, while others spent time training them in music and cultural activities. According to the parents, they spent hours preparing learners for cultural competitions. This won the schools many competitions and enabled parents to instil cultural values into their children which were paramount in their traditional practices. A parent at Thuthuka Primary School said:

We have a culture we wish to preserve and we want our children to know their culture well. We come to school and train learners in sport, music and cultural activities that enabled them to win many competitions. During this time we impart our cultural values to our children. We teach them how to decorate garments with beads; make stoop mats from grass and plastic and to mould miniature clay beer pots 'umphonnywane' which is a fundamental piece of cutlery in our culture.

Learners acknowledged the value of their culture and indicated that they too wanted to preserve it, and therefore cooperated fully with their parents' wishes in this regard.

According to the educators, learners were more responsive when their parents came to school to train in sporting and cultural activities. Educators indicated that they greatly appreciated the support parents provided as they had very little time to train learners. They were especially appreciative of parents who accompanied them when they took learners to competitions as the school could only allow one educator to accompany learners. The educator at Thuthuka Primary School said:

We really appreciate it when the parents come forward to support the school with the extra mural programme. Parents come in and train learners in sporting activities, prepare them to compete in music festival and cultural competition. Parents are of great assistance when they accompany learners when they go out to compete. The school is short staffed so the school can only allow one educator to accompany learner at a given time.

The learners indicated that they were encouraged to perform when they were taught by their parents. A learner from Sipehelele Primary School said:

Our parents sometimes come to school to train us or we have to go to one of the parent's houses to practice for a music festival, cultural competition or a sporting event. Our parents are strict and we have to take all training seriously. We also try to perform at our best because we do not wish to let them down. We all give of our best.

Parents were aware of their children's progress and the contribution they made to their children's education when they supported the school. According to Clarke (2007, p. 60), "involved parents tend to feel a sense of ownership, and because of this are likely to be more loyal and more generous in their commitment to the school and its activities."

Siyaphila Primary School prided itself with an office full of trophies and certificates won at school competitions. The school was reputed for winning musical and cultural contests. A few renowned soccer players came from Sipehelele Primary School. They also won a number of cultural competitions. Thuthuka Primary School participated in athletics as well as cultural competitions and won a few close contests.

6.2.2.12 Supporting in hosting school functions

According to the respondents, the most exciting activity the schools hosted was the end-of-year Grade R graduation and Grade 7 farewell/prize giving function. The events attracted much attention from the local community and even neighbouring schools. This function was attended by most parents. The school community actively engaged in the planning and preparations for this function.

According to the educators, excitement simmered early in the fourth term and flared during the last week as parents from different localities set about preparing items of entertainment for the day. This ignited a competitive spirit among parents, with all the groups intent on out-doing each other. The SGB chairpersons commended educators and parents for putting differences aside and working collaboratively in the build-up to this special day. The SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School said:

Everyone put their differences aside when we prepared for the end-of-year function. The close working relationship between parents and educators made the preparation for this day an enjoyable experience. Everyone worked enthusiastically and methodically which ensured that visitors were given a treat to be remembered. Educators and parents cooked and entertained guests in between. They ensured that everyone at the function was fed, and treated well. Our visitors always commended us for the good work we did.

Learners at Thuthuka Primary School expressed how they looked forward to the end-of-year function with much excitement. According to them, parents put money aside early in the year in preparation for this day. A learner from grade seven explained how she looked forward to the function as they were bought new clothes and parents played an active role in making this day filled with excitement. She said:

This is the most enjoyable day of the year. Our parents buy us clothes, prepare and cook for us and our visitors. They all come and join in the days' celebration. It is the most exciting event when parents display their skills by singing and doing

the cultural dance. The audiences go up in raptures, learners scream with excitement when they see their parents' talents.

Educators, learners and a very few parents at Sipehelele Primary School did all in their power to host the end-of-year function successfully. Educators used their personal funds to buy provisions for the day. While many parents joined in the celebrations, it was disappointing to note that they did not care to support the school in spite of being asked.

On the day of the function, the excitement reverberated throughout the school. All the people who presented items were dressed in the appropriate traditional attire. Every group gave an outstanding performance that was thoroughly enjoyed by young and old. The success of these functions was an indication that when parents and educators work in unison and share skills, parents develop confidence and are encouraged to participate. McClelland (1997) argues that there is a need to encourage parental involvement to build confidence. Mitchell and Pillay (2007) concur with Hargreaves (2009, p. 120) who states that “schools, more than any other organisation, can play a pivotal role in promoting community participation and partnership in developing a coherent and relevant approach to dealing with children and young people in rural areas.”

According to the educators at Siyahphila Primary Schools, educators and community members worked in unison in hosting the function. Many guests crowded into a beautiful five-pole white tent that was erected at the school. The excitement reverberated throughout the settlement. Every person who was in attendance thoroughly enjoyed the day. The school was rated at level 3 because parents, educators and learners went the extra mile and hosted a successful, fun-filled function. Thuthuka Primary School was rated level 2 because a few parents assisted educators with the planning and preparation. While the learners made the best of the function, it was otherwise low-key.

Visibly depressed parents at Sipehelele Primary Schools complained that they felt isolated and alienated. They were unhappy that they could not donate towards planned school functions as they were forced to use their limited financial resources to sustain their families. They complained that this affected their children negatively as the children often asked them to attend.

This is in line with Berger's (1987) finding that alienation, poverty and depression are common partners of poverty. According to Berger, parents who are depressed and unable to control their own world pass that feeling on to their children.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the levels of parental involvement in the three schools. It was evident that Siyaphila Primary School parents made the choice to support the school. The school experienced much success in a variety of areas due to its parents' support. While parents at Thuthuka Primary provided support which added some value to the quality education the school provided, parents at Sipehelele Primary School did very little to support the school. It is disconcerting to note that where parental support seemed to be needed most, the least was provided. In the next chapter I provide a discussion of the outcomes of parental support to the schools.

CHAPTER 7

OUTCOMES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the levels and extent to which parents participated in the life of the school attended by their children. It highlighted the levels of parent involvement in the schools under study. It was evident that while parents provided support in similar areas, the extent of the support provided differed considerably from school to school. Much support was provided in learner admission and school attendance. Some parents supported the schools when they took charge of sport, music and cultural activities. Other parents took care of the maintenance and welfare of the schools.

However, parents provided very little academic support, an area where it was needed most. Researchers such as Lemmer (2004, 2007), Mncube (2010), Samuel (2005) and others argue that most rural schools do not perform well in this regard. This is due to a number of factors, one of which is the fact that the parents themselves received very little education. However, Epstein (2002) posits that all parents, including illiterate parents, can provide support.

In this chapter I present and discuss the outcomes of parental involvement in the schools under study. The thrust of the study reported in this chapter was to reveal whether the support parents provided enhanced learner achievement. Interviewees were asked: **Does the participation of parents enhance learner achievement? If so, how?**

7.2 Parents' participation improved the schools' effectiveness

The participation of parents in school activities had a positive impact on teaching and learning.

7.2.1 Procedural learner admission enhanced school functionality

According to the educators, some parents applied early for admission and ensured their children had the necessary documentation for admission. These included birth certificates and immunization cards. Where this was the case, the admission of learners took place without any

glitches. Learner information was easily captured and school records were put in place at the outset. This facilitated the schools' planning and ensured that the process of teaching and learning was possible from day one. The principal of Siyaphila Primary School said:

Our parents always respond when we advise them to register their children before they apply for admission. They also ensure that they visit the clinics often to have their children immunized. This helps us a great deal when they apply for admission. When parents have the necessary documents for admission, everything is done quickly and teaching and learning is not disrupted.

This was in line with Section 15 of the National Education Policy, Act 27 of 1996, which states that when a parent applies for admission of a learner to an ordinary public school, the parent must present an official birth certificate of the learner to the principal of the public school. Further, section 16 states that on application for admission, a parent must show proof that the learner has been immunized against the following communicable diseases: polio, measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus and hepatitis B.

Educators indicated that schools had to submit statistics which often required the learners' identification numbers. School schedules also had to reflect these numbers. When learners were not registered they did not qualify for social grants and were excluded from organized sport when they were not registered. An educator at Thuthuka Primary School said:

We have to record learner information in the admission books and class registers. We are obliged to record correct learner information as these serve as school statistic. We therefore require authentic information therefore the importance of registering learners cannot be over emphasised.

Further, educators indicated that for some learners, the first day at school was usually an unpleasant experience. Parents played a crucial role when they accompanied beginners to school during the first few days of their school life. This enabled them to orientate to the new environment and adapt to the school routine.

During the first few days of the new school year, I observed scenes where learners screamed and held onto their bigger brothers and sisters when they had to report to their new classes. Where

parents were in attendance, they clung onto them and challenged any attempt by parents or educators to get them to class. Educators tried to lure frantic learners with an assortment of toys with very little success. Some parents chose to stay with their children and assisted in calming down screaming learners. When I returned to the school after a week, all was calm. A study conducted by Singh *et al.* (2004, p 305) found that learners who received support from their parents early in their school lives were more empowered to deal with school work independently later on in life.

7.2.2 Controlled learner attendance facilitated effective teaching and learning

According to the principals, when parents ensured that learners attended school regularly, arrived on time and were neatly clad in school uniform, it had a positive impact on the schools' functionality. Regular attendance ensured that learners enjoyed maximum teaching and learning time. At all three schools the school day started on time which resulted in the maximum use of teaching time. Neatly dressed learners tended to display confidence, behave better and were high-spirited which often translated into improved scholastic performance. The Principal of Thuthuka Primary School said:

We appreciate it when our parents see to it that learners come to school every day, properly dressed in school uniform and arrive punctually. Learners displayed eagerness and enthusiasm towards their schoolwork. This allows us to give the maximum time possible to the teaching and learning process which improved learner performance. When these values are inculcated early in a learner's life, the learners may apply them throughout life.

The educators indicated that the regular attendance by learners provided them with the opportunity to accomplish what they set out to do. They indicated that this allowed them to assess learner performance, evaluate the support they provided and monitor learner progress. An educator at Siyaphila Primary School said:

When learners attend school regularly, we are able to do our work and to complete the work we have planned to cover on time and to do revision when necessary. We are able to assess the progress of learners and provide additional

support where necessary to ensure the learners achieve the required level of attainment.

There were times when learners were neither at school nor at home. Some parents would be unaware of their children's whereabouts when the schools made enquiries. Principals and educators were appreciative of SGB members and parents who spent many hours trying to resolve issues of learner absenteeism. The SGB chairperson of Siphhelele Primary School said:

When I arrived at this school, learner absenteeism was rife. Learners came to school when they felt like it. Some went bird hunting while others went to Mr P's farm to steal sugar-cane. They were often caught and we had to intervene through tribunals which took up much of the teachers' time and gave the school a bad reputation. I insisted that parents provide support, and since they came on board, the school is functioning smoothly.

Educators at Siphhelele Primary School expressed the concern that some parents perpetuated learner absenteeism. They argued that there were some learners who took care of the family's livestock. Other learners took care of their siblings when parents went to collect child support grants. While the schools condemned the practice of truancy support by parents, some parents persisted. Thuthuka Primary School parents had managed a hundred percent attendance for four months. This is to be commended and encouraged.

7.2.3 Parents serving on school structures enhanced school administration

According to the principals, parents mainly served on school structures such as the SGBs and sub-committees of the School Governing Body, and interview, disciplinary and safety and security committees and they supported the administration processes of learners at the schools. The principals reported that there were educators and parents who made meaningful contributions when they served on school committees. They assisted in appointing educators, ensuring safety at the schools and hosted school functions.

However, they indicated that SGB chairpersons were the parents who really committed to supporting the schools. This could be attributed to the obligation that comes with the position. The principal of Thuthuka Primary School indicated that the SGB chairperson had a keen interest

in the school's welfare. He visited the school often, chaired SGB meetings, motivated the educators and learners and encouraged parents to support the school. She said:

We are privileged to have an SGB chairperson that is hands-on. He comes to the school at least once a week. When he comes, he motivates everyone, encourages learners to work hard and tries to address challenges we raise. He is someone who listens when we speak, attends meetings, encourages parents to come on board, and gets involved in school activities - yet he has received very little schooling (Thuthuka Primary School principal).

According to the principal of Siyaphila Primary School, the school received much help from a grandparent, Mrs Q who served on the SGB. She contributed meaningfully by sharing her experience as a retired educator and by providing valuable advice to the SGB. According to the principal, the SGB member played a pivotal role in the school becoming dual medium. This enabled the school to introduce both English and IsiZulu at grade R as first languages. The principal said:

Mrs Q, a retired educator and a grandparent, has empowered us as an SGB. She shared the knowledge she acquired as an SGB member. She insisted that the school introduce a dual medium where Zulu and English were introduced at Grade R level. She assisted in drawing up a school policy on this and helped plan the curriculum programmes. She also assisted educators implement the programme and invited parents to support it (Siyaphila Primary School principal).

According to the SGB chairperson of Sipehelele Primary School, some educators and parents elected parents to serve on school structures. Roles and responsibilities were discussed and delegated. Views and expectations were shared and decisions were taken collectively. The chairperson indicated that by so doing, they hoped to establish a working relationship where all people could take ownership of certain initiatives. She indicated, however, that when the time came for plans to be implemented some parents did not avail themselves. The chairperson of Sipehelele Primary School said:

Parents were elected onto school structures where they took charge of certain activities for the year. Parents engaged in deliberations, set priorities, took decisions and agreed on what was to be done by whom. The allocation of responsibilities was informed by individual expertise. However, while everyone agreed to do their share, when the time came to deliver on promises made, some parents did not avail themselves. This caused discontentment among parents who were committed to serving the school.

According to van Wyk (1996), parents may not delegate their privilege and responsibility for the education of their children. Poster and Day (1988) purport that a meaningful, inclusive decision making process would create a participative ethos. This has the potential of developing a healthy working relationship between the school and the parent community. Parker and Leithwood (2000) advise that where structures such as the SGB are correctly constituted and function effectively, the principal, educators and parents work cooperatively and collaboratively as a team.

While school structures at Sipehelele Primary School existed on paper, they were not functional. This left the work and decision making processes to a few parents and educators. Thuthuka Primary School had the support of a willing chairperson who invited parent participation with some success. Siyaphila Primary School had an active SGB and a grandparent who did much to assist. It is crucial that all parents provide support to the school to prevent these parents from becoming disillusioned as this has been my experience.

7.2.4 Repairs and minor renovations by parents reduced school maintenance costs

According to the respondents, parents provided much needed support when maintaining the schools, thus reducing the cost of maintenance. This also ensured their children were taught in a school environment that was conducive to learning. Parents cleaned the school, did minor renovations, and provided security as well other activities that needed attention.

Siyaphila Primary School, for example, enjoyed the advantages of having the services of a general assistant as well as the support of parents who helped them clean the school. The principal of Siyaphila Primary School said:

We are grateful for the support our parents provide to the upkeep of our school. This reduces the cost of school maintenance, which we greatly appreciate. We are particularly grateful to them for assisting with the cleaning of the school. We do have the services of a general assistant, but the school is big, therefore additional support is appreciated to ensure learners are taught in a clean and conducive environment.

However, where parents were not available to clean the school as was often the case at Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools, the school had to make alternative arrangements. It is here where educators and learners often had to jump in and provide cleaning services.

Learners from Sipehelele and Thuthuka Primary Schools were unhappy that they had to clean the school and the toilets. They complained that this deprived them of learning time when they cleaned during school hours. A learner at Sipehelele Primary School expressed dissatisfaction that on Fridays, they spent hours cleaning the school. The learners argued that their peers in urban schools never did such things. The learner said:

I am not happy that we have to clean the school and toilets during school time. We have to sweep the whole school, dust and sometimes scrub the classrooms and the office. We are even forced to scrub toilets without using gloves, it is a terrible experience. On Fridays we clean the school for hours. Our peers from schools in Ixopo never scrub classrooms and clean toilets. This only happens to us (Sipehelele Primary School learner).

Thuthuka Primary School had parents clean the school over the weekend which meant learners spent the first day of the school week in a clean school. However, educators and learners cleaned the school on other days, except where parents found time to provide support. Sipehelele Primary School experienced very little support in this regard, which meant that cleaning the school remained the responsibility of learners and educators. This impacted negatively on the quality of education rendered at rural primary schools when educators and learners cleaned during teaching time. Siyaphila Primary School enjoyed the services of a general assistant which should be the case at all schools.

7.2.5 Parental support in the school nutrition programme improved learner attendance

The principals commended parents for the role they played in supporting the school nutrition programme, especially when they assisted the cooks as volunteers. According to the parents, the feeding of children at the school brought much relief to the parents as many of them were unemployed and sometimes could not provide meals for their children. Parents confirmed that life for them had changed as the learners looked forward to going to school and attended regularly. Parents from Sipehelele Primary School indicated that some learners lived with poor parents or caregivers and seldom attended school. The introduction of the school feeding programme also had a positive impact on the community. One parent was employed as a cook. Other parents planted fresh vegetables which they sold to the community. One parent at Sipehelele Primary School said:

I find that by cooking and feeding learners, a major difference has occurred at the school. Learners attend regularly and participate in a variety of activities. Before this, some learners seldom went to school as their parents battled to provide for them. Now, they go to school regularly and perform much better in their schoolwork and other activities. The supplier has employed one of the parents to cook for the learners and asked us to supply fresh vegetables. We have decided to do so, as a business.

The learners indicated that they appreciated it when the schools provided them with meals. They revealed that for many of them, the meal the school provided was sometimes the first – and only – meal for the day. However, it enabled them to concentrate on their schoolwork and to participate in extramural activities. A learner from Thuthuka Primary School said:

We appreciate it when the school provides us with meals as it is usually the first time we eat for the day. We do not eat before we leave for school at times. We look forward to the meals at school [sic] that sustain us and help us to stay focused on our schoolwork. We do our best in our schoolwork. When we go out to sport or cultural competitions, we do our best to ensure we do well and win prizes for our school.

According to a parent from Sipehelele Primary School, learners who were fed attended school regularly. She indicated that certain learners looked forward to the meals as some of them lingered around the place where the meals were cooked. She reported that some learners took food home, possibly to feed other family members. She said:

The learners are attending school regularly. I cook for the learners... I notice that learners come to school often now, I believe it is feeding that has made the difference, especially when bread was part of the menu... in the past they were not fed and they stayed away. Now, they are at school every day, some even take the food home.

I noted that the learners hurried to their lines when the ‘food bell’ rang; some pushed and shoved. When they received their food they soon returned to ask for more which confirmed a comment by a learner from Sipehelele Primary School who said:

We really look forward to our meal because some of us don't eat when we leave home. I eat once at school and once at home before we go to bed. When my mother works late, we fall asleep and awake when she has cooked, sometimes very late. We often have to share a plate of food if the food is not enough.

According to Samuel (2005, p. 55), a survey involving parents indicated that school meals “...promoted regular attendance, learners are more attentive and consequently academic performance improves.”

Siyaphila Primary School supplemented its nutrition programme with the vegetables they produced which enhanced the quality of the food learners ate. While Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary schools had space, the development of gardens left much to be desired. Providing a learner with meals is crucial and the value of a feeding scheme in rural areas cannot be over emphasized. In my experience, when the quality of the food learners eat is poor or when learners do not eat, their progress at school is affected and their attendance of and participation in school activities is disrupted.

7.2.6 The Green School Project proved beneficial to schools and communities

The principals of the schools indicated that they were advised by the DBE to participate in the Green School Project in a drive to fighting poverty. Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools experienced challenges while Siyaphila Primary School embraced the concept and made good of the project. The principal of Siyaphila Primary School called on parents to assist the school in establishing a vegetable garden. The school went to great lengths to ensure that the project got off the ground. The principal explored a variety of avenues to solicit support and establish a viable garden project to which he gave a great deal of attention.

The principal of the school cited the positive working relationship that existed between the school and parents, culminating in the school being awarded the status of a Health Promoting School. The learners competed in the Green Garden competition at national level where they came third. They won trophies, certificates and medals for their achievements at different levels of the competition. They were awarded a certificate of excellence by the then Minister of Education, the Honourable Inna Cronje. He said:

The parents have shared their agricultural expertise and helped the school develop a thriving vegetable garden. This resulted in the school qualifying as a health promoting school. The school has won much recognition. We achieved third position at national level in the Green Garden competition and were awarded a Certificate of Excellence by the Minister of Education, Inna Cronje. It has also translated into learners taking a keen interest in farming. Some learners have chosen agriculture as a potential career path (Siyaphila Primary School principal).

The learners at Siyaphila Primary School expressed their appreciation for the support their parents provided when they helped them develop the school garden. They referred to an amazing achievement when they won the Best Garden award provincially and came third nationally. The learners said:

We entered a gardening competition organised by the Department of Health. Fortunately we had done quite a lot of work with our parents providing

substantial support in preparing the garden. They till the garden, plant and take care of the garden during our absence. We won the Best Garden award provincially and came third nationally, (Siyaphila Primary School learner).

I observed that the school prided itself on a well laid out and superbly kept garden with lush vegetables. There were four learners who took charge of the garden with a keen interest. I was informed by the principal that these were learners who experienced learning challenges but managed the development of the garden with diligence. The principal won the National Teachers Award in March 2012 as the principal of a health promoting school.

The involvement of parents in the garden project had a positive impact on the community because many homes had planted gardens when I visited the school. I found this to be helping fight poverty. Some parents had started vegetable trading locally. Samuel (2005) gives a practical example where, through the establishment of vegetable gardens in the school and community, the local economy was boosted through the sale of vegetables. The income that was generated helped parents educate their children.

Siyaphila Primary School had a thriving garden project that not only helped learners acquire entrepreneurial skills, but also allowed them to experience success. Sipehelele and Thuthuka Primary Schools had unproductive gardens and relied on handouts. This deprived learners of a life skill and, in my experience, the excitement the growing of crops entails.

7.2.7 Care and erection of structures created an environment conducive to learning

Respondents acknowledged parents who supported the school by repairing roofs that leaked, replacing window panes and gutters and did other repairs. The roofs at Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools were old and leaked when it rained. Parents often spent weekends patching the holes and replacing badly damaged sheets of corrugated iron. The principal of Thuthuka Primary School indicated that when parents used the school facilities, they witnessed first-hand how the roofs leaked. Many of them then took it upon themselves to seal the leaks and renovate parts of the school buildings. The principal said:

We once held a farewell function for a retired educator and our parent community [was invited]. We used the school hall which was the old church

building to host the function. Many parents attended the function. On the day it rained and water poured onto the people, which was embarrassing as there were visitors as well. Parents experienced first-hand the challenges the school encountered. A community member complained and requested that parents do something. That week parents came in and repaired the roof (Thuthuka Primary School principal).

When parents did renovations and erected or demolished structures, the school benefitted immensely as they would do so at a nominal fee or they would not charge at all for services provided. The principal of Siphhelele Primary School acknowledged with appreciation the fact that parents charged less than half the price quoted by contractors to erect the strong room and office building. He also commended the parents for the good quality of workmanship displayed. The principal said:

The school recently invited quotations from contractors to erect an office block and a store room. Contractors charged exorbitantly high amounts as quotations. The SGB chairperson approached parents who are builders. They charged a third of the price quoted by the other builders. They were awarded the contract and are doing an excellent job. We are very happy with the progress so far (Siphhelele Primary School principal).

I was shown an office block with a strong room under construction. I was told it was being built by the local community members with material bought from the R15 000 building material voucher learners had won in a competition. Although the new structure was not complete at the last visit, it added much value to the structural development of the school. Squelch (2007) advises that not all schools are fortunate enough to be served by skilled professionals. My experience is that when parents are acknowledged and appreciated for what they do for the school, they are motivated and provide additional support to the school.

When I visited Siyaphila Primary School, I found parents working around the school. Some parents repaired cracks in the floor of one of the classrooms, which facilitated better movement around the classroom. Other parents repaired the fence around the school which kept learners

within the school premises and kept animals out. Some parents worked with a group of learners in the garden; one among them was the SGB chairperson. She explained that as parents they needed to provide support to the school as the educators had a large volume of work to do. She explained that as much as she had responsibilities at home, she needed to make time to support the school in order to encourage other parents to do likewise. She said:

As much as I have responsibilities, I believe our children are equally important. I also participate in school activities so as to motivate other parents to give some time to support the school. Yes, we try our best to assist; as you can see, this happens every day. We are also appealing to all parents to come on board and support in some way (Siyaphila Primary School SGB chairperson).

The principals indicated that parents put in some effort to carry out renovations to the schools. However, they were in agreement that one of the challenges they faced was harnessing parent support. They alluded to the fact that parents were caught up by work, family, church and community commitments. Parents also practised subsistence farming which took up most of their time.

Having said this, parents at Siyaphila Primary School provided hands-on support and ensured that where there was a need to close leaks and replace window panes, it was attended to immediately. This was met with much appreciation by learners and educators alike. However, the parents at Siphелеle and Thuthuka Primary Schools did not freely avail themselves. Sometimes they asked for payment which made the school reluctant to ask parents for support.

7.2.8 Parent volunteering reduced educator workloads

According to the educators, there were parents who volunteered their services and supported in the Grade R classes. These parents taught learners how to count, say rhymes and tell stories. They would also teach the young learners life skills such as how to use the rest house, clean their hands and some writing skills. When these learners entered Grade 1, they had mastered the basic skills which enhanced teaching and learning. Parents and educators in the foundation phase lauded the support parents provided and the successes it achieved. A Grade R educator from Thuthuka Primary School said:

There are parents from the community who often come in and volunteer their services with the Grade R learners. I have guided them on what to do and it has really made a difference. The learners are able to count, write numbers up to 10 or more in some instances. They recite rhymes, speak logically and do role plays. They are energetic, play games and enjoy coming to school. This has attracted more parental involvement as more parents have shown an interest to be involved.

With the DBE erecting Grade R structures, many rural primary schools will be able to invite more parental involvement. I believe this is an effective way of getting parents involved and eradicating the mind-set that they cannot support the school.

Parents from Siyaphila and Thuthuka Primary Schools indicated that they went to the school once or twice a term to spring-clean the school. A parent from Siyaphila Primary School indicated that they passed the word around when they saw that something at the school needed their attention. A parent at Thuthuka Primary School said they often went to the school to hoe when the grass was over-grown in an effort to prevent snakes from biting the children. When the school planted potatoes, they often went in and heaped sand around the stems of the potato plants. She said:

When we walk past the school and notice that the grass needs cutting or plants such as potatoes need soil, we go into the school, ask for hoes and hoe the grass or cover the potatoes. Hoeing the grass protects our children from snakes. Covering the potato plants ensures a good potato crop. We often try to help where we can.

I observed at Sipehelele and Thuthuka Primary Schools how parents volunteered their services by cooking for learners. Siyaphila Primary School rendered multiple voluntary services to the school. The services the parents provided did not only beautify the schools, but allowed the schools to function despite the many challenges they encountered.

7.2.9 Parents' provision of financial support improved the level of school programmes

Educators and parents at Siyaphila and Thuthuka Primary Schools indicated that they tried to make the learners' educational experiences interesting by guiding them to participate in a variety of activities. However, this came at a cost so learners who had to pay to participate in certain activities. It is here where the school requested parents to support by paying towards planned school activities. When parents provided financial support, learners were able to participate in organised sporting, cultural and academic competitions. Learners often won and went on to compete at Circuit and higher levels. This inculcated enthusiasm in learners who went on to do well in these activities at high school. An educator at Siyaphila Primary School said:

The many trophies and certificates you see here were won when learners went to compete against other schools. Some learners do not achieve academically, but are gifted in other areas such as music, art, sport and drama. When parents pay towards their affiliation and transport costs, these learners are given an opportunity to express and display their talents at competitions and enjoy success. The learners experience achievement, develop positive attitudes and go on to become successful in life.

According to the educators, when parents provided learners with the opportunity to do what they knew best, their talents were identified. Once identified, learners' talents could be nurtured.

Learners and educators expressed their appreciation when parents contributed financially towards the hosting of the end-of-year function where learners received awards for their achievements. According to the learners, the end-of-year function was an occasion no one wished to miss as it was a time when they received awards from the school and gifts from their parents. They in turn were motivated to excel so as to achieve an award which pleased their parents very much. A learner from Thuthuka Primary School said:

We all looked forward to the end-of-year function. We persuaded our parents to pay towards the cost of hosting the function, because people who paid were allowed to attend. The main event of the function was the prize giving where learners were awarded medals and certificates for their achievements. Our

parents also gave us gifts. We all tried our best to achieve an award in order to impress our families and friends.

According to the educators, the learners went on and performed well at high school. This is in line with Long's (1986) assertion that whatever the form of parental involvement, the effects on the child's schooling is positive, provided it is well planned, comprehensive, long lasting and serves to integrate the child's experience at home and at school.

7.2.10 Parents' vigilance ensured safety at schools

Schools are known to house valuable resources such as computers, photocopying machines and sport equipment and are therefore prone to burglaries and vandalism. In spite of the fact that these schools were without the services of security guards, school burglaries very seldom occurred. According to the SGB chairpersons a few cases of crime occurred in their settlements. Every household was responsible for containing unruly behaviour such as vandalism. The SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School said:

Here in the rural setting every family is responsible for the behaviour of their children. Any form of unruly behaviour is dealt with harshly. You see, the school for example is community property; no one will dare to destroy what we all treasure. All members of the community have the responsibility to watch over the school. It is seldom you hear anything untoward, except for small naughty boys, but we deal with them severely and/or report the matter to the police to root it out completely.

The SGB chairperson of Siphellele Primary School said:

We keep a watch over the school when the school day ends. If educators leave the lights on we inform them and they go and put them off. We also watch over the school on weekends and during the holidays. If something happens, we go out to the school to check what is happening. If it is serious we inform the police, but I can't remember when last we had a problem.

However, the learners were unhappy that they had to open and close the gate when the school received visitors as the school was without a security guard. The school gate at Sipehelele Primary School was located far from the school which disrupted the learning process and posed a safety risk when learners had to man the gate. A learner said:

We are disturbed when we have to open and close the gate when someone visits the school. When a car comes our educators send us to open the gate. When the person leaves we must run back to close it. This disturbs the whole class. Our parents can have turns to do this job.

While schools needed security guards to take care of safety at the school, unmanned gates proved to compromise learner safety. However, parents need to be commended for the part they played, maybe subconsciously, when they watched over the school during the absence of educators.

The parents of Siyaphila Primary School often used the school over the weekends for meetings and church services which ensured good care was taken of the school. At Thuthuka Primary School parents frequented the premises in most cases to see the resident priest. Their presence on the premises served as a deterrent to people with ulterior motives. At Sipehelele Primary School some learners' homes were located in close proximity to the school. This also served as a safeguard against vandalism.

7.2.11 Parental involvement enhanced learner participation and achievement in extra-mural activities

All the respondents indicated that parents actively participated in the schools' extramural programme. There were reports of outstanding achievements when parents provided support by training and coaching learners in sport such as soccer and athletics. Some parents trained learners and accompanied them when they went out to compete.

At Sipehelele Primary School, for example, the principal requested a parent to coach three boys in the under-thirteen age category in soccer. These boys had been selected to represent the Rose Ward at Circuit level. One of them went on to represent the Circuit at District level. The principal indicated that the Department of Basic Education, Sport and Recreation unit provided

much support when they paid all expenses because the school or the parents would not have been able to pay the costs incurred. He said:

We have three learners who were part of a team coached by one of our parents who were selected to play soccer for the Misskoffil Ward at Circuit level. One of them went on to represent Ixopo Circuit at district level. The parent assisted by accompanying the learners when they were initially selected. I was happy when the Department of Education transported the learners when they were selected because neither the school nor their parents would have been able to pay for travelling costs (Siphelele Primary School principal).

The principal was full of praise for this parent who dedicated so much time to support the school in this regard. This added much value to the learners' lives; without the parent's support they would have been left idle.

According to the parents, customs and cultural traditions were an integral part of their children's holistic development. They therefore wanted to ensure that these received the necessary attention. The parents from Siyaphila Primary School said:

One of our priorities is to preserve our culture. We train groups of children from the community in gospel music, others train groups in traditional dance - these are our strong points. We also have males in the community who teach learners cultural skills such as stick fighting. This is our way of life and we regard it as very important. Our children are not expected to have book knowledge only, they must be taught their culture and traditional practices. This would enable our children to develop holistically.

During the school visits I noted how parents were actively engaged in training the learners in singing, beating drums and the art of traditional dancing. This created a vibrant atmosphere at especially Siyaphila Primary School.

The learners were grateful to parents who supported them by training them in extramural activities when the educators were not available. According to the educators, learners became extremely excited when their parents trained them in preparation for competitions. During their

practice sessions, they displayed their prowess and immense talents with much precision which indicated that they were passionate about activities which involved their culture. The learners attributed their successes to the support and motivation their parents provided. The learners at Thuthuka Primary School said:

Our parents spend a great deal of time training us. Sometimes they go late into the night to ensure that we are well prepared when we have to compete. We appreciate the sacrifices our parents make so we too ensure that we don't disappoint them. We do all in our power to make them proud. We have won several awards and we plan to win more!

The variety of accolades displayed in the schools' offices bore testament to the successes learners had achieved in competitions.

It was evident that learners enjoyed the opportunities provided to them as they attended in numbers and spent time with parents practising and preparing for competitions. Most parents were visibly skilled in the various arts and seemed to enjoy what they did.

Educators further commended parents who helped learners and educators develop the schools' consignment of traditional regalia. According to the educators, with the support of the parents the schools developed an assortment of regalia. It was here that parents showcased their expertise. This provided an opportunity for the schools to adorn their learners in the appropriate attire for each event. This influenced the adjudication of performances in their favour. The educator at Siyaphila Primary School said:

Some parents are very skilled in fashioning garments. They have developed a few sets of traditional garments and regalia for certain categories of cultural events. This has enabled the school to inter-change attire at competitions which has contributed to the successes the school has enjoyed at cultural competitions. The way our parents willingly participate in training the learners and ensuring that they are appropriately clad when they compete indicates how important our parents are to us.

The support parents provided when they teamed up with educators resulted in schools winning many competitions. Barth (1990) advises that teamwork creates an amazing and stimulating environment where individuals and groups support each other.

Further, there were parents who supported the school by transporting learners. The principal of Siphhelele Primary School expressed his appreciation for the support the school received from one parent in particular, Mr Y. The parent often transported the learners to competitions at no fee. At times he asked for a stipend to fill petrol into his vehicle. The parent motivated learners by promising them free trips when they won competitions. Learners performed beyond themselves and won several competitions. This is in line with Van Wyk and Lemmer's (2009) who maintain that for schools to progress, the commitment of parents to supporting the school should be strong. The Principal of Siphhelele Primary School said:

When our learners are invited to compete in sporting events or cultural competitions, we often did not attend due to the lack of funds. However, when we approached Mr Y for help and he was not committed he transports our learners to the venues and back without charging us at times. He sometimes asks us to pay a stipend towards petrol. We really appreciate his help as other modes of transport charge exorbitant amounts to transport our learners over short distances. He also had a knack for motivating our learners as they normally panicked when they visited other schools or crowded venues to compete.

When parents transported learners at a minimal fee or without a charge it eased the financial burden on schools. If more parents made a similar commitment to supporting the school, much value would be added to the educational experiences of learners in rural schools. The educators were appreciative of this particular parent's gesture of goodwill as it afforded disadvantaged learners who possessed wonderful skills an opportunity to compete and experience success.

According to the respondents, when parents accompanied learners to competitions, it created a sense of safety and camaraderie among educators. When their parents were part of the audience, they provided the "glucose" that spurred them on to perform to their best. They contended that

going out to perform was intimidating at times but having their parents with them gave them extra motivation to do well. Learners from Thuthuka Primary School said:

We are very excited when parents accompany us. We feel safe and know that some people care. Our parents help by taking care of us and watching over our belongings. They also ensure we eat. We try to ensure that we do our best because we would not like to let them down. We have won many trophies, certificates and even money.

Principals were in agreement that most learners performed to their best when their parents were involved. They indicated that learners were well behaved, motivated and showed much excitement when their parents attended school functions. They also indicated that learners performed beyond themselves to impress their parents. A learner from Siyaphila Primary School said:

When the school goes out to compete or hosts a function, and our parents join us, we are motivated to perform to our best in whatever we do. We perform to our very best to make sure we win to make our parents proud. Sometimes we even surprise ourselves as we do things that we have never done before. Our parents get very excited when we perform well. We try our best as we would not like to disappoint them. We know when we do well it makes them happy.

According to the parents, when their children went out to compete, they were confident that they would succeed. The chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School explained how proud he felt one day when he attended a cultural competition. He explained how overwhelmed he was when the learners from his school won the ‘Umasho’ category in a cultural contest. He said:

It was a wonderful experience seeing so many learners in high spirits and performing at the level they did. My most memorable experience was when the results of ‘Umasho’ were announced. I could not believe my ears, our school actually won. Two other parents were present and we found ourselves running among the crowd with excitement (Thuthuka Primary School chairperson).

I once visited a school hosting an end-of-year prize giving function. I thoroughly enjoyed watching learners perform ‘*Umasho*.’ It was a well rehearsed regimented charismatic carioca movement by 12-20 males who performed with well timed precision to the sound of African drums. The dance spurred the audience into a frenzy of singing and clapping that reverberated throughout the venue. It is usually a fitting climax to cultural functions.

According to the respondents, cultural festivities were the highlight of all school functions in the rural context. It was my observation at some of the cultural competitions I attended that the presence of parents made learners perform beyond themselves. It was a hair-raising experience to witness the jubilation, excitement and the level of competitiveness that prevailed at these functions. Parents went into a frenzy that spurred their children on and the venues went up with tumultuous applause. People screamed and whistled uncontrollably. The audience thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 11) argue that “parents and educators, schools and families, exercise an influence in education and each have [sic] their own special contribution to make. All families can contribute to children’s education and welfare, no matter who they are.” I believe the involvement of parents in this regard contributed to the extraordinary performances by learners.

I noted that when learners won competitions, the schools benefitted immensely. Siyaphila Primary School, for example, won a horticultural competition where the school was awarded computers. Sipehelele Primary School was awarded a voucher which entitled them to building material valued at fifteen thousand rand. The material was used to build an office block at the school. Achievements like these served to motivate parents, educators and learners alike, to work harder.

It is hoped other parents who have not seen the need to support the schools may change their attitude and team up with participating parents to create symbiotic relationships where educators and parents may work together. When parents teamed up with educators and dedicated time to supporting the schools, much success was achieved. Kemp and Nathan (1989, p. 139) advise that “teams have to be built, they don’t just happen.” According to Wolfendale *et al.* (2000),

“involving the family and working with parents as partners arouse interest, increase motivation and create a very successful model of good practice.” Fullen (2001) argues that when parents keep close to the child’s planned educational programme, the potential for achievement is enhanced.

While Siyaphila Primary School achieved a head start by ensuring that their learners performed well in extramural activities and Thuthuka primary took great strides ahead by ensuring that they were a force to be reckoned with, Sipehelele Primary School lagged behind considerably. However, educators observed some progress in this latter school.

7.2.12 Parental support in school-work enhanced learners’ academic achievement

Some learners indicated that their parents assisted them with their schoolwork. A few learners from Sipehelele and Thuthuka Primary schools indicated that their parents assisted them with their schoolwork. According to the learners, they understood their schoolwork when their parents provided support. A learner at Sipehelele Primary School said:

My mother explains certain sections of my schoolwork to me. I understand the work better because she explains it in a simple way. She helps me with Mathematics and Life Sciences. She also tells me interesting stories about the history of our country. I share these with my friends at school and help them and other learners with their schoolwork.

The principals were in agreement and attributed the improvements in learner achievement to the support provided by parents. They asserted that when parents attended parents’ days, workshops, engaged in discussions with educators on the progress of their children and implemented the guidance they received, their children performed better. The principal of Thuthuka Primary School kept a register of parents who attended the empowerment programmes provided by the school. Assessment records of learners whose parents provided support to the school showed better results in comparison to those of other learners. The principal said:

When parents came forward by, for example, attending Parents’ Day or responding when educators called them to discuss their children’s progress and the challenges they encountered, a vast improvement in the learners’ work

occurred. Parents provided much support which changed the learners' attitude towards their school work. Most learners adopted a positive attitude towards their schoolwork. Some parents were reluctant initially, but they have now come on board and work is in progress (Thuthuka Primary School principal).

Atkins (1988) asserts that even when children have started from a position of underachievement, they are able to experience success even when resources are limited. It is therefore never too late for parents to get involved. They should be encouraged to come on board to provide support.

A parent from Siyaphila Primary School reported that where educators guided them on how to support their children, they were able to assist them at home. She alluded to the fact that when they worked cooperatively with educators and dedicated more time to helping their children, their children spent more time on their schoolwork. Their performance at school improved. The parent said:

When educators noticed that my child was not doing well, they called me to the school and we discussed the challenges the child experienced. The educators guided me on how to help my daughter. She had a reading and spelling problem. I dedicated much time to supporting her and insisted that she read for half an hour each day. She initially rebelled, but I put my foot down and did as I was told by the educators. She recently won an award for the most improved learner in the class. She loves reading now (Siyaphila Primary School parent).

According to Long (1986), whatever the form of parental involvement, the effect on children's school performance is positive provided the involvement is well planned, long lasting and serves to integrate the child's experiences with home and school. Loucks (1992) and Prinsloo (1996) concur that parental/family support creates students who are academically successful.

The educators stressed that when parents provided support, learner commitment increased which improved their achievement. According to the educators, when learners became aware that their parents are in contact with educators, they paid more attention to their school work and put in the extra effort. Some did so out of fear that educators would inform parents of under-performance

or bad behaviour. Others wanted their parents to receive good reports about them. The educator from Thuthuka Primary School said:

You see, when a child sees a parent entering the school premises and the child sees the parent talk to the principal or educators, he/she suspects they are talking about his/her progress or behaviour. This keeps them in suspense and they are forced to work hard to ensure nothing negative is discussed about them – this motivates them to work hard. Most learners whose parents frequent the school are doing well in their schoolwork. The learners strive to do well so as to come out in the top group.

Epstein (1996) argues that when educators and parents work towards achieving the same goal, learners are assured of two sets of significant adults to share their knowledge in the best interest of the learner. When the learner's education is supported at home and at school, his/her skills, knowledge and positive attitudes are reinforced in both areas.

An educator at Sipehelele Primary School cited incidents where she supported some learners when they prepared to compete in a Science and Mathematics Olympiad. According to the educator, some of the learners asked parents for extra support. The four learners who asked parents for extra support achieved prizes three years in succession. She said:

Some of our learners are self motivated. They come to me when they are preparing for the Science and Mathematics Olympiad. However, four of the learners asked parents for additional support. Three of these learners achieved first class, above 70% in Mathematics. The other always receives an award for Science (Sipehelele Primary School educator).

Where educators and parents provide support and lay a foundation in subjects such as Mathematics and other sciences, they provide learners with an opportunity to excel in higher grades.

Learners at Thuthuka Primary School indicated that they were taught reading skills by the parent who taught catechism. They were asked to read short extracts from the Bible as homework. They had to report back on what they had read. Where they experienced challenges they asked

their parents to help them with difficult words. Parents helped them interpret the reading at times which helped them answer oral questions. This helped them read simple story books. One learner said:

Our catechism teacher teaches us to read from the Bible. She gives us short passages to read for homework and we are expected to report on what we have read. When we are stuck our parents help us and we have learnt to read with understanding. We are even able to answer questions when she asks us. We enjoy reading the Bible stories and books that are easy to read (Thuthuka Primary School learner).

Horne (1998) regards parents helping their children with reading and homework as a useful initial target. According to Ubben and Hughes (1987, p. 27), “children learn more in schools where there is good involvement on the part of parents in the school programme... good instructional leadership calls for the purposeful involvement of the children’s parents.” Dubin (1991, p. 51) argues that “research indicates that when the school involves parents in home learning activities, parents develop positive attitudes toward the school.”

In my experience, most parents have some mathematical knowledge they acquired at school or have developed over the years. Parents could be trained to impart these and other skills they may have been taught. According to the respondents, most parents could read and write. It was therefore possible, in my opinion, for parents to support their children with elementary reading. Learners who read improved their general knowledge, vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Learners’ who received support from parents with their schoolwork, produced better quality projects and achieved higher scores in assessments in comparison to learners who did not receive support. The September Assessment 2011 results of the learners interviewed from Siyaphila Primary School revealed that those who received support from parents especially in mathematics and literacy, achieved higher scores as illustrated the following table:

Table 7.1 Grade 7 September examination results 2011 of Siyaphila Primary School in Zulu, English and Mathematics

Siyaphila Primary School

Name of learner	Received parent support	ZULU	ENGLISH	MATHS
A	Yes	51%	41%	53%
B	No	41%	34%	43%
C	Yes	64%	49%	67%
D	Yes	64%	73%	36%
E	No	44%	32%	45%

The learners who claimed that they received support from their parents, (learners A, C and D) scored higher marks in literacy and numeracy. However, learner D scored high percentages in literacy but scored poorly in Mathematics. It may be inferred that learner D experienced a challenge with mathematics or parents were unable to provide adequate support in the subject.

Further, according to the Annual National Assessment (ANA) of 2011, the school where more learners and the educator indicated that parents supported learners namely, Siyaphila Primary School, scored higher percentages in comparison to Thuthuka and Siphelile Primary schools as illustrated in the following tables:

Table 7.2 Annual National Assessment (ANA) 2011 results

Siyaphila Primary School			
Grade	1	3	6
Literacy	34%	31%	24%
Numeracy	36%	30%	27%

Thuthuka Primary School			
Grade	1	3	6
Literacy	28%	23%	21%
Numeracy	32%	27%	24%

Siphelele Primary School			
Grade	1	3	6
Literacy	23%	21%	23%
Numeracy	27%	23%	20%

According to the records of learner performance in the 2011 Annual National Assessment (ANA) in literacy and numeracy, there was a notable decline in the level of achievement. Of the three schools, Siyaphila Primary School, the school where learners, parents and the educator indicated that parents provided support achieved the highest average percentage scores overall. Thuthuka Primary School scored higher in grades 1 and 3 in both numeracy and literacy than Siphelele Primary School. However, at grade 6 level Thuthuka Primary scored higher in numeracy 24% and Siphelele Primary scored higher in literacy 23%.

The low averages scored by the schools, especially in grade 6 may be attributed to parents being unable to provide support because they received very little education as they indicated. However, a generally higher achievement is reflected in numeracy and literacy in the foundation phase. It may be inferred that parents were able to provide academic support in the initial stages of primary education. An exponential decrease in learner percentage scores from grade 1, 3 and 6 was evident.

Siyaphila Primary School performed better academically in comparison to Thuthuka and Sipehelele Schools. In my opinion the services of the general assistant and the support provided by parents allowed more time for teaching and learning. Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools parents provided limited academic support which may have contributed to the poor learner performance in these schools.

In my opinion, the collaborative working relationship between educators and parents I witnessed at Siyaphila Primary School has allowed the school to progress. The school embraced and welcomed parents' involvement, which has built their confidence as alluded to by writers such as Deslandes and Bertard (2005), Overstreet, Devine and Efreom (2005). Wolfendale *et al.* (2000) believe that working with parents as partners arouses interest, increases motivation and creates a successful model of good practice. However, it is my contention that much still has to be done to empower parents to assist learners in their schoolwork in order to improve the school's academic attainment.

The support the SGB and some parents provided at Thuthuka Primary School promoted teaching and learning to some extent. However, much still has to be done to persuade more parents to participate in the life of the school. Once parents are involved in the life of the school, schools will need to devise mechanisms to empower them sufficiently to experience success. This will ensure that they acknowledge the value they bring to their children's education and, therefore, retain their support.

However, for this ideal to be accomplished, parents need to be invited and made to feel welcome. Middlewood *et.al.*, (2005, p. 150) advise that "schools [should] hold regular workshops or

discussions on topics relevant to parents such as health and safety, supervision, nutrition, discipline, academic issues and others to empower them and foster cooperation.”

Deslandes and Bertard (2005), Overstreet, Devine and Efreom (2005) and Walker *et al.* (2005) stress the importance of teachers making parents feel invited as having a strong influence on parental involvement. Heystek (1998) recommends that schools, the National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education and other stakeholders take specific action to improve the involvement of parents in school activities so that parents may become aware of the importance of their support.

While educators at Siphелеle Primary School have made a concerted effort to maintain a reasonable level of teaching and learning, parental support is negligible. This has negatively impacted on the development of the school. According to Berger (1987), each school differs in its character; in some, there is a joy in the educational spirit while in others avoidance overrides all sense of joy. There was a clear spirit of camaraderie among educators and parents at Siyaphila Primary School and an inviting atmosphere prevailed at the school.

I believe that if Thuthuka and Siphелеle Primary Schools devised a strategy to attract parents to the school and made them feel welcome, they could harness their support which could impact positively on learner achievement. I concur with Lemmer *et al.* (2009) when they urge schools to “...recruit and organize parents’ help and support by designing programmes which recruit parents.”

7.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, all the respondents indicated unequivocally that rural schools were in need of parental support. It emerged that while schools adequately communicated the schools’ needs to parents, empowering them proved to be a challenge. Further, while parents did participate in the lives of the schools, only a few parents made a concerted effort to provide meaningful support. However, contextual factors prevented parents from playing a more active role in supporting their schools. Among these challenges was the need for parents to provide a livelihood for their children. The limited number of educators employed at rural schools exacerbated the challenges rural schools encountered.

The lack of support from parents and the failure by the relevant authorities in providing support to rural schools left the schools with no option but to rely on learners and educators to provide services beyond the classroom. This disrupted the schools' educational programmes and subsequently affected the provision of quality education. Lemmer (2010, p. 158) argues that "an important aspect emphasised in global reform is that schools alone cannot resolve the supposed failure of the education system, but that it is the shared responsibility of communities." A need exists therefore for the government to work collaboratively with educators, learners, parents, communities and relevant stakeholders in an effort to turn rural schools into thriving centres of excellence.

CHAPTER 8

EMERGING THEMES AND PATTERNS

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the themes stemming from the data that were analysed.

The first theme that emerged was that parents from rural schools did indeed participate in the life of the school attended by their children. It was also revealed that parental support impacted on learner achievement. However, the level of parental support in the rural area under study differed considerably from the level of parental support that I personally observed in urban schools. My experience as a parent of children from an urban schools was that parents readily and efficiently provided technical support such as updating computers and fitting cameras around the school for security purposes. They were also able to ensure that learners received professional support, they sought extra tuition for their children, and they kept a close check on discipline.

Conversely, the empirical research revealed that in the rural context parents cleaned the schools, did minor repairs to buildings, and took care of school gardens and buildings when educators were away. It must be mentioned at the outset that this level of parental support does little to improve the provision of quality education.

The second theme alluded to the interdependence between parents and the school. While the perception exists that schools need parental support schools, in turn, need to offer services to parents or members of the school community to complete a symbiotic relationship. When schools are responsive to the needs of parents, a two-way support structure is established which consolidates a collaborative working relationship between the school and parents; as such, parental involvement in schools is enhanced, leading to better functioning of the school.

The third theme revealed the role parents played when they supported the schools. It also illuminated how learners perceived the involvement of parents in the life of the schools. Some learners did not welcome overt parental involvement in the schools as they mostly feared that parents would receive reports of poor performance or bad behaviour at school. However, there

were learners who were happy to have their parents share in their successes while others wanted to impress their parents with their skills and talents.

The final theme related to the extent to which parental support enhanced learner achievement. The challenges experienced by the schools under study could be compared to those experienced by rural schools in other African countries such as in Zimbabwe, where quality education is provided in the face of adversity. In this regard, Harber (1996, p. 14) posits that “in small schools in developing countries which are starved of commercially produced resources, there is much that can still be done to provide a stimulating and relevant curriculum.” He argues for a quality relationship among students and between staff and students. He claims that in smaller schools, educators can “...get to know their students much better and understand their needs more effectively, and students can get to know each other better. This allows each child’s progress to be carefully monitored and discussed on a long term basis”.

According to Harber (1996, p. 16), by their very nature, these rural schools in developing African contexts are “...ideally suited to providing attention to individual differences, a principle which is at the heart of all good teaching. Not only do children in small schools help each other more regularly out of necessity, but numerically they have a much better chance of joining in sporting and cultural activities such as school plays or concerts.” I concur, as I found that educators in these relatively small rural schools knew their learners and had a good working relationship with them.

According to Budge (2006), many rural communities are in economic distress which contributes to a number of social problems that affect rural schools and the achievements of rural learners. Schools reported instances where they tried to interact with parents in an effort to discuss the schools’ needs and to formulate parental support programmes. Many parents were unavailable which made it difficult to plan and coordinate parental support. However, when parents availed themselves, the support they provided benefitted the schools immensely.

A general perception was that since parents had brought the children into the world, it was their prerogative to nurture the development of the children, ensure their admission to schools, support their educational development and guide them into careers. Most parents took care of the initial

development of their children from birth until they were admitted into schools. However, it is from this point where many rural parents focussed on their children's welfare and left their children's educational development to the schools.

However, there were some parents who supported the schools to ensure their children received a decent education. Respondents indicated that there were parents who provided valuable support when they admitted their children timeously, procedurally and took care of their welfare. There were parents who took care of the schools' upkeep, helped learners with their schoolwork and assisted with the schools' extramural and co-curricular programmes.

8.2 Parents valued education

The responses from parents indicated that they valued education and wanted the best for their children's schooling, as in everything else. They saw a need to participate in the education of their children to ensure they received a high quality, broad education in a caring, effective and well run institution as alluded to by van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 12). However, it was evident that parents did not know how to provide support in the more intricate school management sector.

A review of the literature indicated that programmes that involved parents benefited all role players: parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole. Authors such as Epstein (1987), Davies (1993), and van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) concur that the most effective education occurs when schools and families work together in a shared enterprise. Siyaphila Primary School, for example, received much support from parents and community members. The school in turn offered a variety of services to the community.

Parents and community members played a pivotal role when they maintained the school and prepared learners to participate in cultural competitions where they excelled. Parents, in turn, acquired gardening skills and were encouraged to establish their own gardens to sustain themselves. This is in line with Davies (1993) who asserts that parents who are involved have more positive views of the educator and the school. Parents and others who participate are likely to be more supportive of the school. Research underscores that children are more successful in

all grade levels if their parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home.

However, educators indicated that while they needed the support of parents, there were instances where parents offered support on condition that they be remunerated. This seemed to discourage educators from asking parents for support. I believe this tarnished the possibility of creating collaborative working relationships. I also believe that, through effective communication, these parents' mindsets could have been changed so that they would have come to recognise the need to provide voluntary services as the schools had limited financial resources.

Lemmer *et al.* (2006) cite Stein and Thorkildsen (1999) who posit that the extent to which the school communicates with parents determines their involvement in school activities. It emerged from the research that while educators had mechanisms in place to communicate with parents, there were certain parents who "...did not know what was happening at the school." They cited disempowerment and illiteracy as great contributors to the break-down in communication. Parents also indicated that they were so preoccupied with the struggle for survival that they could not respond to appeals by the school for support.

It was disconcerting however, that communication between the school and parents was often based mostly on the needs of the school. Cockran and Dean (1991, p. 265) warn that schools tend to involve parents in one-way communication rather than in a partnership "...where each partner is truly respected as having something valuable to contribute." If parents and educators do not talk to or know each other, they may wrongfully see each other as uncompromising and not even try to discover mutually beneficial options (Lemmer, 2006).

However, to establish a successful working relationship, it is necessary for an effective communication network to exist between the school and the home and the home and the school, as advised by van Wyk and Lemmer, (2009). I found that rural parents operated in different spheres based on their educational attainment. A few rural parents who were financially stable had an inner desire to see their children succeed. Where parents themselves had received an education, they responded to the schools' request for their support. When the schools communicated with such parents, these parents always responded and helped develop and

support school programmes. They visited the schools regularly, held discussions with their children's educators, attended empowerment programmes and supported their children academically. They worked co-operatively with the school in a committed partnership.

Responses from interviewees indicated that there was a need for parents and educators to work collaboratively to ensure the provision of quality education. Atkin, Bastiani and Goode (1988, p. 12) believe there is a growing perception of, and support for, the view that when professionals and parents share the same goals and work together in a partnership, things can really begin to happen.

Further, a working relationship needs to be established where parents and educators work together to ensure the delivery of quality education. Caltz *et al.* (2002) and van Wyk and Lemmer (2004) purport that schools should open their doors to the community to consolidate a collaborative working relationship between educators and parents if any success is to be achieved in providing a quality education. According to Berger (1987), if the school has an inviting and responsive atmosphere, parents will feel welcome and become contributing resources to the school's activities.

However, there were some parents, especially those who had received a limited education, who believed that the academic aspect of the education of their children was the responsibility of the educators and the school. This is in line with the view of Wolfendale (1989, p. 17) who states: "A reason given by parents for not becoming involved in their children's pre-school centre is the lack of confidence in the face of professional expertise. These parents surrender their rights and responsibilities on the one side of the school gate and teachers [do so] on the other side." Parents and educators should desist from being strangers and need to value one another.

Naidu *et al.* (2008, p. 138) concur with van der Westhuizen (2000) who contends: "The school in turn, should ensure that it provides services to the community. Schools can conduct courses or workshops on parenting and literacy as well as Adult Basic Education. In this way, 'community schools' that foster life-long learning among adults will come to fruition." Schools could open their doors to accommodate educational and other important activities involving parents. This will establish links with surrounding communities and develop a sense of ownership and a safe-

guard for the school. While ‘partnership’ is part of the rhetoric of school reform and has become the buzz-word in various aspects of governance, it is seldom part of the action agenda” (Naidu *et al.*, 2008, p. 132).

According to the principals, parents often failed the schools when they did not respond to requests for support. The principal of Thuthuka Primary School, for example, reported an incident where parents failed to provide support when the school needed to have hazardous toilets demolished. She also mentioned an incident when parents demanded payment for work they had done. She eventually resolved the matter by paying them from her personal funds.

It became evident that the time when schools needed support was sometimes in conflict with when parents were available. In such instances parents were accused of abdicating their responsibilities. Caliz *et al.* (2002) advise schools to have structured or official parental involvement strategies for a partnership to be functional. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that schools allow parents to indicate the service they could offer, to record the skills and services they are prepared to offer and to compile a list of information provided. They also need to meet at times that suit both parties. By so doing, parents will be afforded an opportunity to apply their skills in supporting the school.

However, the study found that the level of parental support in the schools’ academic programmes was limited due to certain factors. Indications were that some educators did not welcome parents into their classrooms as they regarded the role of parents merely as support givers in matters such as cleaning the school and doing minor renovations. According to Bryans (1989, p. 39) as cited by Wolfendale (1989), some educators “...do not feel comfortable with any other teacher, support teacher, adviser, educational psychologist or parent in the room with them.” I believe if parents were welcomed into classrooms to offer support with reading or supervising group work, much could be achieved. I found that the fact that parents were illiterate and some grandparents could not read or write deprived learners of valuable support.

Responses indicated that parents willingly supported their children in extramural activities and other school projects as they had skills in these areas which they willingly imparted to learners and educators alike. However, while the values and strengths of the family culture were

acknowledged by the schools, educators seemed to pressure parents to provide only administrative (registration of children) and limited academic (homework) support at home as it was in these areas where they perceived that support was needed most. Griffiore and Boger (1986, p. 90) point out that "...if a school stresses competition and ignores social co-operation and sharing which may characterise the values of the home or cultural groups, the child may be confused over which values are the best." This would therefore discourage the parents to involve themselves in the education of their children.

Further, most parents in rural areas are not employed and some are low income parents. According to Squelch (1993, p. 205), unemployed parents are restricted by the inability to purchase books and educational games and to pay for special educational excursions. Parents do not involve themselves in fundraising programmes that could assist in schools paying for travelling costs or purchasing additional apparatus that could support learning.

8.3 Learner perspectives on the need for parental support

Learners expressed mixed feelings with regard to whether parents should or should not support the school. Certain learners indicated that they were happy when parents came to school. They viewed parents' visits to the school as ensuring they were safe, something they appreciated. Although initially shy, they would use such opportunities to introduce their parents to their educators. These learners spoke freely about their families to their educators which enabled educators to deal with challenges learners encountered at school or at home.

Some learners welcomed parents visiting the school as it improved discipline. Learners who prided themselves in doing well at school welcomed parent visits. These learners wanted their parents to share their success at school. Some learners indicated that when their educators informed their parents that they were working well at school, they were motivated to work even harder. Parents indicated that they wanted to ensure that their children attended school every day and to check on discipline. Clarke (2007) advises schools to include parents and the community in formulating and implementing strategies to maintain discipline. According to van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 44): "Schools benefit from the involvement of fathers as it enriches the

resources the school can draw on. It has also been found to reduce misconduct by learners at school.”

Learners expressed their appreciation when certain parents visited the school to coach them in sporting or cultural activities. According to Clarke (2007), there are committed parents with a passion for a particular issue who need to indulge wherever possible, especially in rural areas where coaching services do not exist. When parents supported learners by coaching them, they created an opportunity for the learners to showcase their skills and talents. The learners gave of their best when their parents trained them.

Having the parents accompany them to competitions, the learners performed beyond themselves. They dedicated accolades they won to their parents. According to the learners it was their way of thanking their parents for investing their time in training them and accompanying them to competitions. Unfortunately, parents who did not attend competitions deprived their children of motivation and missed an opportunity of witnessing live their children's potential.

Some learners expressed their indebtedness to their parents who supported them with their schoolwork. A well spoken learner at Thuthuka Primary School explained how his mother spent hours supporting him with his schoolwork. The learner spoke intelligently and responded to the interview questions with immense confidence. He provided clear, unambiguous responses. I also noted that the learner excelled as the top achiever in the school and had already been accepted for admission at one of the top schools in Ixopo. The learner heaped praise on his mother and expressed a wish to make her happy by doing well throughout his school life. I recently learnt that he is one of the top five achievers at his new school.

However, some learners were not happy when their parents visited the school. According to the learners, when parents frequented the school, they felt their parents were spying on them. They indicated that they were forced to behave at their best. To avoid conflict, they attended school regularly, did their homework and were well behaved for fear of reprisal. Where learners had transgressed a school's code of conduct, seeing parents visiting the school made them afraid as educators did not hesitate to report wrongdoing to parents. Learners complained that educators lodged complaints with their parents for minor offences. Parents invariably sided with the

educators without listening to their child's side of the story. When learners got home from school they were subjected to punitive treatment for offences committed at school.

Certain learners felt helpless when their parents were unable to help them with their schoolwork. Others were unhappy that their parents left early in the mornings and returned late, which meant they received very little or no help from their parents. Instead, some learners reported that they had to prepare siblings for school and cook for them when they returned from school. They argued that this kept them from doing their homework. It was clear that such children had to function in the absence of a pedagogical climate and that this would not be conducive to their learning, as recommended by Epstein and Sanders (2002).

Further, learners expressed their displeasure at having to clean the school, especially the toilets, during school time. They argued that this was something their parents could do. They were unhappy that their parents ignored invitations to clean the school and cook for learners, which chores they had to take care of when parents did not respond. Other learners complained that their parents often kept them at home to take care of siblings or livestock when their grandparents went to collect their pensions or when their parents had to attend to 'urgent' personal or family matters. They contested that this made them lose learning time.

8.4 Parents provided support in a variety of activities

There were parents who committed themselves and provided human capital. The support they provided when they rendered services such as tending to the upkeep of the schools and many others impacted positively on the schools' functionality.

8.4.1 Parents took care of their children's welfare

According to SASA (1996), every parent must ensure every learner for whom he or she is responsible attends school. Further, learners have to be immunized and registered with the Department of Home Affairs before they are enrolled in schools. However, many rural schools admitted learners who were without the necessary documents as there were learners of a school-going age whose births had not been registered. While it is criminal to deny a child the right to

an education, it is also the responsibility of every school keep records of learner information which include documents regarding registration details.

My experience as manager of a rural primary was that learners that were not registered were often admitted on a verbal agreement that their parents prioritise their registration. However, this promise was seldom fulfilled. The DOE advised schools to invite the Department of Home Affairs to visit the schools to register learners. However, the registration of learners often dragged on for years which meant the learners forfeited many privileges.

Challenges were often experienced with the registration of learners born out of wedlock. Some parents, grandparents in particular, were hesitant to register learners and risk losing an inheritance when they were registered incorrectly where parents never married. Fathers would often will their estate to all their children, which meant that they had to be registered under their biological father's surname, or forfeit their share.

Further, learners who were not registered were excluded from competitive sporting events when schools failed to provide authentic proof of their dates of birth. It is a prerequisite that every learner produces an identity document as proof of his/her age when competing in official sport activities. Where these documents were not available, learners were excluded from competing in organized sport. Educators involved in sport at the schools were therefore at pains to persuade parents to register their children for this purpose.

Another major challenge experienced by learners in most African countries is poor nutrition. According to Harber and Davies (1997, p. 38), 'pupil feeding' is not so critical in a society where most pupils receive sufficient nutrition; however, it can be a key discriminator where food is scarce or unequally distributed. They purport that a third of the developing world's children suffer from protein-energy malnutrition. The shortage of food results in worm infestation which, in turn, results in poor concentration, a slow grasp of lessons, and the inability to absorb information. In this regard, the introduction of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) has gone a long way in improving the lives of learners in rural schools. There was evidence that, at times, learners at Sipehele Primary School went without food when deliveries were late or supplies ran short. At Siyaphila Primary School where parents had established productive

gardens, learners were served meals rich with fresh vegetables, every day. I observed at Thuthuka Primary School, after being alerted by an educator, how two sisters put some of their food into a container to take it home. I later discovered that the meal these learners received at school was sometimes their only meal for the day.

Siphelele Primary School enjoyed the services of a community health worker in the person of one of the parents who was the SGB chairperson. She and other health workers in the community were empowered in terms of health matters and were provided with consignments of health products which they distribute to communities as well as to the schools. I was informed that these community workers frequented the school where they guided learners and educators on matters of basic hygiene. They stressed the use of sanitary towels for girls, keeping toilets clean, the regular washing of hands and the use of gloves when cleaning around the school.

Further, I was informed at Thuthuka Primary School that many learners who qualified for social grants did not receive them. There were instances reported where learners eligible to receive social grants, were put on long waiting lists, or their grants were terminated because they were not up-dated. Grandparents had to go through the trauma of making several trips to the Magistrates Court in an effort to have the cancelled grants re-instated. Many became discouraged and ceased to pursue what was regarded as the child's right of financial support provided by the state. Through my visit to the school and my persuasion parents and educators were encouraged to pursue this sensitive issue.

8.4.2 Parents supported their children with their schoolwork

According to some parent respondents, parents support the schools driven by a desire to provide a better future for their children. Singh *et al.* (2004, p. 301) believe that parents send their children to school "...with the expectation that they will get quality education in order to secure their future with a decent vocation."

Studies devoted to parental involvement in schooling have grown, producing evidence that demonstrates the link between parental involvement and a wide range of schooling outcomes. According to Marschall (2006), parental involvement enhances student self-esteem, improves

child-parent relationships, and helps parents develop positive attitudes toward schools. This was found to be the case with learners who received help from their parents.

According to the learners, parents supported them by teaching them how to count, recite multiplication tables, the alphabet and rhymes. Some parents visited the school and received guidance from educators on how to support their children. They underwent empowerment programmes and sought help from older learners and neighbours when the need arose. One parent shared a very interesting phenomenon when she related how she encouraged children in the neighbourhood to “play school”. She said: “A few girl learners often gathered young children and taught them how to count, say rhymes, sang religious songs and play indigenous games.”

Some learners indicated that their parents helped their children with reading. Where the schools could make only a few books available, learners indicated that their parents improvised by reading short extracts from the Bible or magazines they took from work. According to Mortinor *et al.* (1998), parents who read to their children, who listened to their reading and who provided them with books at home had a positive effect upon their children’s reading. This support had a positive influence on learner progress and development.

Learners indicated that their parents often took the time to help them with their homework. According to the learners, they understood work taught at school better after their parents had explained certain concepts relating to their schoolwork. Parents also helped learners formulate ideas when they had to write compositions and to develop comprehension skills to respond to questions from written texts. Some learners took work they did not understand home for their parents to provide clarity.

Educators confirmed that when they engaged parents in discussions on challenges learners experienced and guided them on how to support their children, the learners’ work improved. Learners spent more time on their schoolwork, cooperated with educators, did their homework regularly and produced better results. A study conducted by Singh *et al.* (2004, p. 305) found that parents who spent quality time with their children motivated them. The study found that

those learners who had received support from their parents early in their school lives were more empowered to deal with schoolwork independently later on in life.

It emerged that parents in rural areas had limited financial resources which impacted negatively on the provision of quality education. Many parents struggled to provide for their children. Some children entered school without being registered and others were admitted into schools at the last minute. However, some parents ensured that their children attended school regularly in school uniform. Some also actively supported the school. They saw to it that their children had a suitable space, allowed them ample time and supported them with their schoolwork. This is in line with Mncube's (2010) finding that researchers see parental involvement as preparing children for school, attending school events, providing children with a place to do homework, and ensuring that they complete their homework. However, while the rural schools under study were really in need of academic support, very little support of this nature was forthcoming from the majority of the parents.

The principals and educators of the schools under study confirmed that learners who experienced parental support were focused and achieved academically and otherwise. This finding is corroborated by Epstein (1996) who contends that learners who experience support from parents apply themselves in what they do and their general performance improves. She found that such children would complete homework tasks and develop regular homework habits. Some learners went on and performed well in life, which is in line with the findings of Henderson and Bala (1997, p. 1) who assert that "...when the schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life."

Educators commended parents who responded to invitations to address the challenges learners encountered. This helped establish a working relationship between educators and parents. This is in line with the view held by Hall and Engelbrecht (1998, p. 231) who suggest that parents "...need to be involved in their children's education and this should include insight into their children's progress, participation in decision making and being critical of information on educational issues."

Educators indicated that when parents supported their children, the children remained focused and showed a positive attitude towards their schoolwork, as alluded to by Dauber and Epstein (1993). Swap (1993) found a decrease in truancy, improved learner behaviour, and a decrease in the drop-out rates. Parents were pleased with the positive feedback they received from educators regarding their children's academic performance after they had helped them with their homework. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p.18) assert that parental involvement "...can help lessen teachers' workload, especially at schools in poor socio-economic communities."

It emerged that where parents visited the school, they became familiar with the challenges the school and learners experienced. Parents became involved in decision making and planned school programmes were successfully implemented. Parents took charge of the upkeep of the school which allowed learners more time in the classroom for learning. Where parents provided support to their children in their schoolwork, academic results improved.

According to the learners, some parents' support enabled them to participate in activities such as Maths and Science Olympiads where some of them performed well. A learner at Thuthuka Primary School received an award for third position in a Science Expo at Circuit level. The learner attributed her success in the competition to the help she received from her father. This view is in line with Epstein (1992) who states that students at all levels do better academically if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging and involved.

I therefore concur with Hall and Engelbrecht (1998) who purport that when parents and educators work collaboratively, success is imminent. Lemmer and van Wyk (2004, p. 202) assert that educators who work with parents "...understand their learners better." Moreover, Mncube (2009) asserts that parents who are involved develop a greater appreciation of their role.

Educators indicated that parents who visited the schools to check their children's progress became cognisant of the challenges their children experienced. They engaged in discussions with educators on challenges learners experienced and together they decided on how best to support the learner. When educators guided the parents on how to provide support, they were able to support their children. These parents developed self-confidence and provided valuable support to their children.

A grandparent from Thuthuka Primary School revealed how she helped her grandchildren master multiplication tables, addition, subtraction, division and multiplication by engaging them in an oral question-and-answer mental quiz. She explained:

I often engage my grandchildren in an oral quiz involving tables or the four basic operations and reward correct answers with sweets or a biscuit. What interests me, is when they cannot answer orally they work it out on paper and try to come up with the answer within the shortest time possible. I control the time so I always allow extra time for them to come up with the correct answers. They have improved tremendously.

According to the learners, they understood their schoolwork better when they received support from their parents. They indicated that they put in the extra effort when their parents provided support as they did not want to disappoint them.

Learners indicated that, when their parents explained certain operations or concepts, they grasped and understood the work better. Parents indicated that they took on extra responsibilities in the home in an effort to allow learners to spend more time on their schoolwork. Other parents relieved their children from tasks such as caring for family livestock, going to the forest for firewood or fetching water from streams or rivers. Some parents indicated that they sat up till late with their children when they did their schoolwork. During the winter season they provided the fire-wood to keep them warm while they did their homework.

According to Middlewood *et al.* (2005, p. 11), "...parental involvement and support makes [sic] a significant impact on learner progress and achievement." In the same vein, Calitz (2002) advises that educators should develop a positive attitude towards parents, incorporate their ideas and, when necessary, make them assist with specific tasks. According to Allan and Martin (1992), it is evident that when educators and parents improve the quality of their relationship and make it part of school practice, parents in disadvantaged communities increase their interaction with their children at home and feel more positive about their abilities to help their children. In addition, parents have a better understanding of what is happening in school and they develop a feeling of empowerment.

However, it emerged that while parents were willing to support the schools in various activities, some parents seldom found time to do so due to constraining factors. In the main, economic factors posed the greatest challenge to parents. They spent most of their time eking out a living to provide for their families, striving to get through the day. Parents were trapped in the survival mode and barely had time to think through the challenges schools experienced. Rural parents inherited poor schools where a few educators are employed with very limited or no resources. According to Mathonsi (2004), schools are struggling with poor resources and the absence of a culture of teaching and learning. School communities who are willing to make a contribution are themselves victims of a poor education, unemployment and general poverty.

I concur with Mathonsi's (2004) view, as I found that although some renovation had commenced at Siphelele Primary School, all three schools buildings were in need of repair and the establishment of recreational facilities. The buildings were old and needed refurbishment. Although the schools were electrified, the schools used the card system which restricted the use of electricity. Generally, the lack of funds often meant that the schools were without electricity for days.

The schools where I conducted the study had dysfunctional photocopying machines. Where machines were functional, they either had no toner or duplicating paper. There were no school telephones which increased the expenses for educators as they used their personal mobile phones to attend to school matters. There were no library books or magazines and teaching was based on the chalk-and-talk methodology. Chalkboards were faded and work written on them was blurred and difficult to decipher.

At Thuthuka Primary School for example, there were no sports fields. Learners improvised by clearing make-do patches where they played soccer, netball and indigenous games. These 'sports fields' had stones and potholes and were covered with wire grass. Goal posts had been erected by learners using crooked wattle poles and the crossbars posed a danger to the learners as they sagged very low. Siphelele Primary School had a decent sized soccer field. It was however badly slanted, had crooked goal posts, was covered in shrubs and wire grass and was poorly maintained. A massive rock stood in the middle of the field at Siyaphila Primary School. It was

however, interesting to note how learners navigated their way around the rock in a high tension must win soccer match I witnessed.

Another factor that was critical was that, although it is desirable that parents are involved in their children's education, literacy and numeracy levels among parents proved to be a major stumbling block. Some parents admitted that they knew very little about work done at school as they had received very little schooling. A learner at Siphelile Primary School painfully explained how she battled with her schoolwork because her grandmother had never been to school and was partially blind.

According to the parents, the ABET programme that had been intended to empower them never got off the ground. Planned school empowerment programmes were held at awkward times which meant that they were not able to attend. Moreover, some parents used illiteracy as an excuse to evade empowerment programmes.

Educators were unhappy that parents did not respond when they invited them to the school with the intention of empowering them. Some educators accused parents of abdicating their responsibilities. However, according to Epstein *et al.* (1997, p. 121), ‘...research illustrates that when parental involvement is viewed broadly, it is possible to involve virtually all parents in the education of their children, including parents of low income status and those who are illiterate or have a very limited proficiency in English.’

I concur with Epstein's finding because I discovered that while the SGB chairperson of Thuthuka Primary School could not read or write, he had a deep desire to have the learners at the school receive a quality education. While he was mindful of his ‘handicap’, his vision of a successful school permeated throughout our discussions. The belief that all learners had the potential to succeed drove him to work tirelessly to provide in the school’s needs. The majority of the parents at Siyaphila Primary School had received very little schooling, yet the school enjoyed many successes driven by their desire to provide the best education possible for their children. The school was progressive and the principal attributed the successes the school enjoyed to parental support.

It was disconcerting that some educators teaching in the intermediate phase were themselves not fluent in the English language, which is the language of instruction. Unfortunately, it is a fact that many learners progress to high school without having mastered spoken and written English and therefore find it difficult to cope in English medium schools. Some learners repeat grades at high school simply because their language proficiency in the language of instruction – English – is poor.

A matter of grave concern was that the schools I visited were not effectively monitored by education officials. When principals attended meetings or workshops, much teaching time was lost as the schools could not adhere to the time-tables as there were no additional teachers to oversee the classes taught by the principal. Much teaching and learning time was lost when schools started late or extended school breaks for various reasons. This left parents disgruntled and many of them chose to remove their children and enrol them at schools in Ixopo.

8.4.3 Parents supported schools' extra-mural and co-curricular programmes

The interviewees indicated that some progress had been achieved with regard to acknowledgement of traditional and cultural practices. Parents expressed a concern that learners who attended ex-model C schools strayed from their cultural practices and frowned on certain cultural activities. They expressed a concern that their children pressured them into enrolling them into former Model C schools, claiming that these schools provided a better education. While some parents succumbed and enrolled their children into the previously advantaged schools, many parents remained resolute and enrolled their children in local schools.

Parents complained that those parents who removed their children promoted learner migration which had a detrimental effect on the functionality of rural schools. They believed that if all parents sent their kids to the local schools, pooled their skills and supported the schools, much improvement would occur in rural education. Increased enrolment figures would also warrant the employment of extra educators. Moreover, an increase in the enrolment of learners would mean that schools could qualify for the appointment of support staff. In the final analysis it was clear that the provision of a quality education at the rural schools would become a reality on condition that everyone did their share towards this end.

Responses revealed that parents of rural primary schools preferred to support learners in activities such as co-curricular and extramural programmes. The parents of rural learners attached much value to traditional and cultural practices. They indicated that they supported the schools because they were provided with the opportunity of instilling cultural values and practices early in their children's development. According to Bush and Carington (2008, p. 166), "...keeping an eye on the future, and doing what needs to be done to prepare our children for that, is a primary responsibility of parents today." According to the learners interviewed the support their parents provided enabled them to excel in a variety of cultural competitions for which they won many accolades.

The SGB chairperson at Siyaphila Primary School indicated that the school had a history of success when they participated in competitions. She attributed the school's successes to the untiring support parents provided. She commended parents who worked unrelentingly, training and skilling learners in a variety of activities. The support parents provided saw the learners competing at national level and attaining position three in a garden competition. They also competed at provincial level and attained position two in a gospel music category. The SGB chairperson at Thuthka Primary School confirmed this when she said:

When our educators call on us to assist by training learners in preparation for up-coming competitions, we willingly give of our time because we want our children to know that we want them to succeed. When we are present, our children are motivated to do well.

In my experience, when learners see their parents showing an interest in what they do they strive to do well and put in the extra effort. When parents are in attendance, learners try even harder and often surpass themselves. Parents are usually surprised when they witness what their children are capable of doing. The school offices displayed a variety of accolades such as trophies and certificates that bore testimony to the successes the schools enjoyed with the support parents provided.

The interviewees at Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools were appreciative of the support parents provided when they played a leading role in hosting end-of-year functions. This function was rated as the most enjoyable way for the school to round off the year. It was usually a glitzy affair where parents and learners dressed in their best outfits. Amid all the glitz and glamour which made for tantalizing entertainment, the highlight of the day was the presentation of awards. While learners were applauded for the awards they received for their achievements in extramural activities, some learners quietly waited for their academic awards. According to the educators, learners who were supported by their parents with their schoolwork won most of these awards.

8.5 Outcomes of parental support

Where parents supported the schools, learner achievement was enhanced in line with Epstein's typology of overlapping spheres of influence between parents and educators. According to the educators, learner attendance and performance improved with the school feeding programme. Learners gave more attention to their schoolwork, were more vibrant, concentrated in class and absenteeism due to ill health was reduced. When parents supplemented the provision of meals by cooking for the learners, the benefits were enhanced. Children were encouraged to participate in a variety of planned school activities and a jolly atmosphere among learners prevailed at the school.

A community member from Siphelile Primary School dedicated time to training learners in sport, crafts and cultural activities. Three of the learners were selected for soccer and one of them competed at provincial level. He was awarded Provincial colours where he received a tracksuit and a sport bag with an assortment of sport paraphernalia. This was a mammoth achievement as such accomplishments seem possible only where learners are exposed to appropriate facilities and coaches with the relevant expertise.

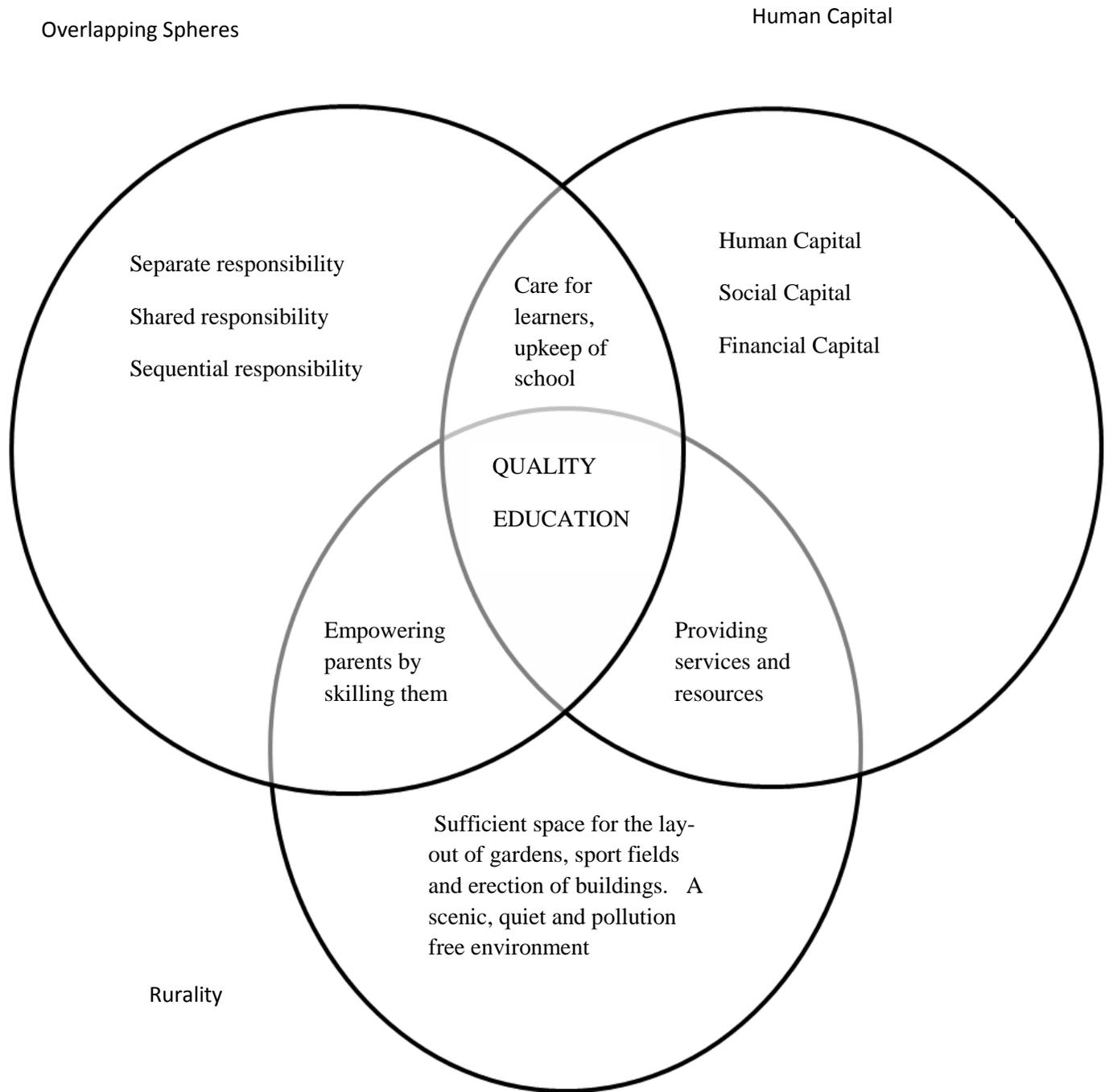
Learners from the three schools who participated in competitions recorded many successes which they attributed to the support parents provided. They were full of praise for their parents and thanked them for imparting their expertise and for willingly giving of their time to train them. They acquired many accolades in academic, social and cultural competitions Siyaphila

Primary School, for example, travelled to Gauteng Province where, through the support parents provided, they won a National award in the Green School Competition.

Learners interviewed from the three schools who indicated that they received support from their parents appeared advantaged. They were more confident and conversed more freely in English. The work in their books was neatly presented and their homework was done regularly. Some of the learners participated in Mathematics and Science Olympiads and won prizes. Siyaphila Primary for example, where more learners indicated that they received support from their parents produced a better result in the Annual National Assessment (ANA). Further, learners interviewed who received support parents scored higher percentages in Zulu, English and Mathematics in the September 2011 Examination. According to the learners, these were the learners areas in which parents were better able to support the learners.

It is my contention that if school management takes the initiative, and if responsibilities are subdivided and available resources are pooled, much could be achieved in providing a quality education in a rural setting. My experience is that the spacious and pollution free rural environment provides an ideal backdrop for effective teaching and learning. The following diagram illustrates how this challenge could be realised:

Figure 8.1: Illustration of possible outcomes when rural parents and schools worked collaboratively



8.6 Challenges that hampered parental involvement

Despite the number of achievements learners enjoyed, there were challenges that prevented parents from providing support to the schools.

8.6.1 Parents had limited knowledge of curricular issues and time to provide support

It emerged from the responses that most learners were in the care of female parents / grandparents as stated before who did not have the time to support the schools, while others knew very little about the work learners did at school. Many parents were unable to support their children, especially with the new curricula which require significant academic expertise to provide support.

This is in line with the finding by Middlewood *et al.* (2007 p. 20) who state: "One of the factors that hinder parental involvement in schools has been the parents' fear that they do not know enough of what is being taught in their children's classes to enable them to help them at home." It is for this reason, in the main, that parental support focused more on co-curricular and extramural activities than on academic matters.

Most of the learners interviewed lived in female-headed households or households which were hard hit by poverty. Learners indicated that many of them were cared for by grandparents who were directly dependent on their pensions to sustain the whole family. Most grandparents were either illiterate, aged, had poor eye-sight or could not walk long distances which limited the chances of them supporting the schools. It was very difficult if not impossible for these parents to provide support.

All the parents interviewed were females; most of them were single parents who lived on a stretched budget. In their responses parents indicated that they had to take care of the household as male parents often left for the cities to find employment. These parents often sought help from the schools for assistance with the registration of their children and the acquisition of social grants. The schools, together with parents who were in the know, supported parents by providing information on the social services available, which is a process also recommended by Berger (1987, p. 85). Through the support of skilled and knowledgeable parents, other parents were able to register learners and access grants and other social services.

According to the female parents from Sipehelele Primary School, they were bread winners and had to work to provide a living. They indicated that they were assisted by grandparents who came to the rescue when all efforts failed. One grandparent explained how she took care of her daughter's children while she worked to contribute to the family's meagre earnings.

Some parents indicated that there were instances when they experienced so much poverty that they allowed their children to leave school prematurely. In this regard, Nkabinde (1997, p. 33) argues that many learners from rural settlements come from socio-economically deprived backgrounds where educational support services are limited. Some learners live in poverty and experience trauma as domestic responsibilities are placed on young children by their families. Some parents cannot afford employing people to take care of new born babies, so parents stayed at home to tend to newly born babies and therefore they cannot afford to assist the school.

8.6.2 Inadequate resources affected the schools' functionality negatively

Rural parents inherited dilapidated schools. In spite of the 'hype' about rural development and education being the government's priority, very little or no change had occurred at Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools. Moreover, very little development had taken place at Sipehelele Primary School. The school buildings were in need of overall renovation and, in some areas, complete reconstruction. They had inadequate facilities and limited resources. Schools were without running water and depended on tank water as municipal water stands often ran dry. The poor condition of the gravel roads led to a lack of social services reaching rural areas as schools were located far from the nearby villages. To expect parents to supplement shortages in equipment and the likes was asking too much.

The absence of specialist educators, as was the case at these rural schools, posed a serious challenge. It is a known fact that was corroborated by the educator respondents that qualified educators are not keen to work in rural areas which means rural schools have to hire unqualified educators. Learners at Thuthuka Primary School and Sipehelele Primary School were not happy that they were compelled to remain at these schools while their friends attended schools in Ixopo. In their responses, learners constantly referred to their preference for schools in Ixopo citing

better facilities and smaller classes, and the possibility to learn English quicker, as their friends did.

The school building at Thuthuka Primary School was old and in need of painting. It consisted of a small office, a store room and several classrooms. There was, however, no staff room and toilets were inadequate. Siyaphila Primary School was an old church building which was also in need of much attention. There were a few aged computers that had collected dust. A massive rock stood in the middle of the sports field. Learners had to make do by clearing little patches to play games.

At Siphelele Primary School the principal's classroom was used for administrative duties and as a store room for school property. All school related responsibilities were conducted from this room. A newly built school block had developed deep cracks in the walls. Deep cracks also ran on the floor between the foundation and the walls. The playground had tufts of tall wire grass with no goal posts marking the goal ends of the 'soccer field'.

None of the schools had libraries or rooms where school administrative duties could be conducted. The kitchens were poorly constructed with limited or no kitchen utensils. The kitchen at Siphelele Primary School was located in an old classroom. It was also used as a storeroom which posed a health risk. A pit toilet system was used by all the schools. This could be unhygienic for big groups if not properly cleaned and maintained. The conditions found at the schools were similar to those described by Samuel (2005, p. 115) in the Eastern Cape. The homes in rural areas had no electricity or running water. Therefore, the possibility of attracting well qualified educators was greatly reduced due to the lack of suitable accommodation.

It was found that the schools under study were staffed by, *inter alia*, displaced educators, educators coming out of retirement, or unqualified educators. However, many educators commuted to school from the town of Ixopo. This resulted in high costs in rent and travelling expenses in some instances. There was a high rate of wear and tear on vehicles. The educators' commitment to the school and its community was reduced because of the limited time that commuting educators spent at the schools and within the communities. Extramural activities

suffered. The long distances, poor roads and inclement weather impacted on attendance and commitment.

The limited number of educators employed at rural primary schools resulted in multi-grade teaching which was done by unqualified or under-qualified educators who had had no training. Expecting them to teach eighteen learning areas with the necessary preparation schedules and work programmes was asking too much of educators. Samuel (2005, p. 94) describes a similar situation in the Eastern Cape when he says, “Some educators are not well qualified and they are a problem to learners who are willing to learn.”

Further, Samuel (2005, p. 94-95) asserts that “...due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the educators, learners are forced to study what they don’t like or want and in which they are not interested. We have teachers who hate teaching but they are teaching, the reason being that they will be earning a salary at the end of the month.” Where learners are being taught what they have the least interest in, the possibility exists that they will show very little interest. The pass-one-pass-all policy where educators were coerced into allowing all learners to progress compromised education as learners knew that they would pass whether they worked hard or not. Educators complained that this would cause learners to struggle throughout their schooling career.

The rural schools had comparatively few learners which greatly reduced the number of educators employed at these schools. The Post Provisioning Norms (PPN) reduced the number of educators employed at Siyaphila, Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools to 6, 5 and 4 educators respectively. Parents were unhappy that educators had to teach all learning areas in multi-grade classes which disadvantaged their children. They indicated that while they saw the need to support the school, the government should ensure that a different PPN applied to schools which were disadvantaged by virtue of being rural. They argued that all rural schools should be allocated an educator for every class. The SGB chairman at Sipehelele Primary School said:

Our educators teach all the learning areas in multi-grade classes, a fact which disadvantages especially slower learners. The government should employ a different PPN in rural schools which are deprived of social services. Rural

schools have to deal with many short-falls, unqualified or under-qualified educators, huge workloads, no specialist educators, shortage of support staff and inadequate resources.

The lack of qualified educators, congested curricula, large multi-grade classes, limited resources, and a lack of libraries were found to be common challenges at the rural schools. While a few computers had been donated to Siyaphila Primary School, they were not put to effective use as the school was without the services of an educator to teach computer literacy. Schools sought help for learners with learning deficiencies with no success. Many dropped out of school.

The schools were further disadvantaged by being Section 20 schools where the procurement of materials and resources was restricted. This meant the schools were unable to exercise the right to purchase goods and services at reduced prices. The schools often paid high prices for materials that were not of a very good quality. Goods were sometimes delivered late which greatly disrupted the teaching and learning process.

In my experience as a manager of a rural primary school, the deflection of physical resources to urban areas has resulted in rural school buildings and facilities falling deeper into disrepair and hence the school communities have fallen into despair. In the Ixopo region, for example, more schools were built yet the schools are in dire need of renovation. Many learners are commuting long distances from rural areas to urban areas in search of a better education. This has plunged parents into greater expenses and deeper into poverty.

8.6.3 Lack of an inviting climate at schools discouraged parental involvement

I believe the schools paid very little attention to providing an atmosphere that made parents feel invited and welcome at the schools. This could explain why parents did not frequent the schools to provide support. While the schools tried to make me feel welcome, I believe this was done primarily because I was a colleague. I noted that some parents who visited Thuthuka and Sipehelele Primary Schools were business-like. They came in, did business with the principal and left. According to Berger (1987, p. 98), “although schools have an obvious climate, one must always consider that parents also bring their attitudes into the home-school relationship. Parents come from diverse backgrounds. Where their past school experiences were pleasant and

successful, they were likely to enjoy visiting the school again. Debilitating experiences with schools, feelings of inadequacy, poor achievement by children and the pressures of the present can cause some parents to stay away from the school.”

Suzuki (2002) reports that the distance between ordinary parents and school leaders in the education system in Uganda caused hindrances to the participation of parents in school matters. Educators tended to manipulate the work of the School Management Committee (SMC), particularly in rural areas where members of the SMC were often semi-literate.

Chikoko (2006) asserts that in Zimbabwe, the parent governors’ level of formal schooling is important to their ability to perform school governance functions. His finding that parents in rural areas have low levels of education also applies to the South African context as most people with a higher average level of education are found mainly in urban areas. Another factor that impacts negatively on the provision of quality education in Zimbabwe, which is the case in many rural primary schools in South Africa as well, is that parents do not attend open days to discuss curricula issues and their children’s progress (Chikoko, 2006). Responses from interviewees indicated that there were times when parents were preoccupied with their own pertinent matters, which was interpreted as parents abdicating their roles in the school-home 'partnership'. This strained the relationship between parents and the school.

The parents who were interviewed expressed a strong need to support the educators teaching at the schools. They acknowledged that their support was crucial if any success was to be achieved with the provision of quality education. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 11) assert that parents and educators, schools and families, exercise an influence on education and that “...each has their own contribution to make.” According to Berger (1987), parents had always reared and educated their children in a context of informal education until it was supplemented by formal education. Parents are the one continuous force in the education of their children from birth to adulthood.

According to van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 34), “...nowhere is school support of families more needed than in South Africa. Parents are a child’s first and most important educator. Most families, primarily Black families, live in disadvantaged conditions and struggle to satisfy their

basic needs.” It was evident from the responses from parents that they were aware of their respective schools’ needs. They acknowledged that the schools were under-resourced with regard to personnel and in need of parental support. However, parents indicated that finding the time to attend empowerment programmes in order to develop skills to assist their children posed the greatest challenge.

According to the parents at Thuthuka and Siyaphila Primary Schools, they received notes inviting them to the school to discuss challenges their children encountered. Educators indicated that they were impressed by the cooperation and enthusiasm some of the parents offered. They confirmed that when parents responded and received guidance on how to assist their children, a marked improvement occurred in the learners’ progress. The learners also alluded to the fact that when the parents assisted them, they understood the work better and produced better results. Atkins, Bastiani and Goode (1988, p. 12) believe that there is a growing perception “...of and support for the view that when professionals and parents share some of the same goals and work together in a partnership, things can really begin to happen.”

To be successful in accommodating parents as partners in the educative process, the principal has to establish an environment at the school where parents feel welcome. Grobler and Schalekamp (1996, p. 12) believe that “...people perform better and work more willingly at something if they are welcomed and given a say than when they are merely ordered to do something.” They advise that principals should have an open-door policy with an invitational approach. Such a policy will motivate parents to come to school, take part in school activities and enquire about learners’ progress. This would foster harmony between the parents and educators so that parent participation does not only exist in policy documents, but becomes a reality in practice.

A lack of education among parents creates a situation where parents lack confidence which results in parents being reluctant to come to the school. According to Chikoko (2006, p. 254), “legislation dictates that parents in Zimbabwe be involved in their children’s education, yet little is done to empower this.” He asserts that with very little capacity building taking place, parents in Zimbabwe are “...legally empowered but practically disempowered”. This appears to be the case in South African rural schools as well.

Responses revealed that some illiterate parents as well as parents who had had unpleasant experiences with the schools developed apathetic attitudes towards school activities. They did not respond to invitations to visit the school for whatever reason. Parents at Siphelile Primary complained that certain parents sat around and made damning comments regarding the school's functionality. I believe that these parents could be persuaded to change their mindset through dialogue and coerced into supporting the schools instead. Sheldon (2010) believes that parents' perception that they can help their child/children succeed in school will depend on the opportunities for involvement provided by the school and its educators.

I believe the challenge for all concerned with rural education is finding a suitable time to have all concerned meet to formulate and implement strategies that would foster the delivery of quality education. Challenges such as evening meetings posing a safety risk and care for children should be factored into planning. Wyk and Lemmer (2009) posit that schools often cite poor attendance by parents at activities as a reason for discouragement. Poor attendance at events aimed at improving parent-school relationships and parent skills may not necessarily be due to a lack of interest, but parents may have no one to supervise their children at home or they may have no transport. Allowance should be made for working mothers, parents who work shifts and other factors such as crime in the area which make travelling at night risky.

8.7 Conclusion

Parents from the rural schools under study clearly showed a genuine willingness to support their schools in ensuring the provision of a better education for their children. However, rural schools are in most need of additional support in comparison to urban schools as they are without the facilities and services urban schools enjoy. Multi-grade classes need the services of well trained and skilled educators. Illiteracy, unemployment and poverty are rife. The lack of social services exacerbates the plight of rural parents. Many parents are so preoccupied with trying to provide a livelihood for their families that they are unable to support the school. Unless the challenges of rural schools are addressed urgently, rural education will continue to suffer.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided elucidation of the trends and patterns that emanated from the case studies conducted at the three rural schools under study. This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the literature review and the empirical investigation. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are provided based on the findings. The findings highlight the roles some parents played in the schools as well the challenges other parents experienced which hindered them from providing support to the schools. The recommendations provide guidelines to parents, the government, social partners and stakeholders on roles they can play to enable parents to participate in the school their children attend in a way that would enhance learner achievement.

9.2 Summary of findings

One of the key objectives of the present government is the provision of quality education to all South African learners. Likewise, all parents and learners who participated in the study indicated that they wanted the best education possible. However, the provision of education is not taking place holistically in the rural context as parents are unable to provide support at the expected level for this ideal to become a reality. The lack of parental support in rural primary schools has contributed to inhibiting the provision of quality education.

While SASA directs that parents play a prominent role in the education of their children, it emerged that when schools requested parents' support or invited parents to meetings, only a small group of the same parents usually responded. Educators and learners often had to perform tasks during teaching and learning time that could have been best carried out by parents. Educators and learners spent less time with the teaching and learning programme when they had to take care of the schools' upkeep.

Further, parents' abilities, educational levels, skills and interest in providing support differed vastly, which influenced the level of support they provided. Parents provided support in essential areas, but were unable to provide the desired academic and technical support. However, where parents provided support, a positive impact on learner performance occurred.

9.2.1 Parents acknowledged that they needed to provide support

Most parents acknowledged that they needed to support the school to ensure the provision of quality education for their children. Parents were aware that they needed to support the schools if they were to function with some degree of effectiveness. They acknowledged that their schools were under-staffed and that, if they expected educators to perform their educational responsibilities with some success, their support was essential.

They were in agreement that they needed to take care of the schools' upkeep and provide on-going support to allow educators more time to teach. They were in agreement that illiterate parents could provide valuable support by telling stories, creating a warm environment and ensuring that their children do their schoolwork. Hess (1992) argues that without cooperation between the parent and educator, the child cannot be sufficiently educated.

9.2.2 A core group of parents provided support at schools

The findings revealed that a few parents provided invaluable support when they became involved in a variety of activities. However, it emerged that at all the schools there was only a core group of parents who frequented the schools to provide support. There were parents who took care of their children's welfare, admitted them to schools and ensured that they attended school regularly.

Some parents supported the schools' educational programme while others took care of the maintenance of the school. However, most parents preferred to provide support by investing in extramural programmes. Decker, Decker and Brown (2007) deem it essential for stakeholders to invest in time, personnel, materials and facilities to facilitate parent-school interaction. They maintain that when learners receive support from their parents, the community and the school, they are motivated to perform at their best.

Parents at Siyaphila Primary School, for example, worked closely with educators and provided much support. There were parents who made routine visits or responded when the school asked for support. Where parents willingly provided support, the schools' functionality improved which impacted positively on learner performance. When parents and educators have a close working relationship, the school can be transformed into a dynamic centre of learning, as alluded to by Sterling and Davidoff (2000).

9.2.3 Learners who received parental support excelled

Where parents supported their children with their homework, learners progressed academically. Such learners spent more time on their schoolwork, cooperated with educators and did their homework regularly. This is in line with Squelch and Lemmer (1994) who assert that the benefits of parental involvement include improved school performance.

When parents trained learners in extramural activities and accompanied them when they went out to compete in competitions, learners were motivated to perform at their best. The learners at all the schools performed well and some won sporting and cultural competition. Siyaphila Primary School displayed an assortment of accolades while a few were displayed at Thuthuka and Siphelele Primary Schools. According to the educators, learners who had been afforded the opportunity to participate in extramural and co-curricular activities were more confident and took on leadership responsibilities such as choir leaders, team captains and prefects.

9.2.4 Some parents were unable to support the schools

There were learners who did not enjoy the benefit of parents supporting them with their schoolwork. Some learners were orphans who lived with aged and sickly grandparents and they received very little or no support. Some learners headed homes where they performed household chores and took care of siblings while parents went out to work to provide a livelihood. Some learners took care of the family's livestock which meant they often came late or stayed away from school.

The high rate of poverty, social inequalities, and the inadequate school facilities exacerbated the plight of rural dwellers to a point where some parents attached little value to the importance of education. When they saw a need, they removed their children from school.

9.2.5 Communication between the school and parents was inadequate

Communication with the parents was insufficient and insignificant at times, which contributed to the lack of parental involvement. In many instances the communication between the school and parents was superficial rather than profound which deprived the schools of significant resources to facilitate the provision of quality education. When the schools failed to communicate effectively, parents withdrew from school activities and left education to the educators. As a result, parents seldom knew what was happening at the schools. Further, communication was mainly directed at parents from the school while very little communication was forthcoming from parents. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2004) suggest that communication should be part of a co-equal relationship where the parents' voice is heard and not compromised.

9.2.6 Some parents were unwilling to provide support

As the primary educators of their children, some parents took care of the well-being and initial education of their children. However, after some parents had enrolled their children at a school, their involvement was 'withdrawn'. Furthermore, a few parents were apathetic and some voiced negative attitudes towards and disapproval of the schools. They never supported school activities or their children's education. Incidents were reported where parents demanded payment for minor services rendered to the school. Michael (2012) cites apathy as a barrier to parental involvement as parents do not seem to feel the need to get involved in their children's education. The lack of cooperation from such parents de-motivated committed educators and parents to the extent where parents who could afford the costs enrolled their children at urban schools.

9.2.7 Very little power-sharing occurred among stakeholders

A significant observation was that very little power sharing occurred; this means that limited authority belonged to parents. The research found that most decisions were taken by principals

and school teachers with very little or no input from parents. While it became clear that the parents often failed to avail themselves at times when decisions had to be taken, and other parents chose not to be involved in school matters, schools went ahead and took decisions at meetings which, at times, did not constitute a forum for parents. This means that schools functioned with very little or no parent representation. This indicated that schools were still unwilling to relinquish or share their power and authority with parents. This 'isolation' of parents contributed to parents staying away from school activities as very little was done to encourage parents to attend meetings where crucial decisions were taken.

9.2.8 Parents spent most of their time eking out a living to provide for their children

Some parents were seasonally employed as farm labourers or worked in the forests for long hours and earned low wages. Male parents left their homes to find employment in the cities. Single parents went to eke out a living as domestic workers or street vendors to sustain their families. Children were left in the care of aged and sickly grandparents or older children who had to care for siblings and take care of the household. These parents seldom found time to support their children's education. According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2007), if both parents work outside the home it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to attend scheduled meetings or school functions.

9.3 Conclusions

The research found that where parents provided support, learner achievement was enhanced in a variety of areas.

9.3.1 Parental support improved over-all learner performance

When parents provided human capital by helping learners with their schoolwork and supporting the schools, learners were cared for by two sets of adults who had learners' best interests at heart. When parents supported the upkeep of the schools, they allowed more time for the schools' teaching and learning programme. Epstein (1997) advises that it is possible to involve virtually all parents in their children's education, even the illiterate ones or those who have a low proficiency in English.

Parents provided social and financial capital when they trained learners, and transported and/or accompanied them on trips. By sharing in their children's excitement, they spurred them on to perform beyond themselves which resulted in them winning many competitions. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009, p. 44) posit that "...children's development is related to the quality and quantity of resources parents provide."

Where parents are aware of the schools' aims and are given the opportunity to contribute to the school activities and decision making processes, they get to know the educators; they provide support and are less critical of the school. Decker, Decker and Brown (2007) argue that, by working collaboratively and in a coordinated and cooperative manner with educators, all parents could be guided to assist learners with their schoolwork.

Meier *et al.* (2006, p. 133) believe that parents directly or indirectly help to shape their children's value system, orientation towards learning, and view of the world they live in. The study found that parents who provided support worked cooperatively with educators and supported learners with their schoolwork. According to the parents, when they gave time to support their children and they performed well, they were encouraged to put in the extra effort. Other parents reported that when educators acknowledged them for the support and welcomed their inputs, they were motivated to do more for the schools.

The educator interviewed at Siyaphila Primary School expressed appreciation for the support parents provided and the healthy working relationship that prevailed between parents and educators. She believed by working closely and sharing responsibilities made parents believe they had a role to play which, which in turn, helped them gain self-confidence. This is in line with Sheldon (2010) who believes that when parents get involved, children's schooling is influenced by their acquisition of knowledge, skills and an increased sense of confidence that they can succeed.

9.3.2 Parental support impacted on school and family relations

Parents performed auxiliary roles (Lemmer, 2009) where groups of parents driven by two or three individuals with a passion for a particular issue motivated them to support the schools. At times parents benefitted from the support they provided to the schools. The parents at Siyaphila

Primary School, for example, indicated that they were encouraged by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal who encouraged communities to establish vegetable gardens at their homes by initiating the slogan: “One home; one garden.”

Educators and learners were appreciative of parents who supported the schools by volunteering their services. Parents’ involvement in volunteer work allowed them to gain skills and abilities in activities such as beadwork and gardening. This created an awareness of parents’ skills and areas where parents could provide support. Where parents provided support and performed menial tasks at the school, educators were able to give more attention to the teaching and learning programme. This finding was corroborated by Mncube (2009, p. 83) who states: “Encouraging parents to participate in school activities and affording them more power and responsibility would result in a better functioning school.”

9.3.4 Parental involvement enhanced learner achievement at school

When parents registered their children at the schools, they were eligible to receive social grants should they qualify for financial support. This eased the financial pressure on grandparents and caregivers some of whom themselves survived on pensions. Parents were often called upon to provide financial capital to enable learners to participate in Olympiads, educational excursions. Learners who were in possession of birth certificates were able participate at the highest level in sporting activities organised by the Department of Education.

According to the 2011 ANA results and the performance of learners who received support from their parents in the September 2011 Examination results, learners who received support from their parents progressed academically. During the interviews, learners claimed that they understood the work better when they were given home tuition and support by their parents, which helped them do well in class work and tests. They did their homework regularly and produced projects with relevant information from those I observed.

Parents taught learners skills in creative art where they produced traditional regalia and home crafts. It was interesting to note how some learners made grass mats during breaks. Learners also spoke appreciatively how they performed beyond themselves when their parents were in attendance at functions. Learners indicated that they worked hard towards being recipients on

Awards Day, something every parent looked forward to. In this regard Henderson (1987, p. 4) posits that, "... when parents show an interest in their children's education and have high expectations regarding their performance, they promote attitudes that are the key to achievement."

9.3.5 Learners who did not receive support from their parents struggled at school

The quality of education offered at rural schools is generally poor, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister of Education of KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Sanzo Mchunu, in a report in the *Natal Witness* (2012). While the minister's comment cites the lack of 'quality' teachers as the root cause of the challenges rural schools encounter, I believe socio-economic factors are the major contributors to the status quo.

Lemmer (2010, p. 160) states that although research findings have indicated that both parents and educators are aware of the importance of parental involvement and that the programmes in this regard should be a reality in all schools, the fact of the matter is that parental involvement in schools is minimal. Michael (2012) concurs and argues that the low level of meaningful contact between the school and Black parents in particular has led some educators and principals to conclude that such parents lack sufficient interest in their children's education. However, my interaction with parents revealed the opposite. All parents interviewed claimed that they wanted the best education for their children. This was evident when all parents gave a resounding, YES! to the question: Is there a need to involve parents in the education of their children?

My finding is in line with that of Lemmer (2006), namely that parental involvement is lacking in rural primary school. However, the data I retrieved clearly indicated that parents were willing to participate in the life of the school attended by their children. A challenge I found to be a stumbling block was mindsets such as, Education should be left to teachers; We do not know what to do, therefore we cannot help; We are poor we have nothing to offer, others, What is the sense of going to school when people who have matriculated join the unemployed. Yes, this might well be the case, however, I believe if each school made it known (communicated) the positive roles some parents, including the lowly educated unskilled parents from within the

community played at the schools, without raising a perception of favouritism, and what their support meant to the school, some mindsets would change.

It is my contention that an integrated community-school relation, which overlaps to incorporate people of all educational levels, religions, retired civil servants and others, surrounding farmers and business people would assist in convincing all parents that they have a role to play in the life of the school attended by their children. If all would commit to serving the school in some way, the possibility of laying a foundation with the aim of producing future citizens who will serve the community and country diligently, would be a reality.

9.4 Recommendations

The study has revealed that where parents provided support, learner achievement was enhanced. Learners experienced success in sporting and cultural activities where parents invested time in training them and accompanied them when they went out to compete. Learners interviewed from Siyaphila Primary School who received support from their parents with their schoolwork scored higher percentages in the September Examinations of 2011 mathematics and literacy as illustrated in table 7.1.

However, there were instances reported where parents were unable to provide support, and that had a negative impact on learner achievement. When parents were not able to cook or clean the school, learners were forced to perform these chores during school hours which deprived them of learning time. Some parents were unable to provide financial support towards travelling costs to planned sporting and cultural competitions. When this happened selected learners were withdrawn from the travelling team which de-motivated them.

It is my contention therefore, that for any improvement in rural education to be realised, all parents need to come on board and play some role in the education of their children. I believe that schools need primary support in curricular matters and secondary support in extramural and co-curricular activities; however, the opposite has been the case in the schools investigated in this study. Based on the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

9.4.1 Parents in rural areas need to play a more active role in the life of the schools

All parents need to actively participate in supporting their children and the school in ways that they are able to, in school or out of school, to ensure that the school renders quality education to their children. Learning starts in the home. Henderson (1987, p. 4) states that when parents show an interest in their children's education and have high expectations regarding their performance, they promote attitudes that are the key to achievement. Parents could share their personal talents and expertise with learners and educators at school. Prinsloo (1996) asserts that "...parent participation in schools' activities is a method of ensuring effective control of the school system that will enable the translation of idealistic, abstract and dynamic objectives of democracy into something more concrete and realistic." Evidence from the research has indicated a need for a greater cooperative working relationship between parents and the school.

9.4.2 Schools should show appreciation to parents who provide support

Parental support should be nurtured by thanking parents both publicly and individually for valuable contributions made, as recommended by Clarke (2007). The school could acknowledge the support parents provide with notes of appreciation to maintain their interest and enthusiasm. If parents approve, mention of their support could be made at public gatherings to encourage other parents to play some role in their children's education. Parents who provided support could be award with tokens of appreciation at the end-of-year prize giving function to which they flock in great numbers. It is hoped that, by so doing, other parents will be motivated to come on board and support the schools in some way.

Further, schools should embark on recruiting and training programmes whereby they increase awareness among parents that they are welcome and valued at the school. Schools should plan parental involvement programmes in such a way that they accommodate all parents, including the illiterate and those who work out or late. Parents at Siyaphila Primary School, for example, participated in school activities over weekends to accommodate parents who worked out. This would also be the most opportune time to do minor renovations when parents with the skills come home to spend time with their families.

9.4.3 A collaborative working relationship among stakeholders should be cultivated

Schools should invest in developing a collaborative working relationship with parents to make them feel welcome and to enable them to participate meaningfully in the life of the school. It is essential that parents be fully involved in planning the school's activities so that they can make tangible contributions to the education of their children. Authors such as Berger (1987), Thomlinson (1991) and Mac Beath (2000) concur that for almost the entire history of the human race, the responsibility for education lay with the family.

Lemmer (2006) posits that "...collaborating with parents involves setting goals, finding solutions, implementing and evaluating shared goals as well as inspiring and maintaining trust between the home and the school." This is corroborated by Dekker and Lemmer (1996, p. 157) who state: "The demands made by society on the education of children necessitates co-operation between the partners in all fields." Parents and educators should engage in a true, honest, committed and cooperative partnership. Parents should not send their children to school and hope for the best; neither should educators see a parent's interest in a child's education as an intrusion. A successful partnership depends, among other things, on parents and teachers trusting one another, understanding one another's needs and aspirations and agreeing to work in unison.

However, a collaborative working relationship does not just happen. Educators need to be trained to cope with the involvement of parents and to embrace their support. The schools should orientate parents by making them feel welcome and assuring them that they have a role to play. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2007) believe that collaboration between the school and the parents increases the resources available to the school, thus helping individualise and enrich students' work.

According to van der Westhuizen (2003), education is likely to be more successful if educators view parents as potentially powerful partners in the community of learners. Efforts to involve parents in the life of the school and with their children's work should focus not only on sending information to parents, but also on fostering interaction with them. Interaction implies an equal and an ongoing relationship in which the home and the school share information and consciously collaborate to enrich learners' learning.

9.4.4 Effective communication between parents and schools should be established

Schools should devise a mechanism of communicating effectively with parents. Ngcongco (1995, p. 28) states, “Depending on how it is handled, communication can contribute to the effectiveness of the school system and the facilitation of the school’s aims. If what is communicated reaches all and is understood by all, it will help to ensure that various duties are delegated appropriately and that everyone works harmoniously.” To ensure everyone is on board, a simple and most suitable way of communication is to be agreed upon.

Where letters to parents are to be delivered by learners, tear-off slips should be issued for parents to acknowledge having received such letters. Lemmer and van Wyk (2004) posit that it is the school’s responsibility to communicate regularly and coherently with parents about the school programme, curriculum and the learners’ development. Poorly educated parents who may not easily grasp assessment strategies or who may have a limited proficiency in the language of teaching and learning should not be excluded. It is crucial for educators to provide parents with the most relevant information at the most suitable time and to solicit feedback.

Schools should ensure that communication with parents is not always to ask for support or when problems arise; it should be on-going. An environment should be created where parents feel free to express their thoughts and views and explore and generate new ideas. Informal parent-educator gatherings or one-on-one parent and teacher get-togethers will do much to ensure that parents’ voices are heard. “Schools need to embody the community’s aspirations for the future so that both parents and learners see the school as instrumental in the achievement of their life goal” (van der Westhuizen, 2003, p 24).

9.4.5 Collective decision making between parents and educators should prevail

According to Epstein *et al.* (1997), decision making means a process of partnership of shared views and action towards shared goals. It is not a power struggle between conflicting ideas. It is imperative that schools devise mechanisms to ensure that parents from all ethnic, social, economic and other groups participate in making decisions regarding their programmes and activities. Where parents are not part of decision making processes, they may feel excluded and not obliged to participate in school activities, while the opposite applies if all parents participate.

Further, decisions taken involving teaching and learning and related issues should be communicated to all the parents to ensure that they are aware of what the school aims to achieve.

“Parents who have been given a say in the decision making process will understand the aims, the nature and functioning of the school and will therefore assume ownership of the decision taken” (Pillay, 1998, p. 164). Parents will be less likely to criticise the teacher or the principal and more likely to contribute positively to the education of their children. The involvement of parents in the decision making process can lead to a sense of ownership and the belief in parents that their voices are heard of the school which can lead to increased support for their child/ren’s school.

I believe when parents are allowed to participate meaningfully in decision making and are invited to perform certain roles at the schools, things will start to happen. Parents who feel welcomed at schools and become familiar with school processes could develop confidence and make positive contributions to the schools’ functionality. Where collective decision making is part the schools’ policy, parents will take ownership of decisions taken and go the extra mile to ensure decisions are implemented.

9.4.6 The Department of Basic Education should provide adequate resources to all rural schools

While the Department of Basic Education is to be acknowledged for the improvement it has undertaken in improving facilities to schools and freeing parents of the burden of paying school fees, much more still has to be done to address the inequalities that exist with regard to rural education. The DBE should erect suitable school buildings with accommodation facilities for educators. This would allow educators to spend more time on the school premises and afford them the opportunity to get to know and work with parents.

While the Honourable President of South Africa, Jacob G. Zuma expressed the need to fast-track rural development as one of the five priorities, and more specifically, education, in the State of the Nation Addresses (2011), in reality very little change has been experienced in rural schools. This has compounded the feeling by rural communities of being neglected. I noted that while parents tried to upkeep the schools, the general condition of the schools remained very poor.

School buildings were old, fences had rusted away, the roofs leaked, and sports facilities were inadequate or did not exist.

I noted at one school that the DBE was putting up prefabricated structures. I believe this was not a viable option as the school is located in an area which experiences vicious sand, wind and hail storms which will threaten the life-span of such structures. The lack of decent housing to accommodate educators, an unreliable electricity supply and the absence of municipal water provision further discourage qualified educators from plying their trade in rural schools.

9.4.7 Efficient and sufficient educators should be employed and retained

According to the PPN allocation, only a few educators were employed at the schools due to the low enrolments. The school employed the services of educators fewer than the number classes taught, which forced the schools to perform multi-grade teaching. Educators were expected to attend workshops, educator development programmes, and participate in sport which compromised teaching and learning at the school. I believe if parents supported the schools, the effects of the unavailability of educators could be minimised.

I therefore recommend that a special provision be made to accommodate these disadvantages by employing one teacher for every class taught. This would prevent multi-grade teaching as very few educators were skilled at this. Multi-grade teaching is clouded with disadvantages and it was almost impossible for the educators to do justice to the teaching of all learning areas to two grades in one class.

The challenge at rural primary schools is the restoration of a sound culture of teaching and learning as alluded to by Kruger (2005). Where rural schools employ young specialists or qualified educators, they seldom stay for long periods. I recommend that the rural allowance that was offered once should be re-implemented to help schools retain specialist and qualified educators. Schools and their communities could also develop strategies to attract specialist and suitably qualified educators.

Rural schools have a history of learners experiencing learning challenges. Early diagnoses by specialist educators and appropriate intervention and referral would allow affected learners to receive the necessary help timeously. Guidance from specialists will assist parents deal with the

challenges their children experience. I believe if parents were empowered to support their children and encouraged to participate in their children's schooling, the number of learners who do not complete their schooling would be minimized.

Further, specialist educators could assist in developing and guiding parents on how to support their children. This would minimise the time taken by staff members, sometimes during teaching time, to support parents with the education of their children. Where there are no specialists, and where some educators are not adequately qualified, subject advisors could offer on-site training and supervision that would enable educators to manage the teaching and learning process more effectively.

9.4.8 Provide community members with job opportunities at schools to help fight poverty

The Department of Basic Education should intensify the employment of members of the community who have matriculated as teacher assistants or support staff and encourage them to enrol at training institutions with the aim of absorbing them into the profession. With the gradual increase of substance abuse and the need to keep schools crime free, parents need to be employed as security guards. I believe that parents who are employed as general assistant will be best suited to ensuring that the cleaning, upkeep and making minor repairs at schools are done correctly and timeously.

Further, there were reports that cooperatives who were not community members provided a mediocre service when they received the contract to take charge of the National School Nutrition Programme. I believe community members are the most suitable people to provide this service. Schools and people within the community could be encouraged to supply vegetables for the programme. The Department of Agriculture and other social partners could be invited to conduct workshops and skill parents and community members in the production of vegetables.

9.4.9 The drive to eradicate illiteracy should be intensified

It is recommended that the ABET programme be intensified and implemented at every rural school. Campaigns and road shows should be held in and around rural areas to entice residents to play their part in fighting the scourge of illiteracy. Illiteracy has proven to be the key barrier

to rural parent participation in the life of the school. While some programmes have been implemented to fight illiteracy at a high cost, most have not been sustained.

The Department of Basic Education, in conjunction with the local municipality, could introduce mobile libraries. Sustainable adult learning programmes should be introduced and strictly supervised. In this way illiteracy could be eradicated with time. According to Miller (2003, p. 58), "...details from a range of well conducted studies show that if a particular type of working alliance can be forged between educators and parents, considerable improvement in classroom behaviour can be attained."

9.4.10 On-going training and capacity building of parents is necessary

On-going training and capacity building of parents is required to ensure that they participate meaningfully in school matters and provide the necessary support that would enhance learners' education. This calls for national and provincial governments to provide adequate resources and support for the implementation of policies and the empowerment of parents serving on SGBs and finance, safety and security and other committees to perform their functions effectively. Also, training could have the potential of preventing some of the discrepancies that presently occur in schools where parents are excluded from participating in crucial activities such as decision making and it could eradicate the 'puppet status' given to some SGB parents.

Furthermore, training should enhance parents' understanding of the South African Schools' Act; improve their organisational skills; increase their motivation; enhance their awareness of their responsibilities; provide them with positive self-esteem which will in turn boost their confidence; enhance their time management skills; and help them to understand their accountability better. Although the National Department of Education has committed itself to providing capacity building for parents who serve on structures such as the SGB as indicated in SASA, in reality this is not happening. Instead, it appears that it has become the sole responsibility of the school to raise money and to find time to do the training.

It is hoped that the recommendations offered would serve to facilitate the effective involvement of parents in the life of the schools attended by their children.

9.5 Further research

The research findings revealed that while schools were supported by a limited number of parents, their participation enhanced their children's achievements. Learners indicated that they understood their schoolwork when they received support from their parents. Educators were appreciative of the parents who provided support as this added impetus to the schools' teaching and learning programme.

However, the study found that rural schools were grappling to find ways of persuading all parents to support the school and their children in pursuit of the provision of quality education. As a result, educator morale waned, learner enrolments remained low and the absence of teamwork among constituent parts compromised the quality of education offered to learners. Many parents were passive in matters affecting their children's education. It is therefore recommended that further exploratory research be undertaken. Topics that could be researched are:

An investigation into the factors that impede the participation of parents from rural primary schools in the life of the school attended by their children and how these could be overcome

The role of all stakeholders in facilitating Whole Rural School Development.

9.6 Implications of the study

The study concentrated specifically on the participation of parents from rural primary schools in enhancing learner achievement. It was noted that while some parents supported the schools and their children with their schoolwork, schools struggled to harness the effective participation of all parents. The need for parent participation in the rural context cannot be over-emphasised.

It is hoped that this study will be instrumental in helping schools to realise that without their concerted effort to encourage parent participation, the provision of quality education cannot be envisaged. If parents are not engaged effectively in the education process, the provision of quality education will be stifled. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) advise that learners' parents have skills and a wealth of experience which, if harnessed, can improve parental involvement and therefore learner achievement at school.

Similarly, it is hoped that parents will realise that without their support, the school cannot function optimally. Epstein (2002) argues that if the school, parents and the community have the same goals, they will succeed. Until such time as the school and parents work in unison in an effort to provide a quality education, educational excellence will remain a theoretical ideal and impact negatively on society as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

23 August 2010

Faculty Research Committee
Faculty of Education
Edgewood Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal



Dear Dr V Mncube,

Consideration of Ethical Clearance for student:

Haines, Fredrick Louis - 209531866

Your student's ethical clearance application has met with approval in terms of the internal review process of the Faculty of Education.

Approval has been obtained from the Faculty Research Committee, and the application will be forwarded for ratification (MEd) or recommended in the case of PhD and Staff applications, to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. All Masters applications approved by Faculty Research Committee may commence with research.

Both you and the student will be advised as to whether ethical clearance has been granted for the research thesis (PhD), once the Ethics Sub-Committee has reviewed the application. An ethical clearance certificate will be issued which you should retain with your records. The student should include the ethical clearance certificate in the final dissertation (appendixes).

Should you have any queries please contact the Faculty Research Officer on (031) 260 3440 or on the email memela@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. Bhana".

Professor D. Bhana
Acting Deputy Dean Postgraduate Studies and Research

APPENDIX B

(Permission letter to the KZN Department of Basic Education)

P.O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

5 June 2010

The Superintendent General

Department of Education

Province of KwaZulu-Natal

Private Bag X9137

Pietermaritzburg

3201

Re: application for permission to conduct research on the title: Perceptions of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement: case studies of selected rural primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

My name is Frederick Haines, principal of KwaDladla Primary School. I am currently studying for a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. The study aims at establishing perceptions of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement in rural primary schools. A case study will be conducted of four primary schools in Ixopo KwaZulu-Natal, Kokstad District, Ixopo Circuit, and Miskoffil Ward in the Mawusheni Location. The schools chosen for the research include: Thuthuka, Sipehelele and Siyaphila Primary Schools.

I hereby request permission to conduct research from 2009 to 2013. The research will not infringe on the schools' programmes nor have any financial implications on you. The planned study will use interviews, observations and document reviews. The study will involve the school principal, an educator; the SGB chairperson; parent and learner focus groups with 4-6 members in each group.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to evaluate the participation of parents in the life of the school. Observations will focus the parents' involvement in the schools extramural programme and role parents play in official structures such as SGBs and document reviews will focus parent involvement

in co-curricular activities, school finances, selected policies e.g. Schools code of conduct. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded.

When doing observations I will listen to what participants say and watch what they do and take extensive notes. I will observe documents that not older than two years to establish if the school is abreast with development within the education sector.

Responses will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of the actual names. Participants will be contacted in time for interviews, and they will be randomly selected to participate in this study. Participation will always remain voluntary which means that they may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without any penalties.

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact my Supervisor using the following details: Dr V.S. Mncube at 031-260 7590 / 076 562 5104.

In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me directly using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines Tel: 039 8342643. Cell: 0822148817

Email: goozahaines@gmail.com

Thanking you in advance

Frederick Haines

APPENDIX C



kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

FREDERICK LOUIS HAINES
PO BOX 633
IXOPO
3276

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar
Date: 25/08/2010
Reference: 0069/2010

PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

The above matter refers.

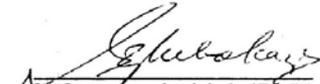
Permission is hereby granted to interview Departmental Officials, learners and educators in selected schools of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal subject to the following conditions:

1. You make all the arrangements concerning your interviews.
2. Educators' programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, educators and schools are not identifiable in any way from the results of the interviews.
5. Your interviews are limited only to targeted schools.
6. A brief summary of the interview content, findings and recommendations is provided to my office.
7. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers and principals of schools where the intended interviews are to be conducted.

The KZN Department of education fully supports your commitment to research: Perception of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement: a case study of four rural primary school.

It is hoped that you will find the above in order.

Best Wishes


R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)
Superintendent-General

...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 G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, PIETERMARITZBURG 3201
TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail

APPENDIX D



kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

FREDERICK LOUIS HAINES
PO BOX 633
IXOPO
3276

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Date: 25/08/2010

Reference: 0069/2010

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the attached list has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educator programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The investigation is to be conducted from 25 August 2010 to 25 August 2011.
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s) please contact Mr Sibusiso Alwar at the contact numbers above.
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the schools submitted.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Resource Planning.

...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 G25; 188 Pietermaritz Street; Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

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APPENDIX E



kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

FREDERICK LOUIS HAINES
PO BOX 633
IXOPO
3276

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

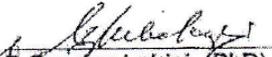
Date: 25/08/2010

Reference: 0069/2010

LIST OF SCHOOLS

1. X X X X Primary School
2. X X X X Primary School
3. X X X X Primary School

Kind regards


R Cassius Lubisi, (PhD)
Superintendent-General

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 G25; 188 Pietermaritzburg Street; Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

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APPENDIX F



kzn education

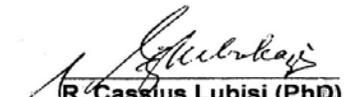
Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

10. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Resource Planning
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3200

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards


(R. Cassius Lubisi (PhD))
Superintendent-General

...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 G25, 188 Pietermaritz Street; Metropolitan Building; PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610/8611 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail:

APPENDIX G

(Letter to the principal requesting his/her permission to conduct the research at the school and his/her participation)

P. O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

7 June 2010

The Principal

Sample Primary School

P.O. Box 163

Ixopo

3276

Re: application for permission to conduct research at the school on the title: Perceptions of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement: case studies of selected rural primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal, at your school.

My name is Frederick Haines and I am currently studying for a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. Your school is one of the schools that has been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. The research will not infringe on the schools' programmes nor have any financial implications on you. I therefore kindly seek permission to conduct research in your school. The Department of Basic Education has granted permission for the research to be conducted, find copy enclosed. I also kindly request your participation in the study.

The study aims at establishing perceptions of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement in rural primary schools. It will be a case study of four selected primary schools one of which is your school. The planned study will use interviews, and observations and document reviews. The study will involve the school principal, an educator, the SGB chairperson, parents and learners.

The study will use semi structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents review and observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal, an educator and SGB chairperson; focus group interviews shall be conducted with the parent members, as well the focus group of learners. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to evaluate the participation of parents in the life of the school. Observations will focus the parent’s involvement in the schools extra-curricular programme and the role parents play in official structures such as SGBs, finance committees and document reviews will focus parent involvement in academic activities, school finances, selected policies e.g. schools code of conduct. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded.

When doing observations I will listen to what participants say and watch what they do and take extensive notes. The research will not infringe on your school programme nor have any financial implications on you.

Responses will be treated with confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of the actual names. Participants will be contacted in time for interviews, and they will be randomly selected to participate in this study. Participation will always remain voluntary which means that they may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without any penalties.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590

Thanking you in advance

Yours sincerely

Frederick Haines

.....

APPENDIX H

(Letter to the SGB Chairperson requesting him/her to participate in the research)

P.O. Box 63

Ixopo

3276

7 June 2010

Dear prospective participant

Letter of informed consent

My name is Frederick L. Haines. I am currently engaged in a three year research project in a study towards a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. Your school is one of the schools that have been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. The study aims at exploring perspectives of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement. A case study of four selected rural primary schools one of which is your school.

I therefore, humbly request you in your capacity as the SGB chairperson, to take part in the study. Should my request be acceptable; your participation will include taking part in an interview where I will visit your school. You will be interviewed for 45 minutes, where the interviews will be tape-recorded. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name will not be used, but instead pseudonyms will. You will be contacted in time for interviews. Your participation will always remain voluntary which means that you may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if you so wish without penalty.

The planned study will focus on principals, educators, school governing body chairpersons, a focus group of 4-6 parents from the community and a focus group of 4-6 randomly selected learners from the school. The above stakeholders would be from the Miskoffil Ward in the Ixopo circuit. The study will use observations, interviews and document reviews. The study will

use semi structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents review and observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal, an educator and SGB chairperson; focus group interviews shall be conducted with the parent and learner focus groups. Participants will be interviewed for approximately 45 minutes and each interview will be voice-recorded.

I will ensure that the research does not infringe on the schools' programmes nor have any financial implications on you. If you accept my request, you are requested to sign the attached form of declaration.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590. In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines Tel: 039 8342643 Email: gooazahaines@gmail.com Cell: 0822148817

Thanking you in anticipation.

F.L. Haines

.....

Declaration

I (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project. I consent to participating in the research project and I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project should I so desire

Signature of participant: -----

Date: -----

APPENDIX I

(Letter to educator requesting him/her to participate in the research)

P.O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

7 June 2010

Dear prospective participant

Letter of informed consent

My name is Frederick Haines and I am currently engaged in a three year research project in a study towards a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of the degree fulfilment. Your school is one of the schools that have been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. The school principal has been asked for permission to conduct the study at your school. The study aims at exploring perspectives of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement. A case study of selected rural primary schools will be conducted. The study involves the participation of the school principal, an educator, SGB chairperson, parents and learner focus groups. You have been the chosen educator in a random selection exercise.

I therefore, humbly request you in your capacity as an educator, to take part in the study. Should my request be acceptable; your participation will include taking part in an interview where I will visit your school. You will be interviewed for 45 minutes, where the interviews will be tape-recorded. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name will not be used but instead pseudonyms will. You will be contacted in time for interviews. Your participation will always remain voluntary which means that you may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if you so wish without penalty.

Participants in the study are from the Miskoffil Ward in the Ixopo circuit. The study will use semi structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents review and observations. Semi-

structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal, an educator and SGB chairperson; focus group interviews shall be conducted with the parent and learners.

If you accept my request, you are requested to sign the attached form of declaration.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590

In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines Tel: 039 8342643 Email: goozahaines@gmail.com Cell: 0822148817

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely

F.L. Haines

.....

Declaration

I (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project. I consent to participating in the research project and I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project should I so desire.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX J

(Letter to parents requesting them to participate in the research)

P.O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

7 June 2010

Dear prospective participant

Letter of informed consent

My name is Frederick Haines and I am currently engaged in a three year research project in a study towards a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of the degree fulfilment. Your school is one of the schools that have been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. The school principal has been asked for permission to conduct the study at your school. The study aims at exploring perspectives of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement. A case study of selected rural primary schools will be conducted. The study involves the participation of the school principal, an educator, SGB chairperson and, parent and learner focus groups. You have been the chosen educator in a random selection exercise.

I therefore, humbly request you in your capacity as an educator, to take part in the study. Should my request be acceptable; your participation will include taking part in an interview where I will visit your school. You will be interviewed for 45 minutes, where the interviews will be tape-recorded. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name will not be used but instead pseudonyms will. You will be contacted in time for interviews. Your participation will always remain voluntary which means that you may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if you so wish without penalty.

Participants in the study are from the Miskoffil Ward in the Ixopo circuit. The study will use semi structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents review and observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal, an educator and SGB

chairperson; focus group interviews shall be conducted with the parent and learners. If you accept my request, you are requested to sign the attached form of declaration.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590

In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines Tel: 039 8342643 Email: goozahaines@gmail.com Cell: 0822148817

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely

F.L. Haines

.....

Declaration

I (Full name of participant)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project.
I consent to participating in the research project and I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw
from the project should I so desire.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX K

(Letter to parent requesting them to participate in the research - Isizulu)

P.O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

07 June 2010

Siyakubingelela Mhlonishwa

Incwade yesicelo semvume

Igama lami ngingu Frederick Haines uThishanhloko waKwaDladla Primary. Okwamanje ngenza izifundo zeFilosofi (Philosophy) ezizongithatha iminyaka emithathu.

Lezizifundo zincike ekuthuthukiseni abazali ngokwazi inqubekela phambili yezingane zabo: zazisa ngezikole zamabanga aphantsi ezikhethiwe zasemaphandleni KwaZulu Natali. Lezizifundo zibhekene nokuphenywa ukuthi abazali bayiqikelele yini, bazibandakanye nempilo yezingane ezisezikoleni zamabanga aphantsi emaphandleni.

Ngakho ngicela ngokuzithoba okukhulu ukuthi uzibandakanye kulezizifundo. Uma isicelo sami samukeleka uzokwenza inkulumo-mpendulwano ezothatha imizuzu engamashumi amane nanhlano laphho inkulumo-mpendulwano izoqoshwa ekhasethini. Izimpendulo zakho zizogcinwa zujimfihlo futhi igama lakho angeke liphathwe kodwa kuyosetshenziswa igama mbumbulu. Sizothintana nawe kusene sikhathi mayelana nenkulumo-mpendulwana. Ungomunye wabatonyuliwe ukuthi ube yingxenye yalezizifundo futhi ubungxenye bkho uzozi khethela, okusho ukuthi uma unisifiso sokuyeka noma ngasiphi isizathu ungakwnsa lokho ngaphandle gnokuthi udalulwe.

Lezizifundo ziqale ngonyaka ka 2009 zizophela ngonyaka ka 2012. lezizifundo zizobe zibhekene kakhulu nabo Thishanhloko bezikole zaKwaZulu Natali. Lezizifundo zizosebenzisa okubonile,

inkulumo-mpendulwano kanye nokucubungula lokho ofufundile. Uma usamukela lesisicelo sami ngicela usayine ifomu lisivumelwano.

Uma kwenzeka uhlangabezana nezinkinga kulolucwaningo ungesabi ukuthintana nomphathi u o supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube usebenzise leminininhwane elandelayo: 0765625104/031 2607590.

Uma unembuzo mayelana nalokhu ngicela ungithinte kulemininingwana elandelayo:-

Ngiyabonga

Frederick Haines

Tel. 0398342643

Email: goozahaines@gmail.com

Cell: 0822148817

Isivumelwano

Mina _____ [Igama eliphelele] ngiyagcizelela ukuthi ngiyakuqonda okubhalwe kulenewadi kanye nemininingwane yalolucwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuba yingxenywe yalolucwaningo futhi ngiyaqonda ukuthi nginemvume yokuyeka uma nginesifiso sokwenze njalo.

Sayina lapha: _____

Usuku: _____

APPENDIX L

(Letter to learners requesting them to participate in the research)

P.O. Box 633

Ixopo

3276

7 June 2010

Dear prospective participant

Letter of informed consent

My name is Frederick L. Haines. I am currently engaged in a three year research project in a study towards a PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus). I am required to conduct research as part of my degree fulfilment. Your school is one of the schools that have been identified as a valuable source of information for this study. You have been randomly selected along with five other learners from your school to participate in a focus group interview. The school principal has been asked for permission to conduct the research at your school. The study aims at exploring perspectives of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement. A case study of four selected rural primary schools, one of which is your school, will be conducted.

I therefore, humbly request you, as a selected learner, to take part in the study. Should you accept my request, your participation will include taking part in a focus group interview which will take place at your school. You will be interviewed for 45 minutes, where the interviews will be tape-recorded. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name will not be used but instead pseudonyms will. You will be contacted in time for interviews. A letter has been written to your parents ask them to allow you to participate. As your participation in this study will be voluntary, you may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if you so wish without penalty.

The planned study will focus on principals, educators, school governing body chairpersons, a focus group of 4-6 parents from the community and a focus group of 4-6 learners. All participants will be from the Miskoffil Ward in the Ixopo Circuit. . The study will use semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, documents review and observations. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the school principal, an educator and SGB chairperson; focus group interviews shall be conducted with the parent members, as well the focus group of learners.

If you accept my request, you are requested to sign the attached form of declaration.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590

In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines. Tel: 039 8342643 Email: gooazahaines@gmail.com Cell: 0822148817

Thanking you in anticipation.

F.L. Haines

Declaration

I (Full name of parent/guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project. I consent to participating in the research project and I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project should I so desire.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX M

(Letter to the parent/guardian requesting their consent for their children to participate in the research)

P.O. Box 772

Ixopo

32767

7 June 2010

Dear Parent/Guardian

Letter of informed consent

My name is Frederick L. Haines. I am currently engaged in a three year research project in a study towards a PhD. This study aims at exploring perspectives of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement. A case study of selected rural primary schools will be conducted.

I therefore, humbly request you to allow your child/ward Sikhumbuzo Cele (fictitious name) who is in grade 7 at Sample Primary School, to take part in the study. Should my request be acceptable; his participation will include taking part in a focus group interview where I will visit their school. They will be 4-6 learners in the group and will be interviewed for 45 minutes, where the interviews will be tape-recorded. Their responses will be treated with confidentiality and their names will not be used but instead pseudonyms will. You and your child/ward will be contacted in time about the interviews. The focus group was randomly selected to participate in this study and their participation will always remain voluntary which means that they may withdraw from the study for any reason, anytime if they so wish without penalty.

The planned study will focus on principals, educators, school governing body chairpersons, learners and parents in the community. The above stakeholders are from the Ixopo circuit,

Miskoffil Ward KwaZulu-Natal. The study will use observations, interviews and document reviews. If you accept my request, you are requested to sign the attached form of declaration.

Should you encounter any problems during this research project, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. V.S. Mncube on the number: 0765625104/031 2607590

In addition, should you have any queries please feel free to contact me using the following contact details: Frederick L. Haines Tel: 039 8342643 Email: goozahaines@gmail.com

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

Frederick L Haines

Cell: 082214881

Consent for participation in research

I _____ parent/guardian of _____ consent to her/his participation in the research study: Perception of parental involvement in enhancing learner achievement: case studies in selected rural primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal conducted by Mr Frederick Haines (student) and Dr V.S. Mncube (supervisor) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Education and Development. I understand that the child's name will not be used; that his/her participation involves only answering questions as a learner at the school and that this research project has been approved by the University's Research Committee.

Parent's/Guardian's name: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX N

RESEARCH TOOLS

INTERVIEWS

a) Interview with Principal, SGB Chairperson and Educators

Semi- structured interview schedule on parental involvement in the life of the school

- 1 In your opinion, do parents participate in the life of the school? What makes you say so?
- 2 Which parents participate in the life of the school? Why?
- 3 Do you think the participation of parents is welcomed by all at school? Why do you say so?
- 4 Why do you think it is necessary for parents to participate in the life of the school attended by their children?
- 5 How do parents participate in the life of the school attended by their children?
- 6 Does your school environment encourage more parents to participate? How?
- 7 Do you think parents know enough to be able to help their children with their school-work?
- 8 What have you done to facilitate the effective participation of parents in the life of the school? What was the outcome?
- 9 Does the participation of parents enhance their children's achievement? If so how?
- 10 Do you think it is necessary to get more parents involved?

b) Interview with parent focus group

Semi-interview schedule for parental involvement in the life of the school

- 1 Biographical information will include: Age; gender; educational qualification; social status (pensioners, employment status) and the relationship with the learner (parent, grandparent/guardian).
Further questions asked will include;
- 2 In your opinion, do parents participate in the life of the school? Why do you say so?
- 3 Which parents participate in the life of the school? Why?
- 4 Do you think parent participation is welcomed by all at school? Why do you say so?
- 5 Do you think it is necessary for parents to participate in the life of the school attended by their children? How do you think parents should participate?
- 6 Does your school environment encourage more parents to participate? How?
- 7 Do you think parents know enough to be able to help their children with their school-work?
- 8 What has the school done to facilitate the effective participation of parents in the life of the school? What was the outcome?
- 9 Does the participation of parents enhance their children's achievement? If so how?
- 10 Do you think it is necessary to get more parents involved?

c) Interview with learner focus group

Semi-interview schedule on parental involvement in the life of the school

- 1 In your opinion, do parents participate in the life of the school? What makes you say so?
- 2 Which parents participate in the life of the school? Why?
- 3 Do you think the participation of parents is welcomed by all at school? Why do you say so?
- 4 Why do you think it is necessary for parents to participate in the life of the school attended by their children and how do think learners could encourage parents to participate?
- 5 How do parents participate in the life of the school attended by their children?
- 6 Does your school environment encourage more parents to participate? How?
- 7 Do you think parents know enough to be able to help their children with their school-work?
- 8 What has the school done to facilitate the effective participation of parents in the life of the school? What was the outcome?
- 9 Does the participation of parents enhance their children's achievement? If so how?
- 10 Do you think it is necessary to get more parents involved?

OBSERVATIONS

a) Observations schedules of parent participation in the life of the school:

Responses to the questions, do parents from rural primary schools participate in the life of the school attended by their children and, how do parents participate in the life of the school attended by their children, will be sought.

1. Do they visit the school? If so, how often and why?
2. Do parents feel welcomed?
3. In what co-curricular activities of the school do parents assist (e.g. reading, storytelling etc)
4. Are learners given homework, where parents are expected to assist them?
5. Do parents assist and acknowledge work done by signing homework books?
6. Do educators and parents communicate on matters affecting the progress of learners?
7. How does the school support parents, especially those less literate to assist learners?
8. Do parents attend functions arranged by the school to assist parents and motivate learners?
9. Do parents attend parents' day where the progress of their children is discussed?
10. Do parents attend prize giving functions or awards days or days meant to acknowledge learners for achievement

b) Observation schedule of parent involvement in school structures

- 1.1 In which school structures are parents involved.
- 1.2 How parents are elected onto the structures
- 1.3 Are the structures properly constituted?
- 1.4 Have the elected structures/committees been empowered? How?
- 1.5 Does the school have a functional feeding scheme committee? If not, why not?
- 1.6 Do learners make use of the feeding scheme?
- 1.7 Do parents attend meetings (school meetings, SGB meetings, committee meetings etc)? If not, why not? Where possible I will sit in to some of the meetings.
- 1.8 Is there regular reporting to parents from committees.
- 1.9 Have parents been orientated and work-shopped on school matters.
- 1.10 Do new parents freely accept nomination onto school structures?

c) Observation of parent involvement in schools' extra-curricular programme.

The observation is aimed at observing the formal participation of parents in the schools extramural programmes.

1. I will keep each schools extramural programme, to be able attend planned school activities:-
2. I will take extensive notes, and what will be included in the note-taking will be: for example
3. What activity is it (soccer/netball match against another school/field trip etc)
4. Have parents been invited to participate, how, when, which parents?
5. Did parents inform the school of their availability (letters) documents?
6. Did parents avail themselves?
7. How many parents responded? Which parents?
8. Were the punctual and did they appear eager to be part of the schools' organized activity?
9. Were they welcomed by educators and learners?
10. Did the parents look excited and 'ready to go'?
11. Did the parent 'coach' talk to the learners before the departure?
12. Did parents ensure that the transport arranged was safe?

d) Observations at the venues

1. Did parent coach have a pep-up team talk?
2. Were parents spurring the learners on?
3. How did the learners respond?
4. What was the final outcome?
5. They won – did every one share in the excitement were learners and parents excited?
6. They lost – did everyone accept the loss graciously or did a blame game start?
7. Did the parents encourage the learners in anyway after the activity?
8. Did parents assist in ensuring that learners got home safely?
9. Did the parent coach promise to have a follow-up session to address short-falls?
10. Did the learners enjoy the day?

DOCUMENT REVIEW SCHEDULE

a) List of documents that will be analysed

NB. The documents that will be reviewed will be not older than two years and will include:

- 1 Learners' homework books to establish whether parents assist learners with homework and acknowledge work done by signing books, school academic records.
- 2 Minutes of meetings over the last two years, parents meetings, committee meetings, sub-committee meetings, disciplinary safety and security (DSC) committee meetings.
- 3 Minutes of meetings where the schools policy documents were drawn up, for example, the schools code of conduct to ascertain inputs from parents.
- 4 Finance documents – fundraising, and school's budget to ascertain if parents participated in decisions taken.
- 5 Schools year plan to establish if parent participation has been included with clear role responsibilities assigned to parents and planned programmes to empower them.

Extensive note-taking will be undertaken throughout the research and relevant incidental occurrences will be noted, recorded and analysed.

