

**Investigating parents' understanding of the role of education in  
the lives of their children**

**By Sthabile Ngubane**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements  
for the degree of Master in Education (Social Justice)**

**Supervisor: Dr Melanie Martin**

**October 2021**

## **ABSTRACT**

The question of parents recognising the importance of education in their children's lives has become a social justice and human rights imperative. Policies and legislation have been developed to enable parents to participate in their children' education. Despite these progressive actions, research suggests that parents have different views of the role of education and schooling in the lives of their children. The aim of this research was to investigate parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. To address this question, six parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children were investigated using a qualitative narrative inquiry, located within the critical paradigm.

To investigate the key research questions of the study, in-depth semi-structured interviews and mapping were used to generate data. The study used Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice, especially his concepts of habitus and capital, to understand and make sense of the participants' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Findings of the study revealed that participants, regardless of their socio-economic status, recognised the importance of education as a means escaping the cycle of disadvantage. For instance, participants reported that it was important for them for their children to receive education, because they did not want them to be like them. This was largely fuelled by their own experiences of education and schooling. However, ensuring that their children accessed education was not without challenges. For instance, one of the major challenges that participants reported was socioeconomic disadvantage, especially poverty. However, despite challenges, participants used their agency to push boundaries of disadvantage to ensure that their children received education.


The findings of the study suggest that parents, despite the negative experiences that they might have had during their years of schooling, they still regarded education as a vehicle for improving the lives of their children, families and communities. However, findings also suggest it is important for schools to establish and nurture good and positive relationships with parents, with a view to strengthening their capacity, competence and commitment to support the education of their children.

## DECLARATION

I Sthabile Ngubane, Student number: 210502506, hereby declare that “*Investigating parents understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children*”, is my own work and that all primary and secondary sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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**Sthabile Ngubane**

07 October 2021  
**Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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07 October 2021  
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# ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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04 November 2019

Miss Sthabile Lucia Ngubane (210502506)  
School Of Education  
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Dear Miss Ngubane,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00000513/2019

**Project title:** Investigating parents understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children.

## Full Approval – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 17 September 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

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

This approval is valid for one year from 04 November 2019.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Urmilla Bob**  
**University Dean of Research**

/dd

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**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

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Without you, I would be facing a desert storm.

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Most importantly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Melanie Martin, for her unshakeable professionalism throughout this journey. Your inspiration, guidance, encouragement and patience are what carried me this far.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Marcus Cooper, my mother, Lindiwe Ngubane, my father, Simo Ngubane and to all my siblings.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study sought to explore parents' understandings of their role of education in the lives of their children. Spaul (2013) has argued that working class or low socio-economic parents see the role that education serves as one that enables social mobility, one that would enable them to escape from poverty. It is for this reason that parents often value and invest in the education of their children. However, school alone cannot provide learners with personal and cultural knowledge to become successful; parents must also play a role and inculcate in their children the understanding of the value and role education can play in the success of their future (Van Wyk, 2004). This study positions parents as possessing capabilities and abilities to negotiate their lives. For this study, this detected in parents' narratives, which provided insights into what parents did to support their children, unconsciously and consciously instilling in their children the value and role that education.

This chapter is an introduction to the study that investigated parents' understandings of their role of education in the lives of their children. First, the focus, purpose and rationale for the study are presented. Thereafter, I present a brief background on the study, as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches used in this study. I also introduce the participants in this chapter and conclude with a brief outline of each chapter of this dissertation.

### **1.2 Focus and purpose of the study**

The focus of the study was the parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The intention was to critically examine parents' past experiences of education and how this was influenced by their socio-economic positioning. The study further delved into how the parents' social positioning influenced their understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. This study is influenced by the critical paradigm. To this end, participants' voices have been foregrounded and centralised in this study. In addition, also influenced by this philosophical stance, parents have been positioned as possessing agency to negotiate the issues involved in their children's education. To this end,

the study adopted an agentic view of parents, and explored how they supported and promoted the education of their children.

### **1.3 Rationale and motivation of the study**

The source of motivation and rationale for conducting this study was both for personal and professional reasons. My interest in this research developed over a two-year period, when I began teaching in the foundation phase in a socio-economically disadvantaged school. My interactions and observations of parents instigated me to reflect on the parents' beliefs and values about education in respect of helping or not helping their children in their education. A unique feature in South Africa education, including the school where I taught, especially in areas where the majority of black people reside, is that the majority of parents and children came from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. This observation is what instigated the stubborn question in my mind of whether coming from a different socio-economic background influenced parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of the children.

Furthermore, I was raised by parents who were poor and understand the difficulties that some parents encounter, which may influence their ability to support their children academically. My parents were illiterate and found helping and supporting me at school extremely difficult. Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018) state that parents' socio-economic background has both positive and negative influences on their children's schooling. This was my experience with my parents. The literature I reviewed for this study focused more on parental involvement and participation (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Bajaj, 2009); the role of parents and its effect on their children's schooling (Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004). In reviewing this literature, I noticed that limited research focuses on the value that parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children.

Therefore, based on the above, conducting this study is a need contribution to this body of scholarship. For instance, the significance of this study is that it potentially contributes to current scholarly debates and knowledge in the field of parents' understanding of the role of education, especially from a perspective of their socio-economic positioning. To this end, the study is a useful contribution to the broadening of the understanding of how experiences emanating from class positions influences the understanding of the role of education in the

lives of children. Findings in this study revealed the complexity of the manifestations of class in this regard. Therefore, this study places me in a good position to contribute to the expansion of understandings of socio-economic circumstance as lived and experienced by the participants in this study. For example, understanding how the participants' past experiences, including growing up during apartheid, influenced what they could achieve academically and their subsequent understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children.

The study also contributes to the broadening of understandings of the role of professional development and practice. From a professional perspective, especially for teachers, this study will assist in respect of how parents perceive and understand education, especially its role in the lives of their children, and how these understandings are influenced by socioeconomic circumstance. This suggests that the findings of the study enhance teachers' understandings of the implications of their expectations from parents. In this study, parents shared their personal knowledge and experiences, and provided insights into their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. For instance, findings of the study revealed that parents adapted their ways of working in order to navigate challenges in them properly fulfilling their role in the education of their children. This study, therefore, makes some contribution to enhancing understanding of what parents' understanding of the role of education in their children's lives. The study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the role of parents in their children's education, the improvement of professional practice, and the policy debates pertaining to parents' understanding of education.

#### **1.4 Background**

There is a great deal of research on parental involvement in education. This is because the involvement of parents in education is regarded as an essential contributing factor for increasing the efficiency and quality of education (Cetin & Taskin, 2016; Porter, 2011; Chisley, 2014). Several international studies have revealed that parents' participation improves students' learning and academic achievement (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998; Porter, 2011; Chisley, 2014). According to the research, a family's socioeconomic situation could affect parents' involvement in the education of their children. For instance, parents from lower socioeconomic origins seem to participate in school activities less than those

from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Ndebele, 2015). Several studies have found that parental involvement in learning activities is often low in public schools, particularly among low-income families, the least educated, and minority parents (Porter, 2011; Ndebele, 2015).

Parents' active participation in the education of their children is thus necessary and is actively argued for by schools as has advantages for children. This can take place both within and outside of the school, with the goal of enhancing their children's education as well as their schools (Naong & Morolong, 2011). As a result, parental involvement should be proactive, with no negative or adverse effects on schools or learners' education (Smit & Liebenberg, 2003). Furthermore, research shows that when parents perceive their children's teachers involve them in a variety of ways, they become more active in their children's educational activities (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998). Communication with, and decision-making by, stakeholders, including parents, can help a school achieve success and effectiveness (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004; Chisley, 2014).

Whilst there is a multitude of explanations for the inadequate involvement, parents with low levels of education, for example, may have had poor experiences with the educational system and its processes, leading to mistrust and discomfort in the school environment (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998; Bajaj, 2009). However, this research works with the current understanding that parents value education and know the role that education can play in the future of their children. If one looks at this, then there is potential to understand underlying reasons for the inadequate participation of parents in the education of their children. However, in locating this study within the scholarly conversation, I was unable to locate research that has been conducted on parental understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children in peri-urban schooling contexts. As a result, the purpose of this study is to contribute to this limited body of knowledge.

### **1.5 Contextualising the notion of class**

It is important to contextualise my understanding of socio-economic class status as it relates to South Africa. Social class is traditionally characterised by and explained as social positioning, which is determined by an individual's wealth, educational attainment, and occupation (Lehmann, 2013). Furthermore, Rehbein (2018, p. 2) defines social class as “a

tradition line that reproduces itself from generation to generation by passing on relevant resources while symbolically separating itself from other classes”. One thus begins to have a particular understanding of social class as an instance of being restricted by a combination of factors, including intergenerational wealth, educational achievements and highly regarded occupations.

However, Khunou (2015) argues the above construction of class represents the notion of class as a homogenous and fixed way of experiencing socio-economic deprivation or disadvantage, which falls short of explaining the South African manifestation of this notion. For this reason, I have adopted Khunou’s (2015) understanding of class for this study. Khunou (2015) has argued that recognising social class in South Africa requires a deeper understanding and recognition of the particular contextual and historical realities. This is especially important given the fact that South Africa's social status differs from that of other countries, due to the country's history of racial inequality. In particular, and significant to this study, is the historical and cultural understandings of class in South Africa. For example, in South Africa, social stratification on the basis of class was enforced by legislation (Khunou, 2015). For instance, following their ideology of apartheid, government allocated land on a racial basis, with black people often forcefully relocated to townships and Bantustans or homelands.

It was not strange to find that people who were unemployed lived next to those who were employed. Understanding cultural practices, such as Ubuntu and the notion of black tax, has contributed to the complexity of the notion of class in South Africa (Khunou, 2015). For instance, often black employed individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged households were often compelled to share their income with other unemployed members of their families. Understanding how cultural traditions affected how parents think of their positioning in respect of social status and how this affects their understanding of the role of education is critical consideration. In addition, within the South African context, the experience of class is a racialised notion. That is, the notion of class must be understood as intertwined with race, given the racialisation of disadvantage in South Africa (Khunou, 2015). The significance of this study, therefore, resides in its potential to contribute to the understandings of socio-economic class as constructed and told by the participants in this study. For example, understanding how their past experiences of growing up during apartheid and how this influenced what they could achieve academically and for their

children is important. Significant also is the influence of cultural practices and community ideas about education and what value it has for their children. This contextualisation of social class or socio-economic positioning was adopted for its potential to enable the study to contribute to the elucidation of the complexity of this notion.

## **1.6 Research questions**

This research study was guided by the following key research questions:

Main research question:

- What do parents understand about the role that education plays in the lives of their children?

Sub-questions:

- What are parents' own experiences of education and how has this influenced their understanding of the role of education?
- How does socio-economic positioning influence their understanding about the role of education for their children?
- How does this understanding of the role of education influence the way parents support and promote education?

## **1.7 Methodological approach**

In order to explore how parents understood the role of education in the lives of their children, narrative inquiry was adopted. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008, p. 24), cited in Greaves (2020), contend that narrative inquiry is the “identification of experience through story.” Stories are a powerful mechanism for allowing participants space to reflect on their past to understand how it has influenced their present and future selves. Narrative is, thus, useful for providing access to a story of the self. For this study, narrative inquiry enabled me to explore parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children and provided participants with device for reflecting on their own experiences of attending school and living in particular contexts, as well as how their experiences of schooling influenced what they believed was appropriate for their own children. Data for this study was generated through participatory methods, namely, mapping and semi-structured interviews (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006; Gumbo & Maphalala, 2015).

## **1.8 The theoretical framework of the study**

In order to explore parents' understanding of the role of education in their children lives, I used Bourdieu's (1986) Theory of Practice, focusing specifically on the concepts of habitus and forms of capital, namely, economic, cultural, social capital. According to Di Giorgio (2009, p.181), capital refers to the "resources that people accumulate and exchange to maintain their power within the field of society". Vincent (2017) contends that capital is valued, because it provides individuals with access to power. For this study, access to such power can enable parents to access affirming experiences, which will enable them to support the education of their children.

On the other hand, parents who do not have this kind of access could find supporting their children difficult and disempowering (Vincent, 2017). In respect of Bourdieu's (1989) forms of capital, for this study, I deployed on cultural, social and economic capital to make sense of the parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Furthermore, I adopted the notion of capital as it is useful for understanding socio-economic and racial positioning. This was useful as it was important to deploy a device that would assist in understanding how social class and race shaped relationships that participants had with and about education. In trying to understand how context influenced what parents could do to promote and support education, I worked with the underlying understanding that the knowledge of this study would produce, was a contextual and subjective one, and based on how the six participants understood and engaged with their experiences of education.

My ontological position was influenced by Bourdieu's (1991) concepts of capital and habitus. The extent to which parents could use their social and cultural capital to adapt to understand how parents used their social networks in attempting to support their children. In addition, it was important to understand the factors that manifested as barriers for parents to understand the role of education in the lives of their children. Thus, the parents who participated in this study were regarded as possessing agency. Using Bourdieu's notions of habitus and capital and literature review as foundations for this study, I could understand that parents perceived education as key factor to building a better future for their children. However, accessing and participating in education did not come easily for these parents, a reality that they attributed to their have low educational levels.

My epistemological, in this study assumed that, to generate knowledge, I needed to create a particular kind of relationship with the participants and the school their children were attending. This was based on parents' past experiences of education, which were important and valued. The understanding of how reality and knowledge is understood within the critical paradigm was regarded as important for this study (Zondi, 2018). In this study, participants were regarded as powerful individuals who could find affirming experiences that enable them to support the education that their children receive

## **1.9 Structure of the dissertation**

**Chapter 1** provides a brief overview of the study. The focus, purpose, rationale and the significance of the study are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter also discusses the background, a glimpse into the theoretical framework and provides a snapshot into the methodological and design approach used in the study.

**Chapter 2** provides a review of international and national literature on parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The chapter presents literature on the parent's experiences of education as well as the impact of the social positioning, which challenges their understandings of education. The chapter concludes by discussing the theoretical framework that framed the understanding of findings and issues in this study.

**Chapter 3** discusses the methodology and design considerations made in respect of the conduct of the study. Sampling procedures, methods of data collection, analysis as well as the limitations and ethical considerations of the study are discussed.

**Chapter 4** presents findings from and analysis of the collected data. The various themes and subthemes that emerged from the data are analysed and discussed, using the theoretical framework and literature reviewed as a theoretical foundation.

**Chapter 5** consolidates the main arguments in the study and highlights key findings pertinent to the study. The chapter also reflects on the use of the methodology and theory,

offers recommendations and proposes further research into parents understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the study, which comprised the introduction, focus and purpose, rationale and significance of the study. A summary of the research methodology and theoretical framing was also presented. Towards the conclusion, brief profiles of the participants were provided. The chapter concluded by outlining the structure of the dissertation.

The next chapter provides a review of literature of the topic under investigation.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

As pointed out in preceding chapter, this study is an investigation of parents' understanding of the role of education in their children's lives. This chapter reviews empirical international and national literature, with a view to providing insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The first part of the chapter contextualises the study, where I provide a brief understanding of policy in respect of the role of parents in education. In this regard, I argue that while policy expectations are that parents must be fully involved in the education of their children, this must be located within an understanding that parents believe education has a particular role to play in the lives of their children. Thereafter, empirical literature, which provides insight into how parents view education, is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theory used to frame understandings in this study. In this regard, Bourdieu's theory of practice and his concepts of habitus and capital are presented and discussed.

#### 2.2 Policy constructions of the role of parent in education

Parental involvement has been recognised as essential to schooling in international and national contexts. Maboe (2005) contends that parental involvement is recognised as a human right protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (United Nations, 1948), and endorsed by UNESCO. In South Africa, various pieces of legislation have sought to establish parent representative bodies. For example, The Education Policy Act of 1967 which, until 1986, sought to emphasise and extend the involvement of parents and families in education (Republic of South Africa, 1967). During apartheid, the objectives of these pieces of legislature was not necessarily to improve the quality of education, but to further the intentions of system that sought to entrench subjugation and separateness.

However, with the advent of democracy, the objectives of policies on parental involvement changed, and emphasis was placed on redressing the injustices of the past, democratising education. By so doing, the intention was to encourage and expand the involvement of parents in the education of their children. For instance, the South African Schools Act requires that parents must participate in the governance of the education of their children

(Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Act underlines the importance of learners, schools and parents working together to transform South African education (Republic of South Africa, 1996). However, whilst this is written in law, the reality within schools paints a different picture. For instance, while policy requires parents to be involved in the education of their children, for a range of reasons, which will be expanded on later, this is not always the case.

Studies conducted in South Africa, for example, by Vincent (2017), have revealed that parents often try to support the education of their children. For instance, parents encourage their children to get education so that they can escape generational poverty (Spaull, 2013). Manilal (2014) contends that the teacher alone cannot provide learners with personal and cultural knowledge to become successful; parents must also get involved in their children's education. Literature suggests that when parents understand education and schooling in which their children are involved, this has a positive influence on their academic achievement (Spaull, 2013; Manilal, 2014; Vincent, 2017).

The South African Schools Act (SASA), 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996) encourages parents to participate in governance of their children's schools by volunteering to become members of school governing bodies (SGBs), democratising participation in the governance matters of schools. Parent involvement is important as the role of the SGB includes the formulation of school policies, drawing up a code of conduct, developing a language and admission policy, maintaining infrastructure, decision on appointment of school staff, handling discipline issues, administering the school's funds and budget and the levy of school fees (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004; Republic of South Africa, 1996). Therefore, access to such rights, places parents in a position of advantage in respect of participation and involvement in the education of their children. Parents' understanding of the role of education is vital as they are entrusted with making decisions regarding the best interests of their children's education (Tessman & Koyama, 2017). This suggests government's commitment to democratise education in public schools, which acknowledges parent's rights to participate in the education of their children (Munje & Mncube, 2018).

However, Gwija (2016) has found that the implementation of laws and policies on the involvement and participation of parents has not been easy for schools. Specifically looking at some of the barriers that African parents face in participating in their children's education,

especially in former Model C schools, Gwija (2016) argued that language often presents as a barrier that prevent parents from participating effectively in the affairs of governing bodies in these schools. Manilal (2014) contends that there are additional barriers to parental involvement, including levels of language and socio-economic disadvantage. Spaul and Kotze (2015) concur with these findings, arguing that education stakeholders often do not recognise the capabilities of parents, which severely undermines the parents' sense of self-worth. Parents in these studies have reported that one of the primary reasons for this is the lack of training to understand how the education system works to empower them to take their rightful place in governance of their children's schools (Spaul & Kotze, 2015). Furthermore, remnants of the apartheid education system have created a division between well-resourced and under-resourced schools, which has further depleted the possibility of effective parental involvement (Spaul & Kotze, 2015).

The South African education system is still bimodal, such that a vast majority of South African learners do not have access to quality education. Literature reveals that a child coming from a disadvantaged background is likely to receive education of poor quality, as schools associated disadvantaged socio-economic contexts often lack resources, are characterised by crumbling infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms (Spaul & Kotze, 2015). This argument is supported by Van der Berg and Hofmeyr (2018), who points out that, due to the failure of South African education system, it is clear from the fourth grade that a child from poor socio-economic background who is attending a poorly resourced school will not acquire sufficient points required to be admitted in a university. This implies that a child from a context of poverty must work twice as hard as their rich counterpart to pass (Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014). For Spaul and Kotze (2015), this constitutes a poverty trap, because access to poor quality of education most probably leads to difficulties in advancing in life. For many children and household, especially those from socioeconomically deprived contexts, the gains of the democratic dispensation have not yet been realised (Christie & Barling, 2009). The above argument suggests that the majority of learners are yet to receive quality education that the Constitution has promised. That is, the promise that with the advent of democracy, there will be access to quality education and participation remains a utopian notion.

This study is not necessarily about parental involvement; it is about the understandings of parents of the role of education in the lives of their children. However, understanding

parental involvement is important in order to understand the various ways in which parents can be supportive to the education of their children.

### **2.3 Reflections on the state of education in South Africa**

Literature suggests that when children receive quality education, they have a chance of accessing better life opportunities. Education can provide learners with the means of facing the challenges of life. However, as previously stated, although significant progress has been made in improving access to education, challenges remain (Amnesty International, 2020). Amnesty International (2020, p. 7) has argued that the experience of education for children in South Africa “depends on where they are born, how wealthy they are, and the colour of their skin”. In addition, children in South Africa are outperformed by other countries on the African continent and children from poorer contexts are at risk of experiencing intergenerational poverty (Spaull, 2015; Robins & Fleisch, 2016; Spaull & Kotze, 2015). The South African Schools Act has provided parents with the right to be involved in the education of their children, with the hope that greater involvement may lead to better achievement. However, parents have not adequately equipped to participate effectively in the affairs of the children’s schools. Therefore, although legislation and policies recognise the importance of parents’ involvement in education, support provided to parents to fulfil this role has been inadequate (Davies, 2002).

Giliomee (2009) has traced how education has come to be understood for black people in South Africa. Giliomee (2009) argues that attitudes of black parents towards education in South Africa must be traced to back to precolonial period. Within this period, education was informal, and values and morals were passed down orally from one generation to the next. This type of education was created to shape individuals for communal life. This kind of education differed from Western education and may have had its limitations, but it proved to be successful in ensuring that families, as well as the communities, were engaged in the education of their immediate family members as well as communities. Furthermore, Giliomee (2009) contends that non- formal education for black South Africans did not begin with the arrival of the Europeans in 1652. What formal education introduced by Europeans did was to impose a western education not in keeping with what was important to indigenous people (Giliomee, 2009). It can then be deduced that when education is imposed and fails to consider the funds of knowledge or the resources of the indigenous community, and aspects

taught are foreign and isolating, then such education is harmful as it is of no benefit to its beneficiaries (Giliomee, 2009).

The introduction of bantu education in South Africa marked a time of crisis in black education. The word bantu in the Nguni group of languages, such as Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele means 'people'. Bantu education refers to the type of education, which was specifically designed for black people and intended to provide separate and unequal education for different races in South Africa. Bantu education was, therefore, used as a tool for social control (Giliomee, 2009). Thobejane (2013) contends that apartheid education did not prepare blacks in the areas of technology and science. That is, the intention of education during this time was to undermine their participation in the economy. For instance, black poor people were prepared as a supply of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Thobejane (2013) contends that this lack of a competitive workforce brought about a decline in the living standards of the majority of the people. Ill-health, malnutrition, unemployment and poverty became rampant in the country (Thobejane, 2013). Over 60% of all South Africans were, by national standards, living in poverty in 1996, which pointed to severe levels of intergenerational inequality and poverty (Thobejane, 2013).

#### **2.4 Factors that influence how parents understand education**

Research into parental participation and involvement tends to be prolific (see, for example, Lee & Bowen, 2006; Bajaj, 2009; Barton et al., 2004). However, Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018) contends that more research must be conducted on the value that parents place on education of their children, as this is an underexplored phenomenon. This is especially true in the South African context. According to the empirical research carried out in the United States, Mexico and South Africa, parents from various social class backgrounds view education as a significant factor to building a better future for their children (see, for example, Vincent, 2017; Tessman & Koyama, 2017; Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018; Chavira, Cooper & Vazquez-Salgado, 2016; Modiaotsile, 2012). However, accessing and participating in education does not come easily and it is connected to a myriad of factors (Manilal, 2014), which will be discussed further in the section below.

### **2.4.1 Parent's experiences of education**

Parents' memories of their own experiences of education play a critical role for their own understanding of its role in their children's lives (Miller & Shifflet, 2015). A study by Miller and Shifflet (2015) in the United States of America, regarding parents' memories of their own education revealed that their experiences had a significant impact on the way they understood its role in their children's lives. Parents' experiences of their own education impact, for example, on how they think about their own children's experiences. For instance, literature suggests that parents' experiences of their own education shape their relationships with and attitudes towards the schools attended by their children (Miller & Shifflet, 2015).

Parents in the study by Miller and Shifflet (2015) revealed both positive and negative experiences of parents, which influenced their own understandings of the role of education in their children's lives. For instance, parents who had positive experiences of education could, for instance, assist their children in significant ways to negotiate their own schooling experiences. What findings of this study revealed was that parents often used their own aspirations to motivate and encourage their children, and they wanted the same or better quality of education for their children. The study by Miller and Shifflet (2015) further revealed that family involvement and participation in education had a positive impact on their children's education, as this influenced them to think positively about their own experiences.

Miller (2014) contends that if the education that is received by their children is poor, parents do not often view education as capable of ensuring a bright future for their children. To this end, they do not encourage their children to take such education seriously, as they view it as a futile exercise which cannot lead to any social mobility (Miller, 2014). This finding negates what Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018) have found in the study they conducted in Mexico. For this study, parents from socio-economic contexts, who themselves had parents who were not involved in their own education, responded positively towards education (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). That is, despite their own negative experiences of education, these parents wanted their children to take advantage of the opportunities provided by education to build a better life for themselves. This was the case even where their own children had negative experiences of education; they still wanted the best for their children and tried to

become even more involved in assisting and supporting their children's education (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018).

In addition, parents from poor socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated lower levels of involvement in the education of their children (Hartas, 2015; Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). In some of these instances, the reason was their parents felt inferior and intimidated by schools and teachers (Hartas, 2015). However, outside school, parents did everything they could to assist their children to increase their life chances and social mobility through education (Hartas, 2015). From this finding, it could be concluded that the parents who participated in this study were often overwhelmed by the reality of having to work too close to the school and teachers. Given the fact that literature suggests that children whose parents are actively involved in their own education tends to perform better academically, this implies that children whose parents are not involved may be exposed to a risk of poor academic performance (Msila, 2014). Spaul (2015) warns that, if this happens, children are likely to be locked in trap of social-economic disadvantage.

#### **2.4.2 Parents' aspirations and expectations of education**

Parents' own experiences of education influenced the aspirations and expectations of education they had for their children. Stevens, Vryonides and Gouvias (2011) contends that there are two types of aspirations, namely, realistic and idealised aspirations. The notion of realistic aspirations refers "to clear knowledge of the opportunities and barriers concerning the possibility of realising of a desired outcome" (Stevens, Vryonides & Gouvias, 2011, p. 319), whereas idealised aspirations refer to desires of things one would like to have if there were no restrictions on capability, opportunity and resources (Stevens, Vryonides & Gouvias, 2011). Parents' aspirations and expectations in respect of education, which are communicated both consciously and unconsciously, could be regarded as levers that parents use to encourage and motivate their children to give-off their best to perform well academically (Stevens, Vryonides & Gouvias, 2011). For this, parents who participated in this study expected their children to reach specific academic levels of performance, that would assist them to ensure a positive outcome in their future lives (Stevens, Vryonides & Gouvias, 2011).

A study by Roubeni et al. (2019) examined the narratives of West African immigrants. Findings of the study revealed that there was a connection between the immigrants' experiences of loss from their home country, be it material or human, and their present lives (Roubeni et al., 2019). That is, their lives represented some form of loss and the struggles that they had had to go through to have a life in their host country. Often, this caused them to have particular aspirations for the education of their children (Roubeni et al., 2019). For these immigrants, Roubeni et al. (2019) argue, education was viewed as a mechanism for providing upward mobility. However, the same education was also perceived as something that was conflicting with their own values. Thus, these immigrant parents believed that it was the teachers' responsibility to teach their children so that they can be equipped with academic knowledge and skills and theirs to teach their children about their culture and values (Bajaj, 2009). What emerges from findings by Roubeni et al. (2019) is that there may be a link between socio-economic struggles that parents experience and their aspirations regarding the education of their children. For instance, immigrant parents who regarded themselves as socio-economically disadvantaged, believed that access to opportunities for growth, advancement and prosperity was important for their children (Roubeni et al., 2019). For these parents, the only sustainable way of achieving this was through education, which believed instigated them to encourage their children to work hard and achieve academically.

In addition, parents' hopes and expectations often cushion them from the stressful demands that come with children's education (Pasquier-Doumer & Brandon, 2015). Furthermore, immigrant parents believe that working hard and sacrifice would ensure upward mobility for them, which would enable them to invest sufficiently in their children's education. Pasquier-Doumer and Brandon (2015) further argued that the notion of aspiration is critical for ensuring equality of opportunity, and that they must be understood as a channel for persistence to overcome inequality.

## **2.5 Social class and education**

Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018), as indicated earlier, call for more research into parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. It is the intention of this study to contribute to this body of knowledge. Poverty seems to be a significant issue influencing parents' understanding of education as a vehicle for improving their children's lives (see, for example, Chavira et al., 2016; Vincent, 2017; Tessman & Koyama, 2017;

Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018; Chavira et al., 2016; Modiaotsile, 2012). This body of research suggests that parents from disadvantaged contexts tend to prioritise education for their children as a mechanism for escaping poverty. For these parents, attaining a certain level of education may lead to upward social class mobility. This is important as parents play a key role in the lives of their children in respect of the outcome of education (Chavira, 2016).

Findings of Manilal's (2014) study also revealed that parents from working-class contexts, who are less educated, understand the role of education differently from middle-class parents, which may limit their children's academic achievements. When parents understand education as a way of opening new opportunities for their children, they may then find ways and means to support their children's education. The challenges parents face, from the broader social and economic context, may limit the support they can provide to their children, which may negatively affect their children's chances for academic success (Manilal, 2014).

However, upward social mobility is difficult to achieve for some individuals from particular social groups, especially from disadvantaged working-class backgrounds. This has been supported by Reay's (2013, p. 662) whose study found that, for parents from working class contexts, social mobility may be a utopian notion – a figment of imagination, which can never be achieved. This is despite the fact that it could serve as a source of collective hopes and desires for those who are in the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder (Reay, 2013). For Reay (2013), this struggle for emancipation from social class bondage, is a complex one, as it is influenced by a myriad of factors, including poverty, which may be outside the control of parents.

The devastating effects of poverty are evident, especially in South Africa, where Spaul and Kotze (2015) have found that social mobility is a myth and a figment of imagination for many from disadvantaged contexts. This understanding has been supported by Theron (2016), whose study revealed that, while parents may place all the blame on the inability of education to serve as a lever for upward social mobility, the biggest culprit could be socioeconomic disadvantage. As Spaul and Kotze (2015) point out, most children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds tend to inherit their parents' social positions in life. For instance, if, for example, parents dropped out of school, they join a pool of

unemployed people or they themselves are engaged in temporary work that requires less skills and therefore earns them less income (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). That is, their daily experiences of survival mean that their children, like them, may also not finish school, and sustain the cycle of intergenerational poverty inherited from generations before them (Spaull & Kotze, 2015).

Another factor that may prevent parents from acquiring the required habitus to understand the role of education in addressing the systemic barriers that make life difficult for them. Whilst parents from working class contexts may inspire and encourage their children, they are often poorly informed about the rules of engaging with the school, within an educational system that is distant and unwelcoming (Vincent, 2017). In addition, parents from working class contexts often struggle to meet the standards and expectations set by school in respect of their roles in the education of their children (Modiaotsile, 2012).

However, as an environment that parents find unwelcoming, one of the reasons may be that schools within middle class cultures, which makes engagement with parents from working class contexts difficult, as the support that is provided by the schools is often inadequate (Vincent, 2017). Often, the nexus of these cultures results in misunderstandings and confusion on the part of parents, who do not know how to engage with the school (Bajaj, 2009). This finding has been supported by Manilal (2014), who has pointed out that support from parents is inadequate; teachers conclude that parents are uninterested in the education of their children.

Another issue involves the availability of time to engage in school activities. Often, parents experience challenges with participation in school activities and functions for a range of reasons. For instance, some parents often work far away from home, which means that they cannot attend participate in the activities of schools. Vincent (2017), in providing more detail on this issue, points out that parents from socio-economically disadvantaged contexts must focus their attention on basic survival and the education of their children is often not priority. Thus, parents from socio-economically deprived contexts often have limited choices in life and they may be dedicating the rest of their time in ensuring they survive with their children (Spaull, 2015). Gustafsson and Olandersson (2018) have argued that one of the ways in which parents from these contexts could be assisted is through the provision of free quality education.

### **2.5.1 Social class and parents' investment in education**

Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018) contend that socio-economic class differences influence the ways in which parents invest in education. Privileged parents have resources to invest in education as a mechanism to ensure personal growth for their children. They understand education as a way of preparing their children to carry on their family legacy. Therefore, parents from privileged contexts often have the resources to ensure that their children acquire appropriate knowledge and skills and securing a better future for them (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). Such parents value and prioritise education and sacrifice other demands to ensure that they can support their children's education (Karsten, 2015).

Parents are often altruistic; they often sacrifice their own needs in order to provide for their children (Ule, Živoder & du Bois-Reymond, 2015). Lachman et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of the awareness that children tend to imitate the behaviour and conduct displayed by their parents. Therefore, parents' attitudes towards education have an effect on their children's academic achievement. Thus, it is important for parents to provide good examples of a relationship with education. This is important given the fact the participation of parents in their children's education increases chances of them achieving academically (Chavira et al., 2016).

However, Chavira et al. (2016) found that even though American parents encouraged and inspired their children, perceiving education as valuable depended on whether children regarded it as such. The study found that parents perceived this as an individual decision, and were not aware that they were inculcating in their children respect for education. Historically, Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018) contends, this could be attributed to the fact that, being from middle class background, they had access to many choices and opportunities. As parents from middle-class contexts, they can exercise choices regarding the school which they want their children to attend (Chavira et al., 2016). These choices, however are unavailable for parents from disadvantaged working-class contexts and children (Tessman & Koyama, 2017).

When parents are educated, their children are likely to do well academically (Harding, Morris & Hughes, 2015). This suggests that educated parents may use their skills and knowledge of

education to support the education of their children. Starting from early age, parents can read, tell stories, sing songs, help with homework and more, which may be lacking for children from disadvantaged contexts (Harding, Morris & Hughes, 2015). In this instance, parents' participation in their children's education becomes a significant factor. This may suggest that parents who have access to capital may be more having access to change the lives of their children for the better. Resources that may be available from middle class contexts provides children with fairly easy access to school and with teachers (Harding, Morris & Hughes, 2015).

It is often easier for educated parents to encourage their children when they themselves had high ambitions and aspirations when they were still young (Tessman & Kayama, 2017). Social networks that these parents have are usually passed on to their children (Modiaotsile, 2012). Bourdieu (1990) contends in his notion of capital that individuals from middle class backgrounds are often perceived as deserving of their place in society, although they have hardly worked for it (Sullivan, 2002). For instance, parents from well-to-do backgrounds have built networks that their children can use to navigate challenges in their lives (Modiaotsile, 2012).

### **2.5.2 Single parenting, education and work**

Family is the most important unit in society and serves as the first socialising agent for children. Families, therefore, have influence on children's physical, emotional, academic and social development (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke (2014) contends that, in South Africa, the notion of family has been extended to include community. Thus, from this context, children are often exposed to a mix of socialising messages (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). This research suggests that some single parents may be having hard time supporting their families and children alone. For instance, due to their busy daily schedule, single parents are likely to communicate less with the school about their children needs, and to spend less time with their children or families (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014).

Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke, (2014) have further argued that in order for a child to succeed academically, they need constant support. Thus, when a single parent is unable to provide this, for a range of reasons, children's academic achievement and outcomes may be

compromised. This may be compounded by other social problems, to which children from single-parent households are exposed (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). It is parents' responsibility to raise children and to provide them with skills to negotiate their life independently. Single parents are often exposed to stressful situations as they must contend with a range of complex challenges. For instance, single parents have the same responsibilities as all other families. Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke (2014) argue that this does not mean that single parents want their children to fail, but the reality is that they do not have sufficient resources to assist their children with their education (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014).

Some of the struggles that the parents in this study faced entailed having to work excessively long and odd hours. This made it impossible for them to attend school meetings and they could not spend time with their children. However, although they tried to support what schools were doing, they were often constrained by conditions of socio-economic disadvantage. Even in the mist of their struggles, in the study by Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke (2014), parents wanted a bright future for their children, in which they would be self-sufficient. However, findings from this study also highlighted challenges associated with single parenthood and the duty to raise children on your own. Despite this, however, parents motivated their children in their own small ways and children often pleased their parents by doing everything to achieve academically (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014).

## **2.6 When school and home culture meet**

A study by Horvat and Baugh (2015), in United State of America, have argued that the role that parents must play in 'managing their children's education' has grown exponentially, because schools are demanding more and more from parents than they previously had. However, when parents from disadvantaged or working-class contexts cannot play their role or value education as expected by the school, this often leads to conflict and misunderstanding. Some of the ways in which parents struggle to play their expected role in the education of their children is when they cannot support their children with homework and do not attend school activities (Manilal, 2014).

In their study, Horvat and Baugh (2015) found that teachers and schools had a limited understanding of the challenges faced by parents from disadvantaged contexts and often concluded

that parents were not interested in the education of their children. This had dire consequences for the manner in which teachers began to relate to the learners, often ignoring them and not providing them with the support that they needed. In this context, both the school and teachers could not recognise the fact that not all parents could meet their demands of time, money and skills (Horvat & Baugh, 2015; Garcia, Roa & Ricaurte, 2016). Moreover, there has been a mistaken perception that parents are neglecting their responsibilities in respect of their children's education, they do not care or they are lazy or less intelligent (Bajaj, 2009).

Parents from disadvantage and working-class contexts often report that they felt unwelcomed and misunderstood by teachers (Langenkamp, 2019; Bajaj, 2009). When this happened, parents could not navigate school processes and interact with school staff, which impacted on the academic performance of their children. In the instances when parents were involved and demonstrated the fact that they valued education, their efforts were often not recognised or valued by the school or general public (Luet, 2017). Parents are often regarded as objects that must be manipulated, are often without power or position, and therefore treated as unequal partners and decision makers by schools (Wang & Sheik-Khalil, 2013). Bajaj (2009) refers to this as a cultural disconnect, a discrepancy in the understanding of responsibilities and roles of each party.

For the participants, in the Roubeni et al. (2015), parents believed that certain schooling practices were alienating their children from their cultural values and norms. In this regard, there was a misalignment between the education from home and school; there was a perception that the school was not complementing education from home (Karsten, 2015). For this reason, some parents do not support or get involved in the education of their children (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2013). The consequence is that this cultural clash is exclusionary and tends to alienate both parents and learners, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Parents' understanding of education in this instance reveals that education may disadvantage children from disadvantaged backgrounds, if it does not consider their cultures (Bajaj, 2009). The problematic dimension of this misalignment may lead to parents perceiving education as not benefitting their children. This argument has been supported by Elliott, Powell and Brenton (2015), who found that parents from low-income backgrounds were often marginalised, not only by their social class background, but also by their race, as could be seen in South Africa.

In South Africa, there is an intractable battle between parents and schools, especially in rural communities, where there are limited opportunities and parents are often excluded from decision making processes for a range of reasons, including their levels of education (Manilal, 2014). This has more severe consequences for parents and children who are poor and have not received any education. The empirical studies, such as September, Rich and Roman (2016), have revealed that learners succeed academically when their parents understand the role of education and have access to resources. Children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds are often exposed to the world of inequality. Often, children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds inherit their parents' social class positions (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). This suggests that parents' understanding of the role of education may have a direct influence on their children's education (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Meier and Lemmer (2015) contends that it is not only parents and teachers who must have clear understanding of the role of education; the family as a whole must also be. This is important as family is central to every aspect of child lives (Ceka & Murati, 2016).

Even though the South African School Act stipulates the involvement of parents in the governance of the reality is different. For instance, a research study by Munje and Mncube (2018) revealed that parents had not been adequately empowered to participate actively in decision-making processes in schools. In support of this argument, Manilal (2014) also found, in her comparative study involving a privileged and underprivileged school, she reported that parents from disadvantaged and working-class contexts reported feeling intimidated by teachers and regarded them as hostile and insensitive towards them. For example, teachers did not attend to parents in time and focuses on the problem rather than looking for the solution when they were engaging with parents. As a result, parents often felt unwelcome, excluded and silenced (Manilal, 2014).

## **2.7 Parents, support and education**

A study done by Karsten (2015) in United Kingdom troubled the notion of parents' support in promoting education. Karsten's (2015) study revealed that parents were willing to support their children education through participation in a wide range of activities, including meetings, helping with homework and developing skills to assist and support their children. However, Karsten (2015) found, parents were often reluctant to commit as they felt they believed that being known by the school and teachers would place too much pressure on

their children. They felt that there would be expectations for their children to participate in a wide range of activities, including compulsory participation in sport and other extracurricular activities, which may be too demanding for their children (Karsten, 2015). Parents, believe that their children would have insufficient time to relax and participate in activities for children.

However, there is debate about sport, for example. Sport is recognised as essential to the well-being of children and assists to improve concentration skills and intellectual development (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2017). Sport can also be a source of unity for children and could lead to improved relationships with peers, teachers and parents (Okeke, 2014). Whilst parents from working class contexts recognised the benefits of participating in sport, there were many challenges, including the fact that their employment conditions did not allow them time-off, which prevented them from assisting their children in this regard. This often led to parents not supporting their children in the ways that the school expected them to (Maringe, Masinire & Nkambule, 2015).

Reading is one of the most important skills that children must acquire in order to navigate life successfully (Spaull & Hoadley, 2018). With good competence in reading, children can face the world with confidence as it enables them to become independent (Spaull & Hoadley, 2018). In addition, Spaull and Hoadley (2018) contend that helping children learn to read during the early ages of their lives can help children to succeed academically. However, Spaull and Hoadley (2018) found that in poor and working-class homes, children had less than 10 books. For a poor working-class home, reading seems to be a dream that parents cannot help their children and it is an ongoing struggle (Spaull & Hoadley, 2018). If reading begins at home, and parents cannot help their children develop love for reading and read better, then learners may struggle to perform academically (Spaull & Hoadley, 2018).

## **2.8 International and local perspective on the issues presented in the literature**

International, national and South African empirical research all indicate that parents value education and that education contributes significantly to the future of their children. In particular, parents own past experiences of education internationally allowed parents to realize the value that education has and the roles they should play to ensure that their children access education. Despite being poor and experiencing schools as disempowering spaces,

parents still worked towards ensuring that education was valued by their children as it allowed for social mobility. South African studies however, show that whilst parents believed that education could help them to challenge intergenerational poverty, they were not as involved in education of their children (Msila, 2014, Spaull, 2015). If parental involvement is a measure of the value that education has one can argue that South African children who are poor and black are not learning this and they are at risk of poor academic performance. Parents realistic and idealized aspirations for their children future was affected by various factors (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). In particular, for parents from particular African countries who were ethnically different, aspirations tended to be realistic and based on what was possible.

Socio-economic disadvantage proved to be the biggest stumbling block to social mobility across all contexts. This is further exacerbated by the lack of cultural capital that was valued by the schooling system (Roubeni et al., 2019; Vincent, 2017; Modiaotsile, 2012), where poor, black parents are unable to know what the rules of schooling area and are thus disempowered. Socio-economic class differences also determine the investment that parents put into education. This is emphasized further by geographical location where poor parents from rural areas were excluded from the schooling system and this had severe repercussions for parent's ability to participate in their children's education (Manilal, 2014). Whilst internationally, more white, middle class and elite parents are able to invest properly and gain opportunities, the plight of poor, black parents yielded a different understanding. When confronted by the basic survival, poor, black parents are unable to invest in education in a manner deemed valued by schools.

A glaring difference in the literature related to being single parents as was the case for the studies in South Africa. Single parenting tended to be done by females and shows the intersections of race, class and gender. Being solely responsible for the needs of the family often meant that these parents were unable to help and support their children in the manner that was required. Marginalised by work commitments, unemployment and migrant work meant that whilst parents wanted to help their children, they did not have the resources to help with education (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014) and could assist in small albeit ways that pleased their children if not the schooling contexts.

One is thus able to see the various ways in which race, class, ethnicity and gender for example intersect and influence what parents from international, national and South African contexts

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This section of the chapter reviewed, analysed and discussed literature relevant to the parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The section also discussed experiences of parents in respect of the schooling system, and how this impacted on their perceptions of education. The section also problematised the assumption that there is a linear correlation between education and upward social class mobility. The argument put forth in this study is that such correlation may be artificial and somewhat utopian.

The next section will discuss the theoretical framework, which will be deployed to understand the findings and discussions in this study.

## **2.10 Theoretical Framework**

In this section, I discuss the theoretical framework that was used to analyse, understand and make sense of the findings of this study. In this regard, I deployed Bourdieu's (1986) notion of the 'theory of practice', specifically, his concepts of habitus and capital. This served as the lens for understanding participants' understandings of the role of education in their children's lives.

### **2.10.1 Bourdieu's theory of practice**

Bourdieu's (1986) work has been influential in the construction of the understandings of social class and how this enables and disables opportunities. In this regard, Bourdieu (1986) has argued that society, especially the elite, tends to (re)produce social class inequalities through the protection and preserving of oppressive cultures.

### **2.10.2 Bourdieu's notion of habitus**

Bourdieu (1990) characterises habitus as a 'structuring structure', a product of the socialisation process, through which dominant norms, values and beliefs are propagated. These beliefs, values and norms become embedded in our thinking and acting and interact to condition individuals and social groups in various ways. In this way, individuals develop particular attitudes, perceptions and values that are durable, which become part of their

dispositions and practices (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, Vincent's (2017) study of parents in the United Kingdom revealed ways in which parents' experiences of education shaped how they viewed and identified themselves. For example, parents alluded to the fact that their experiences were a concoction of race and social class. Parents who participated in this study, and who were black and from working class backgrounds, reported that their experiences of education were prejudicial and teachers had low expectations of their academic potential (Vincent, 2017). These ideas and messages became embedded in their thinking and resulted in them experiencing alienation and exclusion. In Bourdieu's (1986) terms, these experiences had engraved on their habitus and formed a cage the weight of which was difficult to escape.

Bourdieu (1990) argues that practices and attitudes of individuals are shaped by their habitus or dispositions as a form of social inheritance. This form of social inheritance shapes and moulds an individual's tastes, their expectations of the world, as well as the ways in which they orientate themselves in the social world (Bourdieu, 1986). For instance, in the study by Vincent (2017), it was revealed how parents' exposure to institutionalised cultural capital, in the form of educational qualification and job skills, enabled them to negotiate their social worlds. When engaging with teachers, parents were confident and often affirmed by the cultural ethos of the school (Vincent, 2017). Their educational background also provided them with the required resources and, in this way, they acquired the necessary 'tastes' and resources to support their children's learning.

In addition, in this study, parents from working class contexts did not have access to the social inheritance or capital. To this end, these parents experienced difficulty in negotiating their social world and would often defer to the teacher's expertise, often allowing them to make decisions about what was best for their children (Vincent, 2017). This reinforced the divide or misalignment between the home and the school (Vincent, 2017). The distancing of the home and the school was also reported in the study by Bajaj (2009), in which immigrant parents and their children experienced education as disempowering.

Whilst Bourdieu (1990) contends that habitus is a 'structuring structure', he also argues that individuals are not powerless. Instead, individuals can negotiate themselves in powerful ways, because they possess agency, especially when they develop or adopt new ways of thinking, believing and acting (Bourdieu, 1990). One can then argue that parents from

working class and disadvantaged contexts, whilst they may have negative experiences of schooling, they can negotiate, trouble and challenge the status quo. This was the case in the study by Olandersson and Gustafsson (2018), where parents from working class contexts took responsibility to motivate their children, pushing them to study hard and succeed academically. Their past experiences of schooling informed by stereotypes about their ability and intelligence levels instead served as the fuel that propelled them to ensure that their children took advantage of the available opportunities (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). This suggests that parents can thus make strategic decisions to challenge the disempowering and repressive effects of habitus.

### **2.10.3 Bourdieu's notion of capital**

The concept of capital is foundational to Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice. Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual framework of habitus and capital, I consider how parents' habitus and forms of capital that they have are deployed. Bourdieu (1986) explains how power works using different forms of capital, namely, social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital. Given the fact that this study focuses on class and racial positioning of parents, the forms of capital that were deployed were social, cultural and economic capital.

#### **a) Cultural capital**

Bourdieu (1986) contends that cultural capital is a vast and entrenched source of power. Cultural capital comprises three forms, namely, embodied, institutionalised and objectified capital. Embodied capital is a product of cultural aspects, which is passed down by members of a specific family or culture, which could be in the form of behaviour, status or class (Edward & Imrie, 2008). For example, as it has been pointed out by Spaul and Kotze (2015), capital or lack of it, is passed from generation to generation. This suggests that if parents received motivation from their parents, it is likely that parents will pass the same aspirations to their children. Children's behaviour is often related to that of their parents' action therefore, that is, children are likely to follow their parents' steps, whether it good or bad (Lachman et al., 2017).

Institutionalised capital is usually in the form of the education to which one has been exposed and the qualifications that one has obtained. Horvat and Baugh (2015) argue that the demands that education puts on parents are constantly changing. However, parents from

working-class contexts are sometimes unable to meet these expectations and adjust to the changes (Horvat & Baugh, 2015). Parents, especially those from disadvantaged sections of society, sometimes do not have the required skill or time or capital to become the ‘full partners’ that schools expect them to be. However, parents from middle class contexts may be able to become such partners with schools, as they possess the capital to do so. For instance, parents from middle class contexts may have resources to ‘buy’ people who can stand on their behalf as partners with schools, or they may use other means to compensate for their absence (Horvat & Baugh, 2015). This study involved parents who were from an ordinary, per-urban school. For these parents, the resources that may be available for other parents in middle class contexts, were unavailable for them. For this reason, their understandings of the role of education in their children’s lives mattered significantly for this study.

#### **b) Social capital**

According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital refers to the relationships or networks that individuals develop with significant individuals and social groups. Social capital is often linked to the currency or importance of connections with these significant individuals and groups. For instance, parents who have a job in a big multinational company will have connections to important people who will be connected to other important people. This would then cushion such an individual and empower them with resources to navigate their social world.

Bourdieu (1986) argues that social capital has two crucial elements, the first being that the social relationships individuals have with significant people will place them in a better position to access resources that are important for them to navigate their social world. The second element of social capital involves the quantity and quality of these resources and the extent to which these are valued within society. Gale and Lingard (2015) argue that schools have institutional forms of power and the ability to restrict and enable access for those who display appropriate habitus. For this study, the intention was to understand parents’ understandings of the role of education in their children’s lives. These understandings depended on the social networks to which these parents had access. Without access to the resources that accrue because of these networks, the parents’ understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children may be negatively impacted, depending on their

agency. In this instance, social capital structures relationships between teachers and parents, parents and parents and parents and the school.

Camarero-Figuerola, Dueñas, and Renta-Davids (2020) contends that children's home environments may provide them with social capital that is required for academic success, depending on the access to relevant resources in those environments. Such access would largely depend on social class positioning and, for this study, racial positioning. For Dika and Singh (2002, p. 33), social capital serves as the investment that is deployed by dominant social groups to (re)produce, maintain and preserve their dominance. For this study, for instance, this suggests that parents understanding of the role of education in their children's lives could be muddled by their own struggles with education as children.

### **c) Economic capital**

Economic capital involves access to economic resources. Bourdieu (1990) argues that families have different degrees of access to capital, which fact allocates economic advantage inequitably. For example, economic capital can be used by parents from middle class contexts to provide private tuition for their children, who may be struggling academically or whose teachers struggle to teach (Vincent, 2017). That is, for parents from middle class contexts, it is possible to buy an educational service somewhere else, if the school that their children attend cannot provide it. However, this is not the case for parents from working class contexts. The various economic capital strategies, according to Møllegaard and Jæger (2015 p. 12), can contribute to educational success as children inherit the "implicit 'rules of the game' in the educational system, an appreciation of higher education and the ability to present an impression of academic brilliance to teachers". This suggests that economic capital has a significant role to play in enabling access to the empowering codes of education.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a review, analysis and discussion of the literature relevant to the aim and focus of this study, namely, to investigate parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. The chapter also discussed Bourdieu's (1986) concepts, namely, habitus and forms of capital, which was deployed as a lens to frame and understand the findings and discussions of this study. The intention was to use this review of literature and the theoretical framework to provide a theoretical foundation for the study.

The following chapter discusses and analyses the methodological and design considerations and justifications that I made and provided in respect of the conduct of this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I reviewed international and national literature on parents' understanding of the role of education in their children's lives. The chapter also explored the theoretical concepts on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice, deployed to frame understandings in this study. This chapter presents the methodological and design choices and considerations, which were adopted for this study. In this chapter, I, firstly, discuss the research paradigm, which was used to frame my worldview for this study. I then link that with the key research questions as well as the theoretical underpinnings deployed in the conduct of this study. Secondly, I discuss narrative inquiry and the manner in which the participants were positioned in this study: as central to the study, with their descriptions of their realities serving as the template for constructing understandings and sense-making. This is followed by a discussion of the research design, wherein I share procedures following in the sampling of the participants, context of the research and research methods and techniques that were used to generate the data. Finally, the trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations for this study are.

#### **3.2 Research paradigm**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) refer to a research paradigm as a lens that is used to view and understand the world. Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 97) extend this to include an understanding that a paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action". Thus, one could claim that a research paradigm a researcher chooses guides their actions in the conduct of research. Various research paradigms exist, for example, positivist, interpretivist and critical paradigms (Scotland, 2012). Each research paradigm comprises important ontological and epistemological elements of. Ontology refers to the nature of reality studied and what can be known about it (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014). Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher as the 'knower' and what can be known (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2014).

This research study adopted the critical research paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison

(2007) contend that the critical paradigm is not only about critically understanding society and situations; it is also about changing them. The intention of this study was to understand the realities of parents and how this influences their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Whilst the research could not change situations that the parents, who participated in this study, experienced, it afforded them the space and opportunity to reflect on their understandings about education and its role in the lives of their children. It also potentially strengthened their commitment to work for a better life for their children.

The critical paradigm enabled me to reflect on my different beliefs, normative understandings as well as structural barriers that informed my understandings of parents, especially those from low socio-economic contexts. This allowed a particular kind of relationship with parents to emerge, based on respect for who they were and informed the epistemological orientation within which I worked. Rehman and Alharthi (2016, p. 57) contend that a research process is a subjective experience, and that “no object can be researched without being affected by the researcher”. For this study, this meant that I had to be aware of my own positioning within this research study and to find ways in which the participants’ subjective truths were known, and not informed by my own biases about parents.

Epistemologically, the study considered that the participants as active subjects, who possessed agency and capability to be critical of their own social realities. In other words, the participants did not outsource their responsibilities to the school; they played a central role in shaping their children’s education, thereby displaying deep understandings of its role in their children’s lives. Understanding the participants in this manner and using the narrative inquiry approach ensured a particular kind of relationship between the participants and myself. The impact of this was evident in how the participants positioned themselves, not just as subjects for enquiry, but as active agents seeking to change their circumstances. In this instance, a researcher who understands themselves as a knower would take up the space. However, in this study, I worked with the understanding that we were equals in the research process and I depended on them to provide me with the data to respond to the key research questions. Thus, the research process was somewhat a negotiated one.

In order to establish a relationship with the participants, I went into their spaces, namely, their community and home spaces, with a view to trying to understand them in their contexts.

Thus, the relationship that was established with the participants was based on mutual trust and respect. This was with the understanding that qualitative research, the critical paradigm and narrative inquiry calls for the researcher to derive or source meanings from participants (Creswell, 2009, p. 175-176). In this regard, I created a space where the sense making of participants' understandings of the role of education in their children's lives could best be revealed. When I began with the data production phase, I afforded the participants to decide on the space that was going to be used as a venue. Participants decided on a classroom in their school. I, however, recognised that the classroom setting was not a neutral space, Therefore, in order to make it a bit more comfortable, I set it up in a more informal way. I also provided them with tea and cake, and held an informal discussion with before the commencement of the data collection process.

Ontologically, the critical paradigm considers reality as socially constructed and such construction is controlled by those with power (Krauss, 2005). This dissertation understands that the status quo is shaped and informed by those with power and influence. This explains why the educational culture normally reflects the culture of the middle class, to which some of the participants did not belong. Against this background, this thesis adopted two positions, which sought to challenge the prevailing structures and cultures that shaped the nature of educational system by exploring alternatives sources of power. These two positions are informed by the theoretical underpinnings of the study, namely, that of Bourdieu (1986). This consideration enabled me to understand power as a form of capital.

This implies that I adopted an understanding that acknowledged that the participants possessed particular forms of capital, or what González, Moll and Amanti (2005) call funds of knowledge, was an important aspect of this study. I could then read how the participants deployed their capital or funds of knowledge to negotiate their daily realities to the benefit of their children. This then enabled the study to negate normative, deficit understandings of the participants, who were parents from disadvantaged backgrounds. As evident in the literature review, current literature and discourse suggests that parents from socioeconomically deprived contexts may lack the ability and interest in education, a deficit understanding that was challenged in this study.

### **3.3 Methodological approach**

Qualitative research is an umbrella term, which covers several different approaches to research, such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Qualitative research is interested in understanding human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is, thus, for this reason that the study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative approaches are generally associated with critical and interpretive paradigms, as they seek to understand the meanings that people attach to certain human and social phenomena.

This study sought to understand the role that education played in the lives of children, as viewed from their parents' perspectives. The socio-economic positioning of the parents was critical for understanding, for example, why education was important for the future. Thus, to achieve this qualitative research was the most appropriate means to obtain rich narrative accounts of the participants' experiences of education and ways in which they supported their children. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) contend that, within qualitative research, special focus is on people's experiences, as reality is generated through human action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Cohen, Morrison and Manion (2018) contend that qualitative research provides researchers with a variety of ways for collecting data. Thus, data for this study was generated using semi-structured interviews and mapping. In this way, the participants could reflect on their own experiences of education in the past, present and future. These will be discussed in more detail in the sections below.

### **3.4 Narrative inquiry**

A narrative inquiry provides insights into people's experiences, by allowing them space to tell their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories are ways in which people interpret and make sense of the world (Aguilar, 2011). It is important to understand that the stories that participants tell reflect their social identity and how this is experienced. Narrative inquiry acknowledges the fact that people and events have a present, future and past. Thus, the stories of participants, which were parents in the case of this study, were key to understanding them as people – their ideas, the values, beliefs, aspirations as they imagined certain configurations of their children's future. For this study, the participants' own experiences of education influenced how they viewed the role of education in their children's lives.

When life stories are told, not everything is said; some events are prioritised over others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The ordering of events emphasises certain events and aspects. For instance, mapping as a data collection tool afforded participants an opportunity to share the events that they regarded as important to themselves. The stories that they later narrated to explain the events that they had chosen provided insights into what influenced them and stood out for them. In this sense, the stories documented the innermost experience of the participants (Davis, 2002; Elliot, 2005). Therefore, narratives became a means through which lived experience and meaning ascribed to such experience by participants could be gathered by the researcher. According to Polkinghorne (1995, p. 5), a narrative is “a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into temporal unity by means of a plot”. Such an inquiry consists of three main features, as discussed below.

The first feature is temporality (i.e. stories happen at a particular time or over time; they are time-bound). In this case, I focused on specific events in the lives of the participants, which were associated with their experiences of education Polkinghorne (1995). The second feature is causality (i.e. what happened and what caused it to happen, often referred to as the plot). In this regard, I sought to understand whether participants’ educational backgrounds had a direct effect on how they imagined the role education in the lives of their children. The final and last feature is interpretation or evaluation of the event narrated by the teller and the listener. In this case, I sought to understand whether parents’ experiences of education and their socio-economic backgrounds or positioning had an influence on their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. This was then interpreted using theory Bourdieu’s (1986) notion of capital and capital.

### **3.5 Research design**

#### **3.5.1 Context of the study**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) contend that there are four important categories influencing how context can be understood, namely, places, people, events and activities. This study was conducted in a peri-urban area, uMgungundlovu District, province of KwaZulu-Natal. The area in which the participants lived was indicative of the effects of apartheid. The area is characterised by a combination of low-cost housing, informal settlements, and upwardly mobile families who have chosen to remain in the area. It is, therefore, not uncommon to see big extensions to houses alongside low-cost houses.

Here, teachers, police and nurses lived alongside other poorer neighbours. However, roads are poorly constructed; there is no electricity and water and sanitation is poor. This peri urban setting was chosen to investigate parents understanding of education in their children lives. A peri-urban area is one of the places that experienced inequalities, institutionalised through the apartheid policies that were implemented by the previous National Party government. Therefore, whilst there has been some development in the current context, the majority of people in the area continue to be trapped in poverty.

However, González, Moll and Amanti (2005) contends that families, including parents, and communities are the holders of historical and cultural knowledge and can adapt to new situations, which can bring about change, for example, change in education received by children even though parents' socio-economic backgrounds exposed children to social inequality. Spaul and Kotze's (2015) study has supported the finding that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds tend to inherit their parents' social class positions in their adult lives. Using parents who live side by side and possess different socioeconomic statuses was, therefore, crucial for understanding and establishing whether class positioning influenced what parents believed was possible with education for their children.

### **3.5.2 Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. Purposive sampling is used to access people with sufficient knowledge of the subject of inquiry. Therefore, selection is based on a particular criterion or criteria. Purposive sampling is linked to the key research questions or phenomenon of interest (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). A researcher uses specific criteria for the selection of participants, groups or object (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). In this study, purposive sampling was appropriate as I had a specific target group. The criterion for the selection of the participants was that participants must be parents from a range of socio-economic statuses, i.e. low to middle income groups in relation to the community context. This may be different from the international understanding of social class status.

Therefore, the parents who were selected for participation in the study had to meet the following criteria: they had to be parents; professionally skilled, two who owned small business (e.g. spaza shops) and two who were either unemployed or receive social grants. This enabled me to obtain various perspectives on the participants' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. Secondly, selected participants were black and lived in the same area with their children.

Furthermore, the participants eligible for selection had to be living with their children, as this assisted me to understand the various ways in which they supported their children. Through this, I wanted to understand how race and class intersect and influence the social realities of people (Khunou, 2015). An additional criterion was that their children had to be learners attending a school in the area. Gender was initially a key factor in that I believed that participants could provide different perspectives and experiences. Thus, the intention was to select an equal number of females and males. However, the parents who volunteered to participate in the study caused me to rethink. I could not find an equal number of male and female parents. This did not concern me, as my supervisor has underlined the fact that most important criteria were race and social class.

This range of groups although artificial, as explained by Khunou (2015), enabled me to understand if their status enabled a different view of education for their children, given their own understandings and experiences of education. It also enabled me to investigate how parents supported and promoted their children's education. See table below.

| <b>PARTICIPANT</b> | <b>GENDER</b> | <b>MARITAL STATUS</b> | <b>AGE</b> | <b>HIGHEST QUALIFICATION</b> | <b>NATURE OF WORK</b> |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Lindiwe            | F             | Single                | 52         | Diploma in nursing           | Nurse                 |
| Ziph'ezinhle       | F             | Single                | 53         | Basic Education Degree       | Teacher               |
| Nonjabulo          | F             | Single                | 32         | Matric certificate           | Unemployed            |
| Maduna             | F             | Married               | 40         | Matric certificate           | Businesswoman         |
| Mxolisi            | M             | Single                | 35         | Diploma in marketing         | Businessman           |
| Nombulelo          | M             | Single                | 37         | Grade 10                     | Unemployed            |

*Table 1: Biographical details of participants*

Table 1 above provides the details of participants for this study. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity pseudonyms were used instead of their real names. The participants were five

(5) female parents and one male parent. Lindiwe and Ziph'ezinhle were from middle class contexts, as they are professionally qualified and worked as a qualified nurse and a teacher. Nonjabulo, Maduna, Mxolisi and Nombulelo represented working class. Of these participants, further divisions could be made, as Maduna and Mxolisi were small business owners and could provide for their families.

Two of the participants were unemployed, namely, Nonjabulo and Nombulelo and they from a working-class background. Only one participant was married, living with their partner and raising their children together, whilst five participants were single parents, including Mxolisi, who was the only male. Their ages ranged from 32-53 years old. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), a small sample size assists the researcher to save time. What they indicate, however, is that the researcher should strive to generate rich, in-depth data.

### **3.5.3 Methods of data collection**

Naidoo and Rule (2016, p. 234) state that a researcher who collects data within a qualitative method intends to pursue a profound understanding and in-depth analysis, which open a space for participants to share their views. The intention in this study was to investigate parents' understandings of the role of education in their children's lives. To investigate this, mapping and semi-structured interview were used to generate data.

#### **a) Mapping**

As mentioned before, the study is based on people's stories about their experiences of their social world (Aguilar, 2011). I chose mapping as one of the tools for collecting data. According to Trochim and Donnelly (2001), mapping is allowing participants to shape discussions on a given topic with limited interference from the researcher, who serves as a facilitator. Rambaldi (2004, p. 5) states that mapping "is more than a piece of paper" and should be seen more as "stories, conversations, and lived experiences out in a place", making them "inseparable from the cultural context in which they are used".

Mapping was chosen for its potential to preserve the richness of the participants' meanings, thereby assisting the researcher to maintain the original meanings of the participants' experiences (Daley, 2004). Thus, during the mapping exercise, the participants generated

data using sketches or drawings to represent their experiences. In this regard, the use of mapping to collect data provided a mechanism for ensuring that the process of collecting data was participatory (Dakwa, 2015), in this way, circumventing the possible power differential between the participants and myself as the researcher. In this regard, participants were afforded the opportunity to participate as co-constructors of knowledge for the study.

The participants were guided through the process to ensure that they understood how it worked. The first sketch participants were asked to draw was their own experiences of education. The second was regarding how they perceived their children's experiences of education and schooling. Finally, they were requested to sketch what they believed education could do for their children. This progressed very well as it helped to capture all their experiences through their own terms. This assisted me to map education experiences and determine if their experiences had changed in any way or if they had been influenced by what they believed their children could gain from education.

Using mapping as a data collection technique or tool was useful for the study, because it provided a means for the participants shared their experiences using drawings. Van Boeijen and Stappers (2011) contends that mapping provides explicit knowledge from the past, informing the present in order to obtain a better understanding of the future. In this exercise, participants were the experts in respect of representing their experiences (Daley, 2004). This means that, for this study, participants were regarded as agentic partners capable of telling their own stories and representing and expressing their own truths. Some participants showed excitement, interest and curiosity about the project and the results it was going to generate. Therefore, it could be deduced that participants were willing to contribute as co-owners and co-constructors of the project and were looking forward to the findings of the study (Van Boeijen & Stappers, 2011). This participatory method was empowering for participants, as they could take decisions about what to include in and exclude from their maps as well as of the research project as a whole (Zondi, 2018).

In the initial meeting I held with the participants, I had shared with them the entire research process, including the information about the concept of mapping. I also explained that they did not have to be expert artists in order to participate in the mapping exercise, as some participants had asked about this. The participants' drawings or maps were then used as a lead activity into the semi-structured interviews. The period allocated for the drawings

allowed them sufficient time to engage with creating, recollecting memories and experiences that they wished to highlight represent in their maps. The maps also placed me in a good position to understand the participants' experiences and social world as represented and told by them.

### **b) Semi-structured interviews**

According to Cohen et al. (2018), interviews are among the most common methods of collecting data. An interview often takes the form of a conversation, in which questions are often asked by the researcher with a view to obtaining views from participants about a phenomenon under investigation (Kumar, 2011). This interactive process allows the participants and researcher to construct versions of the social world (Silverman, 2004). The interviews that I conducted served as follow-up from mapping exercise, and served to further my understanding of the key elements of the issues raised by the participants.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured or open-ended (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A structured interview is guided by an interview schedule, whilst an unstructured or open-ended interview takes the form of a conversation, with no schedule for questions to be asked (Creswell, 2009; Nieuwenhuis, 2007)). On the other, a semi-structured interview, commonly used to corroborate data gathered using other methods (Nieuwenhuis, 2007), is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews (Struwig & Stead, 2001). This type of interview overcomes challenges associated with structured interviews, such as limiting the depth of participants' experiences by controlling what is expected from the participants (Kumar, 2011). A semi-structured interview may use an interview schedule to guide the interviewer or researcher on the questions to be asked, although this is not usually followed to the letter (Kumar, 2011). This assists the researcher not to stray from the topic/issue under investigation (Fox & Bayat, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are, therefore, a flexible and adaptable way of gathering data (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006).

Greaves (2020) contends that semi-structured interviews allow for a subjective account of reality, as it is experienced and understood by participants. For this study, while interviewing the participants, I noticed that they seemed to understand their experiences differently and that their experiences had references on their past, especially their struggles and social positioning. Thus, given the fact that the interview was semi-structured, I often asked

questions based on what they were sharing, rather than what the schedule of questions contained. Their responses were reflective of multiple realities, multiple regimes of ‘truth’.

Using a semi-structured interview allowed me to adjust and refocus my questions to pick up those elements which I thought required further explanations or clarifications from the participants. In addition, it allowed me to probe and ask alternative questions where necessary. This was done by changing the way questions were phrased; pursuing different angles of the discussions and leaving out particular questions, which were inappropriate (Robson, 1993). By doing so, I could obtain in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation. Using the semi-structured interview also enabled me to corroborate issues that emerged from the mapping exercise to understand the participants’ experiences and understandings. The process of reflection that the semi-structured interview allowed assisted me to understand the participants’ experiences better. According to Cohen et al. (2018), this is crucial for a researcher working within the critical paradigm.

As the researcher, using a semi-structured interview, I could delve deeper into the participants’ experiences and understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children; their experiences of education; factors that constrained their abilities to negotiate education; ways in which their social positioning influenced their perceptions of education and schooling context; and relationships that enabled them to engage with their children and the education they receive. The semi-structured interview, therefore, allowed for a multi-layered understanding of the participants’ experiences and understandings to unfold. In addition, the use of the semi-structured interview also opened possibilities for the participants to self-reflect. In this way, the semi-structured interview positioned the participants as co-constructors of the knowledge generated and gathered (Naidoo & Rule, 2016).

### **c) Conducting the interviews**

Participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent from the participants, took between 30-60 minutes, depending on the participants’ responses. Most of the interviews were conducted during break time at the school that the participants’ children attended. It is important to point out that the interviews were conducted at the school because the majority of the participants preferred so, given the fact that they

were employed at the school (i.e. cleaner; teacher; and SGB member). However, the noise levels were disruptive and a decision was made by all participants to move the interviews after school hours. For participants who lived far from the school, interviews were conducted at their homes. All interviews were conducted in isiZulu as all participants chose to respond in their own language. Each participant was asked questions according to interview schedule, but this was used as a framework to keep the themes to be covered.

The choice of interviews did have some limitations. One of the major limitations was that I could not conduct face to face interviews, as the country was under lockdown to try and contain the spread of COVID-19. Whilst five of the six interviews were conducted prior to the lockdown, the sixth interview was conducted during the lockdown. This interview was conducted telephonically, which attracted costs as I had to buy data for the participant. Furthermore, after translating and transcribing the interview data and my initial attempts at data coding, I noticed that there were gaps that I needed to follow up on. The follow-up interviews also had to be conducted telephonically. For this interview, I could not finish on the same day owing to technical problems.

Another challenge that I noticed was that the interviews produced a large amount of data, which was a bit overwhelming for me. For instance, transcribing the data was a time-consuming exercise, which took many hours to finish. In addition, I had to work meticulously to ensure that the data was translated properly and that it preserved the integrity the meaning of the participants' responses. Although difficult, this heavy work had some advantages. For instance, as I transcribed the data, I could understand it better and begin to detect the trends in the participants' responses, which fed into the analysis process. In order to enhance the integrity of the participants' responses, I shared transcriptions with the participants for verification, a process known as member-checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). However, given the fact that this was done within the context of COVID-19, and protocols had to adhered to strictly to prevent infections, the process took a bit longer. The adverse effect of operating within the context of COVID-19 was that this stretched the data collection period, causing some challenges in respect of the project time frames.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Data analysis is defined as a procedure of searching and arranging the data generated (Kgaffe, 2001). For this study, as explained above, interviews were conducted in IsiZulu, which was time-consuming, because data had to be translated to English first. Using two languages had its own challenges. For instance, there were challenges in respect of different terminologies, grammar issues and metaphoric structures. These have to be navigated and managed carefully to ensure the integrity of the participants' responses. To this end, assistance of language specialists was enlisted. It is only after this that the process of analysing the data gathered effectively commenced. Data gathered comprised that from the mapping exercise and semi-structured interviews. The stages followed were: transcribing, coding, identifying categories and finally, identifying themes and sub-themes.

Firstly, I prepared the data by transcribing in order to analyse textual data, a process known as transcription (Manilal, 2014; McLellan, MacQueen & Neidig, 2003). I then familiarised myself with the transcribed data through reading, re-reading and thinking about the research questions, the context of the study, my notes from journaling of the research process and debates in the field. During this process, I noted and highlighted ideas and patterns, including contradictions that were beginning to emerge for the gathered data. To organise, analyse, make sense of and interpret the gathered data, I used the thematic method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Basit, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Dika & Singh, 2002). Thirdly, borrowing from Basit (2003), I then undertook a process of creating categories, took the form of an intense and close discussion between myself and the gathered data. To do this, I had to work with data very closely in order to identify and understand each participant's experience.

To establish categories, I decided to organise the data in ways that were useful for the data analysis. I then grouped together as categories the long list of codes that I generated. I reduced similar categories in order to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, themes emerged from categories, which were reviewed, named and defined (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Thereafter, the theoretical constructs and debates from the reviewed literature were used to analyse and make sense of the gathered data. This structure or format was followed throughout the process of data analysis. It is important to place a rider and point out that the analysis was initially mainly inductive, which allowed the themes to emerge from the gathered data (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006).

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the study**

The intention of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is to strengthen rigour (Creswell, 2014). Shenton (2004) contends that there are four criteria that must be considered in ensuring trustworthiness, namely, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). In this section, credibility, transferability and confirmability will be discussed as mechanisms for how trustworthiness was ensured.

Credibility ensures that the research displays or presents real experiences of the participants (Shenton, 2004). For this research study, to ensure credibility, data gathered was not tampered with or manipulated or compromised during the presentation. This was achieved by reflecting the actual stories as told by the participants (Creswell, 2014). In addition to that, I borrowed from Manilal (2014) and used a process called triangulation to corroborate the data gathered. Triangulation in this study was ensured through the use of two data gathering methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and mapping. For purposes of triangulation, data gathered through the mapping exercise was explored in greater depth during semi-structured interviews. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to verify and amend the transcribed data through a process known as member-checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In this way, I allowed for the participants' ideas, inputs and voices to filter through and be incorporated in the study. In this instance, the triangulation process allowed for greater verification and consistency and preservation of the integrity of the participants' responses.

If the study is to be trustworthy, its findings must be transferable. This means that the findings of that study must be generalisable to similar settings, situations and populations (Golafshani, 2003). However, for this study, the notion of transferability did not matter, as the intention was not to generalise findings, but to delve deeper into the experiences and understandings of a particular set of participants. That is, the intention was to investigate and understand the phenomenon under investigation through the eyes of these participants, and not to make claims that what obtained here, obtains somewhere else.

Terre Blanche et al. (2007) and Shenton (2004) indicate that one of the ways in which a researcher can ensure dependability is by providing a detailed and in-depth account of the

research process, data collection and analysis approach. In this, dissertation I ensured that all the processes were described in details. For this purpose, I took notes during the research process to ensure that I had some record of the events and issues that emerged outside of the audio-recording of events. In addition, I also ensured that even responses that were contrary to my beliefs were included in the study. Therefore, I am confident that the study sufficiently meets the standards of the notion of dependability. In addition, my supervisor and peers served as my critical friends providing feedback, support and other ways of looking at the gathered data. This helped me to constantly reflect on my thinking and what I thought the participants' responses were saying (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

Finally, I had to ensure confirmability, which refers to the need for the researcher to protect the findings from his/her biases, although this may be tricky. Considering the fact that I was operating within the critical paradigm, there may have been a degree of bias. However, it must be pointed out that, for this study, the application of the tenets of the critical paradigm included taking a critical stance even regarding the manner in which the paradigm influenced my thinking. That is, I endeavoured to be critical even of my thinking. This was achieved through critical friends, who provided me with their views in respect of how I was thinking about issues within this framework. For this reason, I was always careful not to work from the theoretical constructs that I possessed, but from the gathered data.

### **3.8 Design limitations**

Using mapping and semi structured interviews presented me with the opportunity to interact with the participants in deep discussion, providing rich detailed data. However, the difficulty I experienced was in respect of covering all the areas required for a sufficient response to the key research questions. As a novice researcher, I was extremely overwhelmed that I missed several questions, which then led to me having go back to the participants to address the outstanding areas.

Conducting these follow-up interviews with the participants took longer than I had. In addition, two of the participants seemed uncomfortable during these follow-up interviews. This was largely because of the level of noise as the interviews were conducted at the school. However, the recording of the interviews was sufficiently clear for me to use the data. I negotiated times with participants that were suitable for both them and myself. I did not have

to pay for transport or incur any expenses because the participants were from the same place. However, there were occasions when I had to drive to their homes in order to conduct the follow-up interviews.

One of the six interviews was conducted during lockdown, owing to the outbreak of COVID19. As a result, I conducted five interviews, instead of six, in March. I could only conduct the sixth interview and its follow-up via telephone. This means that the process attracted costs as I had to provide participants with data and airtime so that the telephonic interviews could take place.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethics involve how researchers deal with matters relating to what is right or wrong in working with research participants. Ethics can be understood as conforming to specific ethical standards of a given group or profession (Mouton, 1998). Ethical considerations in research usually focuses on three elements, namely, voluntary participation, no harm to participants, and anonymity and confidentiality. The following section discusses how the rights of the participants were respected, upheld and protected in respect of the three elements.

To ensure that I followed all university ethics guidelines. For this, I obtained permission to conduct the research from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee. This means that I only commenced with data gathering processes once I had received the ethical clearance certificate from the University. Secondly, using the ethical clearance certificate, I then applied for permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. It is only after I had received such that I approached schools and participants for further permission and consent. The documents signed and obtained have been annexed into this dissertation.

Voluntary participation requires that the participants must be aware of the nature of the research and their rights relating to the research. Some of the rights may include the fact that the participants may withdraw whenever they want to or whenever they are no longer comfortable doing so (Bryman, 2008). For this study, participants were informed of their rights and processes to follow if they wanted to withdraw from participating in the research. For this purpose, the participants were provided with my contact details and that of my

supervisor, in case they need to contact her. In addition, the participants were informed that there was no financial benefit for participating in the research study. This was important to ensure that the participants agreed to participate because they wanted to, not because of the financial incentive.

For this study, the principle of no harm to the participants and voluntary participation were formalised through informed consent (Mouton, 1998). No harm to participants required me to ensure that the participants were not exposed to any danger that might cause harm. Protection of participants' identities and well-being was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, which were decided by the participants. In addition to this, any information that could be traced back to the participants and might reveal their identities was removed, kept under lock and key or encrypted with hard-to-crack passwords in the case of electronic information.

Lastly, as alluded to earlier in this dissertation, the critical research paradigm, which was adopted for this study, takes the issue of power seriously. Therefore, as I conducted this research, I was always conscious of the position that I occupied socially as a researcher so as not to abuse or manipulate the research process to my favour. I am confident that the various ways in which I have presented and discussed the participants' responses preserved the integrity of their stories.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology. The chapter discussed the research paradigm, narrative inquiry, sampling procedures as well as methods used to gather the data. The discussion of the research design included the presentation of the context of the study. The choices and decisions made about the research process were explained from the choice of particular participants, through to issues of trustworthiness and ethical consideration.

The next chapter will present and discuss the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed research methodology and design, which were adopted for this study. This chapter presents, discusses, analyses and interprets the findings that emerged from the gathered data. The interpretation and discussion of the major research findings generated meanings and understanding towards responding to the key research questions of the study. This process was framed by the deployment of the theoretical constructs from Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice and the debates from the reviewed literature.

This chapter analyses the data in relation to the following key research questions:

Main Research Question:

- What do parents understand about the role that education plays in the lives of their children?

Sub-questions:

- What are parents own experiences of education and how was this influenced by their socio-economic positioning.
- How does socio-economic positioning influence their understanding about the role of education for their children?
- How does this understanding of the role of education influence the way parents support and promote education?

The chapter firstly introduces the participants. Thereafter the analysis is organised into three (3) sections. The main research question underpins all the themes analysed. The first section, namely, 4.2, addresses the first sub-question, although it also inadvertently lays the ground for understanding how the participants came to have a particular understanding of education, which is the main research question. In this chapter, the analysis focused on the participants' experiences of education as a foundation for accessing their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Under the broad theme, "*Influence of past*

*experiences on current understandings of education*”, I discuss how class, race and gender influenced the participants’ understanding of the role of education in their children’s lives.

Under section two, I respond to the second sub-question. The broad theme titled “*Influence of social class on parents’ understandings of the role of education*”. This section provides insights into the manner in which the participants were influenced by current discourses regarding the role of education. Sub-themes reveal that, in this study, education tended to serve other social and moral purposes, which influenced the manner in which the participants constructed understanding of the role of education in their children’s lives.

The third section of this chapter addresses the third sub-question and provides insights into the various ways in which the participants supported and promoted education for their children. Under the broad theme, *Parents supporting their children’s education*, data reveals the various ways in which the participants went about doing this and subsequent complexities that emerged.

The data presented represents the actual words that constituted the responses from the six (6) participants in this study, namely, Lindiwe, Zipho, Maduna, Nombulelo, Nonjabulo and Mxolisi.

## **4.2 Introducing the participants**

This section provides brief insights into the lives of parents who participated in this study, and the different socio-economic backgrounds from which they came. The six participants were one male and five females. All participants lived in the same area, a township in Pietermaritzburg.

### **a) Zipho**

Ziphezinhle is a divorced, single mother. She has seven (7) children, for whom she is solely responsible for, as her husband does not contribute financially, emotionally or socially for the children. Ziphezinhle was the eldest of the participants. At the time of data collection, she was 53 years old. In the interview, she spoke of her perseverance and determination to improve her life. Ziphezinhle is also a grandmother of seven (7) grandchildren, who live with her. She became a teacher although she studied late in her life. Her motivation to become a

teacher was so that her children could have a better life. Being solely responsible for their children meant that not all her children could go to university or any other tertiary institutions. Growing up poor and struggling pushed her to want to do better for her children's and grandchildren's education. Six (6) of her children attended universities of technology; only one has no university degree. Although her professional qualifications suggest that she is from a middle-class context, having to look after so many children and grandchildren often meant that she did not have adequate access to accoutrements of middle class and often found it difficult provide throughout the month.

**b) Maduna**

Maduna was a single parent of two children, a boy and a girl, who were both in high school. Maduna is a businesswoman living with her children. Even though she is raising her children alone, she ensures that they are well-looked after and receive education. She is happy with her children's education, because they come home with new knowledge that she is not familiar with. Therefore, she praises the work done by the school and her children's teachers. She has many community assistance programmes and works with different organisations to look after children who come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**c) Nonjabulo**

Nonjabulo is a young single mother of two children, who grew up staying with her siblings. She only has a Grade 12 certificate and could not continue with higher education. She got pregnant whilst still at school and she feels that this has had an impact on her current life. She was a very confident individual, which was evident during the interviews, where she spoke of ensuring that her children do not have to go through what she went through as a young person. Her only source of income is a social grant and casual employment cleaning classrooms at the school and people's washing clothes in the community. She dreamt that her children would take them out of poverty through education.

**d) Lindiwe**

Lindiwe is a married mother of seven (7) children. Lindiwe works as a nurse in a local hospital. She has been married for more than 20 years. Lindiwe got pregnant whilst she was still at school, but went back to school to finish her studies, when she was married and had children. Even though it was difficult for her, she was determined to finish and obtain a matric certificate and further her studies and become a nurse. Lindiwe said she always

encourages her children to get an education and tries to support them with what their school needs. One of her interesting understanding is that she feels that education can only be done by teachers, as they are trained and qualified to do so.

**e) Nombulelo**

Nombulelo is an unemployed single mother of four (4) children, who depends on the social grant for a living. She spoke fondly of both her parents who helped her with school, just by ensuring that her homework and that of her siblings was done. Nombulelo left school in Grade 11. She believes that her lack of education has jeopardised her chances of getting a job. As a result, she is trying everything to change the future of her children, because she does not want them to be like her. She ensures this by helping her children with homework and attending school meetings, although she does not contribute much to discussions, because she feels that there are people who can raise concerns on her behalf.

**f) Mxolisi**

Mxolisi is the only son amongst (5) daughters. He went to college, but could not complete his studies because of financial struggles. He is a single father of one son, whom he wants to give him a better future. During the interview, he kept on saying that he wanted to become a better ‘someone’, but because of a background of poverty, he could not. As a member of a school governing body, he understands the importance of cooperating with the teachers to improve his son’s life. He is a knowledgeable person and understands the rapidly changing world and the importance of technology for human development. As a result, he ensures that his son receives support where he can.

#### **4.3 Influence of past experiences on current understandings of education**

This section addressed the first sub-research question: *What are parents own experiences of education and how was this influenced by their socio-economic positioning.* This theme and sub-themes focussed on the influence of the participants’ past experiences on their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. The sub-themes that of which this theme comprised are discussed below.

#### 4.3.1 Growing up in poverty: “*It was the norm...we knew we won’t get it*”

All the participants recalled growing up in contexts mired in poverty. Participant reported experiencing deprivation in respect of basic necessities, such as food, clothing, clean water, sanitation, health services, education and more. Zipho, Lindiwe and Maduna shared their experiences of growing up in poverty in the excerpts below:

Zipho: “*We were surviving with what we had we did not have more. We grew up getting excited when it a weekend our mother would come home with lots of bread crust.... My mother will be collecting these crusts for the whole week. Therefore, what I have experienced it mostly because my parents were poor and couldn’t afford many things.... “So even us as children we knew we not getting anything we understood that this is all they can afford.... It was what it was, and we were used to our lifestyle.” It was painful though but there was no other way. Thinking about it now it very sad and it hurt but I do not blame my parents they had no power to change the situation at that time. And even though I tried my best to have a better life I also experienced poverty that is one of the reasons I fought so hard for my children.*

Maduna: “*The way I see now; we were very poor even though we didn’t see it at that time. And most of households were poor I guess that is why we didn’t question because it was a norm*”

Lindiwe: “*What I remember was walking from my mud house, two room of a mud house. We were poor and walking long distance, but we wouldn’t care we enjoyed that..... my mother was working as a domestic worker for rich white people very far in Cape Town.*”

What the above excerpts from narratives reveal is the abject poverty in which the participants grew up, which influenced how they viewed their world and their realities in many ways. Their world seemed to be filled with a lack of basic needs in which “*bread crusts*” collected by Zipho’s mother were treated as a treat. What is important to note here is that the participants, above all, had accepted and internalised their life circumstances as an inevitable, natural and normal reality of their lives “*we were used to our lifestyle*” “*we didn’t question*

*because it was a norm*". This suggests an instance of internalising one's reality of disadvantage and deprivation as the norm, not an anomaly anymore.

Furthermore, the participants reported not feeling angry at their reality or situation: "*we wouldn't care, we enjoyed that*". In this instance, Zipho suggests a sense of giving in to the situation, accepting it as part of one's reality and even beginning to find peace in it. However, what Zipho says also suggests oblivion regarding the systemic nature of poverty, individualising as a personal matter, a personal tragedy that cannot be blamed to anyone. For instance, Zipho seems to be oblivious to the role of government in the poverty that she was forced to grown up in. This points to the power of dominant ideologies that cast poverty as normal and natural in the lives of those who are experiencing it. This understanding has become embedded in their habitus; such inequality she had accepted the experience of poverty as part of the equation of her life.

Freire (1970) would refer to the about characterisation as a process of dehumanisation. From these excerpts, it would seem that the participants had accepted that less access to economic capital was their property, which reinforced their marginalisation, objectification and subjugation. Unconsciously, it would seem, the participants had learned that it was acceptable for them to be 'the other', strangers in their own lives, and to be content, although not content in a real sense, with what they had and did not have. In this regard, participants seem not to have the required amount of capital to question their circumstances and demand a better life: "*most of the households were disadvantaged*". For them, living amongst other people who were also poor made poverty somewhat normal and acceptable. Why complain? We are not the only ones! This solidarity in pain points to depth of harm that socio-economic deprivation attends to those who are subjected to it. This suggest a wild manipulation of an ideological whose intention is to preserve the status quo (Bell, 1997). This, according to Vryonides and Gouvias (2012), can only serve to reproduce what is supposed to be eradicated.

Both Lindiwe and Zipho also share their experiences of the migrant labour system, which forced black people to leave their homes to seek employment elsewhere. This type of discrimination compelled Zipho's mother to only come home during weekends, while Lindiwe's mother to had to leave the province. Without the presence of her mother at home, Lindiwe would be abused by her aunt: "*she (her mother) would send money to my Aunt and*

*my Aunt would take that money use it for her and her children and forget about me*". This points to the circumstances under which, the participants, who were supposed to focus on their education, were compelled to start thinking about issues that were beyond them. This may explain how socio-economic disadvantage combined with the racist ideology to construct the experiences of education for the participants, as socially patterned experiences, which would likely leave a durable impact in their lives (Bourdieu, 1990). The extension of the pain of these experiences is evident from Zipho's words "*[I fight] so hard for my children*", a sense of not wanting history to repeat itself.

#### **4.3.2 The long road to school: *Everyone was in their classrooms***

Part of the early memories about going to school for Lindiwe, Zipho (see figure 2) and Maduna was the "*long distances*" (See Figure 1) that they had to walk to get to school. These experiences are part of the thread of the consequences of deprivation in the lives of the participants. This was a direct contrast with the experiences of Nonjabulo and Nombulelo, who lived close to the school.



Lindiwe: "*I walked a very long distance going to school, we would meet with other children on the road and walk together*".

Figure 1: Lindiwe walking barefoot to school

For Maduna, walking long distances resulted in the participants arriving late at the school, when everybody was in class: "*I would walk inside the school quiet as everyone were in their classrooms already learning*". Whereas for Lindiwe it did not mean much because she had children to walk with (See Figure 1).



Zipho: *We walk by foot and sometimes carry a half cent that we used to buy gingerbread biscuit that will make it wet by water and eat. We walked bare foot in all seasons, in winter in summer. You don't know 'snow' we used to walk with bare foot in winter and the feet will get torn because of the cold and the blood would come out. Like I said we would go to school bare foot winter, summer all four seasons of the year.*

Figure 2: Zipho walking barefoot to school

Whilst the participants lived in poverty in Zipho's family, shoes and clothes were "*those things [that] were not the priority.*" Despite this lack of economic capital, her parents ensured they attended school, even without shoes or proper school uniform and sometimes under extreme weather conditions – *You don't know 'snow,' we used to walk with bare foot in winter.*" Zipho paints a picture in figure 2, that provides insights into the harsh conditions that became a normal feature of her life as a child. This points to poverty as a persistent and endemic form of inequality, which extends to many parts of an individual's life, in this case, into how education is experienced: no protection from harsh weather conditions; long distances to school in snow, without shoes.

From the above, one can infer the fact that participants valued education despite the challenges they experienced. Whilst there was no active support from parents in Zipho's case, she had learned at an early age about the value and importance of education. This finding is supported by Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2015) who argued that the historical nature of parental engagement or disengagement influences how current parents respond to the education of their children. Whilst one cannot conclude that Zipho's parents were actively engaged; they were also not disengaged. It could, however, be pointed out that by insisting that they go to school, this may have constituted their way of challenging the status quo regarding their situation of poverty (Spaull & Kotze, 2015).

Once at school, the poverty evident in the community extended to the infrastructure for school's space:

Lindiwe: *“Schools were all made of mud and you find that the windows had holes, the doors were broken... we would even study under the trees when the weather is cloudy because the classes were very dark and we couldn’t see what is written on the chalkboard, when it rains teachers will gather us inside all together. The boards were black the teacher would write as we used slate the boards were not even on the wall but on top of the old desk..... We used a slate to write our work. If someone hit it or break it the teacher wouldn’t care but beat you up. And after it was broken it was very difficult to even to report at home and at that moment you do not even have a pen. Even though the school was not big, we had two blocks of four classes each and the principal’s office. On the floor it looked like the outside”.*

Zipho: *“The school we were attending was not really a school, but it was a church. The church I am talking about was falling on the side. It was just a church and we would exchange with church people, during the week it a school and on Sundays its church. We were even sharing the class, grade one, two and three in one class. There were morning and day classes. At other places children were learning under the trees”.*

According to Lindiwe and Zipho’s description of the school environment, the schools were in a bad condition *“made of mud”*; *“falling on the side”*; *“classes were very dark”*; *“windows had holes, the doors were broken”*; and *“classes were very dark and we couldn’t see what is written on the chalkboard”*. According to Amnesty International (2020), this could indicate the marks of the severe deficiencies in resource provisioning under the apartheid government, especially in black areas and rural areas, which were treated as forgotten communities. This inadequate resourcing of education attended indelible marks on the lives of the participants, and possibly resulted in frustration for the teachers who were expected to teach under these conditions at the time.

Here, we see the slate standing in the place of learning and teaching support materials. Lindiwe remembers that breaking the slate resulted in them being physically punished by the teacher, and indication of frustration on the side of teachers. This suggests, as Greaves (2019) has pointed out, the powerful nature of emotions that caused teachers to lose

professional control of the situation and resort to educationally unsound practices, such as the administration of corporal punishment. Furthermore, the lack of resources is so acute that basic writing materials, such as pens and books were unavailable. This suggests the endemic nature of poverty, both at home at school, with nowhere to find relief for those who were subjected to it. From this, it could be deduced that poverty travelled with the participants, wherever they went, it was there.

Participants' parents lacked access to economic capital. Thus, they did not have the resources to replace a broken slate, an indication of how life at home might have been for the participants and their families financially. One has to wonder how learning occurred without a slate for learners for whom these had been broken. What is evident here is the structural problem of poverty becoming individualised in the lives of the participants. This could be seen also as a form of symbolic violence, where failure to provide learners and teachers with adequate resources on the part of government means that learning cannot occur (Chetty, 2014). In this instance, both teachers and learners are set up to fail as they repeatedly struggle to acquire the capital and habitus necessary for academic success (Bourdieu (1989).

As part of apartheid ideology, learners and teachers were being taught about the value of education. There are ambiguous messages being sent because at a societal level, black learners were being taught that they are unimportant through government's unwillingness to provide teaching and learning resources. This also sends an ambiguous understanding of the role of education in their lives. What is education for, exactly? Is it for emancipation or subjugation? It is, as Sullivan and Procter (2016) argues, a message that the participants, their families, their communities, their teachers and their schools are undeserving of a place in the social structure of society.

Maduna continues to say “...because my school was very far and when I got back home, I was always tired and it was even difficult to do homework, sometimes we leave books at school because they will get wet...” Maduna makes it clear that receiving education was difficult for her. She would be exhausted because of walking long distances to and from school, which suggests that it was difficult for her time to focus on her studies. From the excerpts above, it can be concluded that apartheid education inadequately resourced schools, especially those which were attended by the participant. Bourdieu (1990) argues that for people to acquire cultural capital, they must be familiar with the codes of dominant culture.

However, for these participants, the codes for access to quality education were encrypted and inaccessible.

### **4.3.3 Gender and education: “I left school to get married”**

Within the community in which the female participants lived, gendered norms regarding the place of women in society were dominant. When asked about the intergenerational value placed on education, the participants responded:

*Lindiwe: “...it [education] was a second priority to marriage. You were seen more successful when you were married than educated... My parents tried. But the problem was that during that time people believed so much in that a girl child once she has grown, she must get married, but for a girl everyone knew is to get a husband and get married. I left school and went to get married”.*

*Zipho: “...no, what was most important in their days was to get married and find a job. Education was not much important especially in poor areas”.*

Here, Lindiwe’s parents’ response points to the influence of cultural norms and practices in the decision-making process about the importance of education compared to marriage. Both Lindiwe and Zipho’s parents believed that their daughters would live a better life and be taken care of after marriage. Their parents made this decision based on economical and patriarchal grounds, in the process endorsing the normative constructions of what it means to be a woman in their household. These patriarchal definitions of a life of a woman, as can be concluded in the case of Lindiwe and Zipho, were often fuelled by economic instability in their families, which projected marriage as a solution for women. This supports Jarret’s (1998) arguments about the reasons mothers and grandmothers go as far as choosing partners for their daughters. Both Lindiwe and Zipho reported that they got married while they were very young, actually, when they were supposed to be attending school.



Mxolisi: *I grew up from as a young boy doing boys duties like fetching cows from the fields. I enjoyed doing it as it was my responsibility as a boy and girl would be doing girl duties like cleaning the house and cooking. As a result, I wanted to own a farm, but I couldn't fulfil that, and I ended up having a spaza shop.*

Figure 3: Mxolisi's description of culturally gendered duties

From the above figure 3 one is able to see that Mxolisi, from young age, had an understanding that it is possible to own a farm “*I wanted to own a farm*”, even though his dream of owning a farm could not be realised. His parents taught him about the duties “*as a young boy doing boys duties like fetching cows from the fields*” pertaining to owning a farm. Here, we can see that the messages that are instilled in boys are different in that they prepare them for access to power, whilst girls are prepared for positions that diminish access to power. As can be discerned above, children’s gendered identities are determined and taught by societal, cultural and institutional influences and gender stereotypes (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Cultural stereotypes in this instance were evident in the allocation of activities based on patriarchal criteria. However, unlike female participants, Mxolisi was provided with resources, capital, thinking and preparation for access to power. That is, he believed that he could own a farm later in life.

Chores were also allocated along gender line, as pointed out by Nombulelo: “*We would come back from school with my siblings clean the house; do household chores while our parents were at work... And after we finished could do homework with the help of our parents*”. Manilal (2014) and Roubeni et al. (2019) found parents understood and wanted good education for their children. However, as can be seen in the case of Nombulelo, her parents valued education in some way. However, household chores often took priority, as they believed more in instilling social and cultural responsibilities (Bajaj, 2009). As a result, often, in these contexts, children first attend to chores, then their school work. This is problematic in that it makes it difficult to value something that seems devalued in one’s family context, as Sullivan and Procter (2016) has pointed out regarding the acquisition of

an appropriate habitus. Here, however, Nombulelo and her siblings are being taught to place more value on household chores than their education.

This section foregrounded participants' understandings of their past experiences in respect to education. This section sought to respond to the main key research question as well as the first sub-question. The data suggests that participants' experiences were often influenced by their target status in respect of race, class, culture and gender. The intersections of these factors made it difficult for participants to access quality education, causing them to adopt particular understandings of the role and value of education. The intention in this section was to provide insights into the participants' realities and how this links back to their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children.

#### **4.4 Influence of social class on parents' understandings of the role of education**

This section responds to the second sub research question and adds to the main research question. This section focuses on the main theme: "*Influence of social class on parents' understandings of the role of education*". Data gathered reveals that parents had dreams and aspirations for their children. Their understanding was that education was a source of opportunity to achieve upward social mobility. However, the complexity of the participants' socio-economic positioning often made it difficult for them to achieve this.

##### **4.4.1 Education as social and civic duty: "*For me education is life*"**

Participants believed that education served particular social and civic purposes. These understandings had implications for their own personal dispositions or habitus. It must be remembered that the participants, as children they had been socialised to the dominant norms and values regarding the role of education in society. Three participants shared their views on the social and civic purpose of education:

Lindiwe: "*...I see education as a church. Have you seen when a child does not go to church? It is likely that the child become someone who do wrong things within the community - even at home. No. So now I compare a school with the church because the only right way for a child to spend his/her own time is to go to school rather than not knowing what to do and end up doing crime. It better*

*if the child is at school the whole day come after school and do homework eat and sleep. I take school as something that instil all the good in my children lives”.*

Mxolisi: “...it helps one to behave in a good manner and make a difference between good and bad. For me education is life. You know you can tell if someone is educated or not judging by behaviour...”.

Nonjabulo: “...education put a child in order, a child knows that if he/she is at school they going to benefit. And when one is educated, they develop academically. You are nothing without education even when you have matric certificate it like you don’t have anything. I am an example I do small jobs there and there I sometimes clean teachers’ classrooms only when they called. One needs something above matric to be able to get a proper job. In our days, matric certificate is exactly like Grade 7”.

For the above participants, education had a particular function, which was, for instance, to assist their children develop morally. Lindiwe likens school to a church that must guide an individual not to engage in undesirable conduct. According to Spaul (2015), whilst education is primarily about the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values, it also has a responsibility to instil citizenship. In this way, children will what is ‘right’ and ‘good’ and, importantly, as something that will save them from “*doing crime*”. For the participants, education will help them to fit into society and contribute to society, what Lindiwe and Mxolisi alluded to in their narratives. Within poorer communities in South Africa, Bell, Costa and Machin (2018) and Steurer and Smith (2003) contend that crime is endemic and influences how young children think about the purpose and role of education. This supports research by a number of researchers who have argued that schools can play an important part in ensuring this development through the development of programmes that ensure that learners do not get involved in gangs or drugs (see for example, Sharkey, Stifel & Mayworm, 2017; Jarillo et al., 2016; Ghosh et al., 2017).

Such arguments strengthen the understanding of the role that education has in respect of personal and community development. Mxolisi argues quite strongly that “*education is life*”. The importance of the certificate or qualification is reiterated by Nonjabulo: “*you are nothing without education*”. Here, education has become a measuring device as “*you can tell is*

*someone is educated or not judging by behaviour.*” What Mxolisi inadvertently does is set up education as a means for social stratification. This supports what Bourdieu (1984) has pointed out about cultural capital as a form of stock or currency. Here, the ‘stock’ or ‘currency’ is education, and the matric certificate represents institutionalised capital, valuable for the participants who represent various social classes in South Africa, namely, working and middle class. These participants recognise the fact that it is important to invest in education to gain the ‘existing stock’ (Bourdieu, 1989), and thus cultural capital. Bourdieu (1990) further argues that people’s attitudes and behaviours about the importance of education are informed through dominant societal discourses and norms and, in the instance of this study, these have become embedded in the habitus of Mxolisi and Lindiwe. Failing to help their child achieve this, would result in them not getting a “*proper job*”, one different from hers as a cleaner, who is only able to “*do small job*” and is always at the mercy of her ‘*employer*’ who will ask her to ‘*clean teachers’ classroom only when they call*”. This points to the importance that Lindiwe attached to being educated, believing that without education “*no one will take someone uneducated in this life*”.

Not only is education positioned as life giving; it also has a particular kind of currency. Nonjabulo points to the increasing need to move beyond a matric certificate, as a matric certificate is “*like you don’t have anything... is exactly like grade seven accreditation.*” Education becomes a commodity and institutionalised form of cultural capital that needs to be added to their ‘stock’ in order to increase the proceeds and profits (Bourdieu, 1989). Similar to what has been found by Olandersson and Gustafson’s (2018), in the instance of this study, participants have internalised beliefs that education is the only way and that without it, one is doomed to eternal failure. Thus, for these participants, there is constant pressure to put more capital into the stocks.

However, Mxolisi presents an alternative understanding that points to unemployment in South Africa. He points to limited opportunities for people in working class contexts, as he believes that finding a job requires cultural capital – one must be connected to good networks. Despite Mxolisi’s qualifications, he could not get a job and he “*just gave up and opened my business*”. He points out that enrolment in higher education is too high and there are few employment opportunities outside, which makes upward social mobility difficult. This points to the current state of unemployment in South Africa, where many people with degrees are cannot get a job (The Mercury, February 14th, 2020). The fragility of

employment opportunities in South Africa also corresponds with what Leon-Guerrero (2018) has argued that rising unemployment rates are threatening people's sense of economic security. Mxolisi became a small business man not intentionally, but was compelled by circumstances; he had to find an income so that he could provide for his family.

#### **4.4.2 Schooling as independence: “*They no longer depend on me*”**

Participants also projected education as a source of opportunity, as independence:

*Zipho: “They are able to do whatever they wish to do. They have their own money that they can use anytime. They no longer depend on me”.*

*Maduna: “Education plays a big role because at school you learn to believe in yourself, you learn to stand by yourself in situations. Today’s children can do things on their own even in academics they can choose easily what they want to become. Unlike us when we only knew that there are professions like nurse, teacher and police. But now, like I said you get a child who says ‘I am doing horticulture’ and you ask yourself what kind of an animal is that? And the child would have to explain more on what they will be doing after studying that course. Sometimes you even ask: “does that need you to go to school? Where do you work with that qualification”?”*

Participants’ narratives suggest that they believed education provides access to opportunities, allows children to gain a sense of independence and open up possibilities. Both Maduna and Nonjabulo reflected on the opportunities that had compared to what their children are exposed to today. For Maduna, education opens up the world: children can pursue whatever field of study: ‘horticulture’ and many more. Furthermore, Maduna was happy since her children went to school and, in this way, they had had gained some cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Zipho was happy that being educated enabled her children to become independent. In this case, their children will have this social inheritance that will enable them to take ownership of their lives.

#### 4.4.3 Parents' aspirations for their children: *"I don't want them to be like me"*

As evident in Chapter 2, I used Stevens, Vryonides and Gouvias' (2011) conceptualisation of realistic aspirations, expectations and idealised aspirations to understand what the participants believed was possible for their children to achieve in life. This, however, depended on various social, economic and contextual factors. The perspective that their children should have a better life than their parents may be reflective of the memories and impact of the structural disadvantage that they experienced as children, and for which they do not want history to repeat itself. This perspective supports what Ule, Živoder and Du Bois-Reymond (2015) have observed, that parents who have been exposed to socioeconomic disadvantage as children, will do everything in their power to ensure that this does not happen to their children.

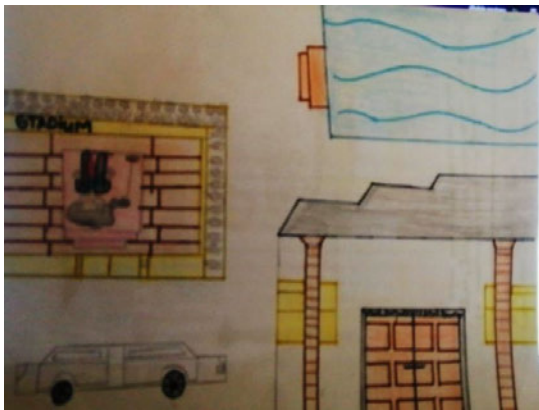
Participants in the study had good expectations for their children's future. The data that is presented and discussed below was taken from the participants' drawings in the mapping exercise. In this activity, participants were requested to draw their wishes and future aspirations for their children, which they believed could be achieved through education. These, according to Steven, Vryonides and Gouvias (2011) could be referred to as idealised aspirations. A thread that cuts across participants' responses in this regard was an emphatic *"I don't want them to be like me"*. This is a powerful commitment that history will not repeat itself in the lives of their children, that they will push back to ensure that this does not happen.



*Zipo: The life in a space where people are educated is different than those without education. Life can change for the better but only when you are patient with education. Therefore, as you see these pictures are the fruits of being patience no matter the situation at home. It all depends on you as an individual, on what are your goals and what you want to achieve. Getting education to change your household situation so that those who come after you will not live the same life as you did. It doesn't matter the situation at home.*

Figure 4: Zipo's description of her aspirations for her children and grandchildren

Zipho: *The life in a space where people are educated is different than those without education. Life can change for the better but only when you are patient with education. Therefore, as you see these pictures are the fruits of being patience no matter the situation at home. It all depends on you as an individual, on what are your goals and what you want to achieve. Getting education to change your household situation so that those who come after you will not live the same life as you did. It doesn't matter the situation at home [Zipho].*



Nombulelo: *There is a big photo of them in their graduation day and I am a proud mother. You see it is every parent wish that their children achieve more in life more than they themselves have achieved. I do not have much and I wish my children can have everything they wish for. A big house, a nice car and having their dream jobs.*

Figure 5: Nombulelo's description of her aspirations for her children

Zipho, Nonjabulo, Nombulelo Lindiwe and Maduna all drew pictures that showed big houses, big, expensive cars (BMW), all the accoutrements that signify their desire to achieve a new habitus; one that is reflective of the middle-class status and social mobility, which, for them, was reflection of success and constituted idealised aspirations for their children and grandchildren (Stevens, Vryonides & Gouvias, 2011). Zipho regarded education as something that is not easy to attain and that requires 'patience' in order to receive the 'fruits' of education (See Figure 4). She, like Nonjabulo and Nombulelo, regarded owning a *nice car* (Figure 5), a beautiful house as a significant achievement that comes through education. Zipho believed that this can be achieved, if children have an internal drive to push back the frontiers of socio-economic disadvantage. Thus, she individualises aspirations, focusing on the extent to which individuals have 'goals' and are committed to 'achieve'. For her, getting educated also involved helping to change the futures of the next generations for the better (Roubeni et al., 2015). However, she seemed oblivious of the structural impediments, such poverty or poor-quality schooling (Spaull, 2015) that may impede individual effort. This is, however, not strange, given the fact that social disadvantage tends to be individualised in society, given its gigantic nature.

Nombulelo, Maduna and Nonjabulo believed that when an individual is educated, you are able to own a beautiful house, an expensive car. Therefore, it would seem, for them, the measure of a good life or future had a material basis. This is reflective of the dominance of materialistic discourses, in which conspicuous consumption and display of wealth is the measure of success (Khunou, 2015). O’Cass and McEwen (2004) believe that people who display such behaviour are often motivated by the need to improve their social standing or image through material things. It is as if they owe the world an image that will symbolise and let it know that they are no longer what the world knew about them. For them, the expensive cars are a statement that they are now free.

Furthermore, both Nombulelo and Maduna regarded their children’s achievement at university as important: wearing a graduation gown was a significant achievement. Their drawings and narratives reflect a narrative of hope, as Maduna says: “*They need education to live a good life. I cannot struggle and they struggle too*”. Maduna understood that all these assets were achievable, but only through getting education, which is what she was trying to ensure for her children. Maduna’s response that her life was a struggle depicts a toxic mixture of socio-economic disadvantage and instigates and shapes what she can aspire for her children. She trusted the power of education and was confident that as long as her children get education, they will have access to opportunities (Gustafsson & Olandersson, 2018).

Moreover, Maduna’s own experiences of being a single parent without the support of the father of her children, provided justification for why she must ensure that her daughter becomes independent, “*I always tell my daughter that she must not wait for a man to do things for her and I am a very good example for her*”. Vincent (2017) has argued that race, class and gender often intersect to shape individuals, in this case, such as Maduna, experienced their lives. This triple disadvantage that Maduna experiences informed her habitus and her dispositions about education (Bourdieu, 1990). As such, if her daughter gets an education and a job, then she is independent and free from the shackles of disadvantage. Unlike her, she does not need “*a man to do things for her*”.

These experiences had formed their habitus, which was based on negative stereotypical understandings of themselves. Her desire is that her lifelong battle for survival should not be transferred to her children. Elliot, Powell and Brenton (2015) have argued that black women

who were single-mothers were more likely than others to be stuck in poverty and, even when not poor, tend to face high levels of financial instability. However, the narratives of Maduna, Nombulelo, and Nonjabulo emphasise the often-denigrated qualities of good mother: altruism, sacrifice, self-reliance and protection: “*good mothers sacrifice for their children; they are self-reliant and teach their children to be this way too; and they protect their children*” (Elliott, Powel & Brenton, 2015, p. 352).

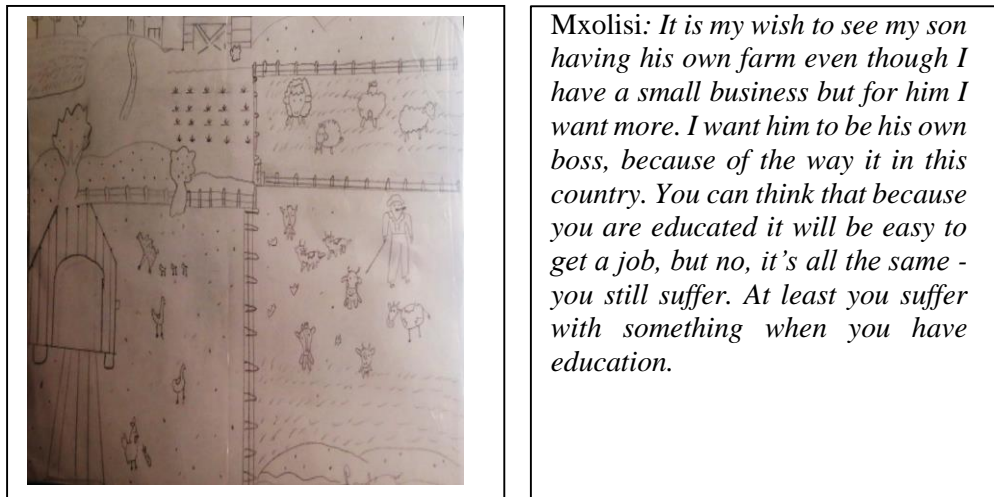


Figure 6: Mxolisi's description of his aspirations for his son

However, Mxolisi's aspiration was for his son to go beyond “*just a beautiful house and a car*”. Instead, the source of Mxolisi's aspiration for his son was his understanding of the social and economic inequalities in South Africa (Leon-Guerrero, 2018). To this end, he wanted his son “*to own his own farm*” in order to be “*his own boss*” (Figure 6). Being a boss meant that his son would not suffer the consequences of unemployment. For Mxolisi, this will provide his son with choices that others do not have. In the interview, Mxolisi expanded on this indicating that “*opportunities in South Africa are very limited without education*” and that to succeed and achieve, his son should not become “*distracted but keep his head held high with the goal of being educated*”. For him, being a farmer was a measurement of success and concurs with what Van Sheers (2016) has found that owning a business is an achievement.

Mxolisi's habitus is a product of his experiences and understanding of the South African context. His decisions and aspirations for his son could be referred to as his “*horizons for action*”, which Steven, Vryonides and Gouvias (2014, p. 320) argued causes “*different individuals [to] exercise widely contrasting strategies and develop diverse actions*”.

Mxolisi's understanding of the field of the South African context, where political and economic forces influenced employment and forced him to limit his aspirations for his son to that of a farmer who could be his own 'boss'. For him, education has symbolic value associated with cultural capital. The embedded understanding or prevailing discourse of the importance of acquiring an education even if it does not allow one to get a job is reinforced and legitimised in his disposition towards life: "*At least you suffer with something when you have education*". Education becomes a cultural albeit symbolic good (Bourdieu 1986).

Mxolisi highlights the financial and material gain as being the main benefits of education. However, he also indicated that education brought about both money and respect as follows: "*When you educated, when you have money you get respect and people listen to you*". Mxolisi displays a different side of the benefit when he indicates that when you are educated you are treated differently in your home and community. Through education one can benefit by gaining knowledge, becoming empowered, ensuring a stable income and gaining the required social and cultural capital in society (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018). For Mxolisi, as alluded to by Sullivan (2002), education provides prestige, recognition and honour, where socio-economic disadvantage brings disregard, rejection and condemnation.

Lindiwe is also aware that unemployment is rife in South Africa and alludes to the importance of getting an education. However, for her, what is more important is self-reliance, independence and resilience: "*If they don't get jobs out of their education... Teaching children these days is to ensure that they are able to make and have their own bread out of their education knowledge. I want each child of mine to own businesses; they must be able to be their own bosses. I want them to have their things not to depend on any other person and to never give up until they succeed*". For her, self-reliance, independence and resilience are what education must provide in a person's life. Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) have argued that qualities such as independence, perseverance and being able to "*recognise opportunities even in the community and have choices*" (Maduna) are powerful cultural resources that are necessary to succeed in life. For Lindiwe and Maduna, the transfer of these cultural resources is what will help them to face the future with courage and competence.

Participants also regarded education as an empowering tool, especially in the current world where "*education will help him to understand everything happening around the world since we are living in the 4th industrial revolution*" and where their children "*they [children] are*

*the ones telling us what is happening around the world because of the internet and so on”* (Nombulelo). Maduna also regarded education as an empowering tool, not only for herself, but for her children as well: *“because of the environment we live in, I saw it very important to get education to empower myself so that my children would also be able to get education in future”*. Bourdieu (1990) and Lachman et al. (2017) confirms that education is not only a means to economic and cultural capital, but that it enables the formation of a particular kind of habitus and that when parents show certain dispositions reminiscent of middle-class values, it is likely that parents will pass on the same aspirations to their children.

Thus, for the participants, the benefits of education were manifold. Education would allow their children access to wealth, opportunities and choices in life – material, social and cultural, which are important in society (Olandersson & Gustafsson, 2018).

#### **4.4.4 Single parenthood: “*I have always been on my own*”**

Single parenting has a significant impact on the way parents raise their children, including their orientation towards education (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). In this study, only one participant was still married. The rest were either divorced or were single, unmarried parents. They were all responsible for their children. Even though their decision to have children or get married had been made voluntarily, this had influenced the manner in which they raised their children and why they placed emphasis on education (Miller, 2014).

Maduna, Nonjabulo and Zipho reported that being a single parent was not easy, but that they had learned to be strong and had devised strategies to overcome the challenges that they were facing. This points to agency on the part of the participants as, despite the challenges that they were experiencing, they were determined to ensure that their children received an education.

Maduna reported that life as a single parent was sometimes very difficult, because children *‘misbehave’* and *‘disciplining them was very challenging’*. This was the one area in which she felt that she was failing, and attributed this to her being a single parent:

Maduna: *“The difficulty is that no matter how the child is behaving no one is helping me. It all up to me to try all that I see myself as a failing parent because I have no one else and they also know only me and what I tell them”.*

Nonjabulo: *“...I have always been on my own so I always think that maybe it would have been less stressful if I had help from their father, but it is what it is”.*

Being a single parent had its own challenges, which led Maduna and Nonjabulo becoming stressed. Stress can affect the way parents focus and support their children’s education. Being a single parent is a struggle for some women and it may worsen stress to unbearable levels. For Maduna, the challenges of single-parenthood caused her to think of herself as a *“failing parent”*. For Nonjabulo, it caused her to wish for help from the father of her children. Vincent (2017) has reported that for single parents, challenges with finances remained the most important obstacle.

Zipho also spoke of their financial struggles associated with being a single parent:

*“...I was struggling, my child, I am a single parent of 7 children. I struggled a lot with all of them, so they had to understand that others will go, and others will not go. I did not have enough money to take them all to university, tertiary, Technikon’s or other institutes. I was not able to get them all they needed for school, as they were 7; it took me some time to just get a full uniform and a stationary for one person”.*

The difficulties mentioned by Zipho were that it was difficult raising children alone. For instance, she alluded to the fact that when children were going out of the way *“you are all alone have no one to turn to for help”*. Therefore, not having a well-paying job had affected her children negatively, as they did not have everything needed for their education. As Nombulelo expresses her ideal situation: *“with money helping with things needed at school would have been good and I would have made good changes”.*

All the participants spoke of a life of struggle, growing up in poverty, but they also reported that their upbringing had helped them survive in some way. Zipho experienced some form of social mobility, working up the social ladder and becoming a teacher. However, she could

not enjoy the power, privilege, prestige and status associated with being a member of the middle class. This was because of the intersections of various social identities based on race, gender and culture that prevent her from getting support from the father of her children. This was exacerbated by patriarchal norms and structural barriers, such as the failure of the courts to ensure that fathers paid maintenance for their children (Epstein, Knight & Shvetsova, 2001). All this resulted in her feeling disempowered and disrespected.

Data reveals that all the participants in this study wanted their children to “*be nothing like me*” (Nonjabulo)... “*to do better*” (Maduna) and “*fight for the future*” (Zipho) in order to “*live a better life*” (Lindiwe). For these participants, education was a way of escaping their current situation of poverty. Participants believed that, despite adverse circumstances, it was possible to escape through education. For instance, Mxolisi did not believe that single parenthood affected him negatively. He believed that there was always an opportunity for him to make things better for his son.

Nombulelo holds an intriguing position. She is a single parent and is unemployed. Whilst she believed that education can help her child “*live a better life*”, better life, for her, was about changing the situation in her home. However, Nombulelo believed that “*all I can do is take them to school only. God knows what the future holds for them*”. Thus, although she believed that education had the potential to lead to a better life, she was not completely sure about; hence, she placed everything in God’s hands who, she believed, knew the future. In this instance, Nombulelo is aware that education may not lead to any benefit, as it happened to. This may suggest that the raw deal she received from education as a child, remains with her in the form of not be so sure about what will come out of education. For Nombulelo, her situation is somewhat out of her control. She feels defeated and unsure of what the future holds for her children. According to Theron’s (2016), education is meant to enable a better future, and to “*change [the] situation at home and to achieve a better life*”. However, for Nombulelo, this may not be possible for her children. This points to the importance of education to build hope, rather than break hope, as it happened to Nombulelo.

## 4.5 Parents supporting their children's education

This section addresses the final sub-questions and discusses the various ways in which the participants assisted their children to access education. The data gathered points to the struggles and tensions that arose when the participants were trying to support their children.

### 4.5.1 Parents promoting reading: *“I bring lots of books home”*

Literature suggests that there must be a positive relationship between school, home, and community (see, for example, Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2018). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 requires that parents must be involved in the governance of and support the professional management of schools (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In this regard, participants had the following to say about their participation in the education of their children:

*Zipho: “I bring lots of books home, like my children, my grandchildren love reading and that make me very proud to see they all adopted it.”.*

*Maduna: There are ways to teach them and get used to reading even if it not for school... The time they read they grow more*

*Nonjabulo: I wish I can take them to library but where is money? ... but I advise them to take education seriously ...One thing I always think about is only if my parents were there to help me and assist me, my life would be different. ... I do not want them to struggle like me*

For Maduna and Zipho, reading was important for their children to do well academically. For them, parents' participation in their children education led to improved learning outcomes. In this regard, participants recognised the value of reading as a mechanism for ensuring access to not just education, but for participation in the information society. From the above, it is evident that parents did their best to support their children with reading. For the participants, learning to read was critical for access to education. As Spaul and Hoadley (2018) have shown, what the participants were doing for their children was important to addressing the challenge of reading, as in poorer homes, children have access to less than 10 books. Thus, what Maduna and Zipho are doing is promising and positive, as it will instil in

their children the love of books and the fact that reading must also be done at home. For their children, this might mean that they will grow up in an environment that teaches the codes for academic success, which will enable them to participate productively in education.

Nonjabulo provides an understanding of the deep-seated nature of poverty and she shows her distress at being unable to provide her children with sufficient support. She would like to do more, but financially, she is unable, given the fact that she is unemployed. This suggests that the level of parental engagement and involvement may be constrained by access to financial resources, especially in a context where support always has a financial aspect as its main feature. The intergenerational poverty that Spaul (2015) discusses is important here. Nonjabulo, as Spaul (2015) has observed, recognises that if she does not act to arrest the vicious cycle of poverty, it may complete another spiral into generations to come. Nonjabulo believes that, by encouraging her children to take education seriously, her children can succeed in their future. This is not what she experienced, as her parents were disengaged parents, which she does not want for her children: *“they must not struggle like me”*. Nonjabulo may be unable to shape the habitus of her children, but her encouragement may be a valuable resource or the ‘social inheritance’ that she can provide to her children (Bourdieu, 1990; Miller, 2014).

#### **4.5.2 Learning the rules of the game: *“I do try to do what is good”***

Participants reported on the ways in which they supported their children’s schools. However, they were aware that there were rules attached to this, which they had to learn in order to play their role effectively. The following are excerpts from the participants’ narratives regarding how they supported their children’s school:

*Nombulelo. Teachers always ask us to help children about homework’s, keep them clean and make sure they have stationary I go to meetings; I help with homework where I can. I think that is enough.*

*Nonjabulo. I make sure that whatever is needed at school they get it, any book needed, calculator I buy it*

Mxolisi: *Yes, I do try to do what is good by providing him with all that is needed at school.*

Vincent (2017) contends that support from parents can make a valuable contribution to the education of their children. From the above, it can be observed that participants helped in crucial ways to ensure that their children benefitted from the education provided in the school. In order to play this role more effectively, they had learned the rules of the game, that is, how things are and must be done, which enabled them to help their children with homework and make the necessary material resources available to their children. This was important undertaking by the participants, given the fact that when parents actively participate in their children's education, schools are generally positive towards children's achievement (Bajaj, 2009). Parents' habitus of engaged participation further inculcates within children the value that education (Okeke, 2014) and ensuring that education can be understood as key to survival and thriving in a competitive world (Ule et al., 2015).

#### **4.5.3 Home-school relationships: “*They both have the responsibility*”**

For a child to be properly educated, there must be a good relationship between school and home. In discussing what they believed the relationship between school and the home should be, participants shared the following:

Nonjabulo: *“It obvious, to teach our children as they are trained, we as parents can help with homework if we understand it.... I teach my children to be responsible like doing house chores and so on. Me I teach my children to respect teachers and elders because you know that where blessings are”.*

Lindiwe: *“To teach is a teacher's responsibility because he/she is trained for that. For whatsoever ability she/he comes across it is their job. Me, I have never been trained I am not qualified to teach, for me is limited because I do not have knowledge and information that teachers have... For me as a parent I have to make sure that my children go to school with full school uniform, they have all the school material needed, well fed in the morning because at school they eat”*

Maduna: *“So, as a parent I have to make sure that children go to school ready to learn, when it’s time to be at school-be at school, when they back from school do the house duties... They both have the responsibility to work together for the future of the child”*.

The above responses suggest that participants believed that there was a separation between what their responsibility was and what the teachers was. This is similar to what Bajaj (2009) has found that parents and teachers have different conceptualisations of their roles and responsibilities. For the participants, the responsibility of the teacher is to assist children develop academically, which from Lindiwe’s and Nonjabulo’s perspective, requires special skills that they believed they did not possess. However, in their voices, there is a somewhat distancing from the school, which could be attributed to the lack of knowledge and confidence as required by the school. Participants, thus, had a different understanding of what the home-school relationship should look like. This could be attributed to a lack of knowledge and confidence as some the participants were had low levels of education.

The above findings are similar to what has been found by Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke (2014). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) have pointed out that parents do not support or get involved in the education of their children, because they lack information or knowledge of education. This can be observed in the case of Nonjabulo, who reports that as parents they can only *“help with homework if we understand it”*. Expectations from schools are that parents must assist with homework. However, Nonjabulo points to an important issue that sometimes parents do not have the required skills to help with homework. Participants reported that this often makes it difficult for the home-school link to benefit their children. For the participants, the expectation to assist with homework may be flawed in that it assumes the availability of the skills that the participants do not possess. However, the fact that Nonjabulo tries to help when she can suggest that she is trying to take on a habitus required, as she recognises, like parents in Vincent’s (2017) study that supporting children even by helping them to do homework in whatever capacity may be one way of building a positive attitude towards education (Sullivan & Procter, 2016).

However, it must be noted that when it came to communication between the school and parents, all the participants indicated that they were happy with the manner in which the school kept them informed. For example, Lindiwe and Maduna expressed their happiness

that the school “*write us letters updating us about school needs, and all that is happening at school and if our children face some challenges*”. Lindiwe’s response suggests that not only did the school keep parents informed about the activities at the school, but also about their children’s academic achievements and challenges. For this study, the school provided parents with access to the codes required for them to participate actively in the affairs of the school. For instance, participants reported the school used notices and meetings to keep them informed. For them, although there were challenges, the school ensured that there was communication with the participants as parents in order to enable them to participate in school activities.

The willingness on the part of the school to engage with parents and invest in the achievement of their children is represented in the excerpts from the participants below:

Zipho: “*...all parents are allowed to school whether to ask or needing help concerning learner’s education...*”

Maduna: “*... yes, we are allowed to go to school. The school is always open for parents. Yes, teachers’ and the staff are welcoming*”.

Nombulelo: “*...teachers are treating parents very well and very welcoming...*”

Lindiwe: “*...teachers are very welcoming, as the school governing body involves parents so there is a very long and good communication between parents, teachers and the school that instil unity and love for one another*”.

Zipho, Maduna, Nombulelo and Lindiwe shared their appreciation for how the school and teachers treated them. This was largely attributed to the open, transparent and welcoming way in which the school treated. This school suggests that the school and teachers were aware of the importance of the role of participants in the education of their children. That is, the school and teachers placed significant importance to the school-home relationships and ensured that the relations between home and school were healthy. Participants reported teachers as being welcoming and that the school involved parents in decision-making processes. Participants praised the school for providing them with opportunities to participate in the education of their children.

The above finding differs from that by Manilal (2014), who found that communication was usually a one-way process, involving parents as passive players in the affairs of the school. For this study, data suggested that teachers were aware of the contextual realities and challenges that the community was facing and supported learners through donations of “*food, shoes and uniforms*”. In this instance, teachers played a pastoral role in which assisted families with the alleviation of the effects of poverty on children. These were positive school-home relationships, which suggest that teachers and the school embraced an inclusive approach towards education, recognising the fact that structural barriers prevented learners from accessing education and parents from assisting them. (Manilal, 2014; López et al., 2013).

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter presented, analysed, discussed and interpreted findings from the data generated in the study. The findings provided insights into how participants understood the role of education in the lives of their children. Parents reported that their own experiences of education were steeped in inequality and injustice. This influenced the participants’ understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Furthermore, findings revealed that participants had aspirations and expectations for their children. However, various factors existed, which made it difficult for them to support the education of their children in the way that they believed they should. Despite these difficulties, participants, however, demonstrated agency and found ways help their children achieve academically. Participants drew inspiration from the fact that they did not want their children to be better than them.

In the next chapter, I present my conclusions in relation to the findings that emerged in this study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented the analysis of the data regarding parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Findings revealed that participants believed that education was a source of social mobility that could be deployed to help their children escape poverty. Furthermore, findings reveal the complex ways in which socioeconomic positioning influence the manner in which participants understand the role of education in the lives of their children.

In this final chapter, I present a summary of the key issues that emerged in the study. Firstly, I reflect on the theoretical, design and methodological considerations, which guided the conduct of the study. I then present the key findings of the study and how these respond to the key research questions of the study. This is followed by the presentation of the implications of the findings and the recommendations for future research.

The study sought to respond to the main and sub-research questions, which were:

Main research question:

- What do parents from different socio-economic backgrounds understand about the role that education plays in the lives of their children?

Sub-questions:

- What are parents own experiences of education and how was this influenced by their socio-economic positioning.
- How does socio-economic positioning influence their understanding about the role of education for their children?
- How does this understanding of the role of education influence the way parents support and promote education?

## **5.2 Purpose and significance of the study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The intention was to critically examine the parents' past experiences of the education and how this influenced their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. The study further investigated how the participants' social positioning influenced their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Findings from this study contributed to the body of knowledge regarding how the participants negotiated their past experiences of education and how this impacted their understandings of the role of education in their children's lives. This study is influenced by the critical paradigm and participant voices are centralised and they are also positioned as having a sense of agency. To this end, the study also explored how parents support and promote education.

The significance of this study is that it investigated an area that has not been sufficiently researched, namely, parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The study contributed to filling in the gap by, firstly, contributing towards understanding parents' experiences and understandings from their own perspectives and in their own words about what they believed was the role of education in the lives of their children. As indicated previously, there is abundant literature that seeks to understand parental involvement. However, there is limited research focusing on how parents understand the role of education in the lives of their children.

Secondly, there is also a dearth of literature that focuses on the understanding of class as lived experience. This paucity is especially evident in South Africa and this study, thus, responds to Khunou's (2015) call for more research to be conducted in this area. This study revealed how parents' past experiences of education influenced how they understood the role of education in the lives of their children. In addition, findings of the study revealed the fact that, in South Africa, and within the context of this study, in particular, social class was not experienced as a stand-alone; it was experienced as an aspect of the intersection of race, class and gender. For this study, this provided an alternative understanding of the complexity of how social class operates to impact lives and affect how education is understood.

Thirdly, this study contributed to the understanding of the various challenges parents experience, and the resilience and agency that they possess to push back the frontiers of poverty. The study revealed the capabilities that parents possessed to challenge the inhibiting factors, which were both personal and structural. This study has demonstrated that whilst inequality may be endemic in South Africa, parents continue to be driven by the understanding that they do not want their children to be like them to try and support their children in working to achieve academically.

### **5.3 Theoretical framework, methodological and design issues**

In this section, I reflect on the theoretical framework and research methodology that was used in this study. The theory that was used in this study was Bourdieu's (1986) theory of practice. The theory was used to analyse and understand parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. Bourdieu's two concepts of habitus and capital enabled me to understand issues of class and how this enables or disables opportunities. Bourdieu (1986) has argued that society tends to reproduce social class inequalities, as those who are in power and have the required forms of capital tend to resist any transformation (Bourdieu, 1986). The marginalisation and exclusion that parents reported played a significant role in shaping their habitus. Bourdieu's concept of capital enabled me to understand how education could provide them with required capital to support the education of their children.

This study also used the critical paradigm. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) contends that the critical paradigm is not only about critically understanding society and situations, but also about changing them. By using this paradigm, I could critically understand the realities of parents, the power dynamics that parents had to negotiate in order to ensure that their children accessed education. The critical paradigm enabled me to reflect on the different beliefs, normative understandings as well as structural barriers that inform our understandings about parents, especially those from low socio-economic statuses. This allowed a particular kind of relationship with participants to emerge, based on respect and informed my ontological and epistemological positioning. As Rehman and Alharthi (2016, p. 57) has pointed out, I was aware that there was no way in which the phenomenon under investigation could be investigated without being influenced by my presence as researcher.

Using narrative inquiry required particular relationships to emerge in the research process. For example, as the researcher, I could position the participants as central to the study, a situation in which meanings were made by the participants themselves. A narrative inquiry enabled me to obtain insights into the participants' experiences by allowing them to tell their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The benefit of this was that it moderated power relations and enabled participants to claim and occupy a more active role in the generation of data about their own experiences and understandings. In addition, this assisted in backgrounding my voice, while foregrounding the voices of the participants.

This study was located with the qualitative research tradition. The qualitative approach was useful in that it enabled the study to generate rich accounts of participant's experiences and understandings of education and its role in the lives of their children. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) contend that within qualitative research, special attention is afforded to people's experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition to the above, the qualitative research approach allowed for the participants' experiences and understandings to be studied in their natural context. To this end, the use of the qualitative approach was useful as it enabled me to work closely with and understand participants' experiences.

The study was conducted when the country was under lockdown to try and contain the spread of COVID-19. To this end, five (5) interviews were conducted face to face and one (1) telephonically. The resulted in numerous challenges, given the fact that the situation was new and I was a novice researcher. As such, the data generation process took longer than expected, resulting in changes in the whole project plan in respect to time frames. Furthermore, after translating and transcribing interviews, I found that there were some gaps that required that I conduct follow-up interviews with the participants. In order to observe the protocols for the containment of the spread of COVID-19, follow-up interviews had to be conducted telephonically. This took longer than expected due to the logistical issues that were involved. However, the mapping exercise went very well, with a few negligible challenges. The mapping exercise generated tons of data and served as a very useful preparation for the semi-structured interviews, which generated very rich, contextual data.

#### **5.4 Summary of key findings**

In this section, I present the summary of the key findings of the study.

The main research question filtered through the findings of the study. The first theme responded to the first sub-question and accounted for how participants had acquired particular understandings of education, based on their own past experiences of education. The broad theme of the influence of the past experiences of education on parents' understandings of the role of education provided insights into how this understanding was inculcated in them. The participants' experiences were influenced by their target statuses and the intersections of their various identities, namely, race, class, culture and gender.

Their experiences of being poor, black and female, for example, made it difficult for them to access quality education. This foregrounded their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. For this study, poverty had a significant impact on the participants' lives and being deprived of basic material resources. The extent of poverty in the lives of the participants influenced how they viewed their social world and realities. In addition, findings revealed that cultural gendered norms had an influence on how participants understood the role of education in the lives of their children. When asked about the value placed on education, participants reported that they took education very seriously, as they did not want their children to be like them. However, this was not without challenges. For instance, financial challenges in the participants' households led to a situation where the need to get married was placed about receiving an education.

The second broad theme investigated the manner in which social class impacted on the participants' understanding of education of the role of education in the lives of their children. Findings revealed that participants' understandings of the role of education were influenced by dominant normative understandings of the value of education. For participants in this study, education was understood as a form of currency, a stock that could provide capital required to achieve academic success. However, participants were critical of the world in which they lived, especially in respect of the economic crisis and high unemployment rates. What is also particularly revealing, was that when they were still young, their economic security was always under threat.

Participants recognised the fact that in order for them to participate actively in supporting the education of their children, they had to learn the rules of the game. All the participants reported that they did not want their children to inherit their struggles and go through the

same road as they did. Thus, they had aspirations for the education of their children. The aspirations raised by the participants were twofold. Firstly, they were based on outward embellishments of success such as big houses and cars. These idealised aspirations (Stevens, Vryonides and Gouvias (2011) were not cognisant of the deeper structural impediments such as endemic poverty.

Findings also revealed complexities with regards to single-parenthood. For this study, participants who were single parents experienced a range of challenges, which made it difficult for them to support their children's education. For instance, their difficulties of having to face the responsibilities of raising children made it difficult for the participants to provide appropriate support to their children. For example, this was evident in them being unable to provide their children with basic requirements for participating in education. In some instance, the complexities of single-parenthood combined with the fact that some participants had not finished their schooling, which made them doubtful of the education as a way-out for their children. In this particular instance, the participant concerned seemed to have lost so much trust in education, such that she left everything in the hands of God.

The third theme focused on the various ways in which parents supported their children's education. One of the ways in which participants supported their children's education was assisting their children to improve their reading. This was done by making reading materials available to children and encouraging them to read. However, for those parents whose financial backgrounds were unfavourable, struggled to provide their children with the necessary materials, which often caused them stress and frustration. However, participants who did not access to financial resources required to assist their children with reading often encouraged their children to take education seriously.

Parents also spoke highly of the way in which the school and teachers communicated with them and kept the school-home relations healthy. For the participants, these engagements were critical as they made them feel that they were valued and welcome by the school and teachers. However, some participants believed that there were different roles and responsibilities for the school and teachers and parents. These participants believed that it was the responsibility of the school and teachers to take of academic issues, because they had expertise and capacity to do so. For the parents, the participants argued, their responsibility was to mould the conduct of their children, teaching them respect, for instance

## 5.5 Implications of the study

Findings from this study have implications for education as a whole as well as for schools and research. The following are the implications that were drawn from the findings of the study:

- The findings reveal that parents have particular understandings about the role of education and what this can do for the future of their children. This is impacted by a range of issues and factors. Policy needs to consider the contextual realities within which parents live and the systemic constraints that prevent them from being able to support their children's education in the manner that they would like to.
- Findings also reveal the importance of focusing on the capabilities and abilities of parents. Current research, especially research that focuses on parents from poor and working-class contexts tend to create a narrative where parents are seen as victims of their world. However, findings in this study revealed that parents are capable and competent. They can critically read and understand why their socio-economic positioning is the way that it is and take steps to help alleviate its impact. This must be taken into account when developing programmes for supporting parents to participate in their children's education.
- Findings also reveal the importance of establishing and nurturing a good and positive relationship between schools and parents. Schools must find ways to ensure that this is maintained as it is crucial for the success of learners academically. Parents and schools must work together to craft ways of enhancing school-home relationships. Although we tend to concentrate on the immediate skills needed for children, it would be helpful to acknowledge parental socio-economic backgrounds as an important factor contributing to the teacher, parent and child journeys through the schooling process.
- For this study, exploring parents' experiences and understandings of education provided a deeper understanding of families and children's socio-economic backgrounds, by bringing to light some of the key challenges parents encounter, and

showing how these experiences may impact children's views about schools and learning. The current study adds an additional layer to the complex web that families from lower income backgrounds face as their children attend school (Dockett, Perry, and Kearney 2012). Teachers should use these stories and personal experiences of parents and children in order to better understand the home environment of children and their relationships with families. Parents can share stories and experiences from their own individual awareness to provide teachers access to the complicated social, emotional and educational issues that can help teachers reduce the mystery around their children early beginnings. At the same time, as teachers help parents revisit their school memories, parents may become aware of the motivations behind their own thoughts and actions.

### **5.6 Limitation of the study**

Like all other studies, this study had its own limitations. One of the limitations was that the study only focussed on the experiences of parents and, thus, only represented parents' perspectives. Other members of the school community, such as learners and teachers, could also provide their own understandings of the role of education. However, the intention of the study was to understand the role of education from the perspectives of parents. This is an issue that can be future investigated.

Data was collected using mapping and semi-structured interviews. Whilst, these methods presented me with the opportunity to interact with the participants and engage in deep discussion and provided rich detailed data, the difficulty was keeping up with asking all the questions and probing more during interviews. I was so overwhelmed that I missed so many questions, which then led me to having to go back for follow-up interviews with the participants. Conducting follow-up interviews with the participants extended the time for data gathering, which had implications for the time frames of the study.

I conducted five face to face interviews instead of six due to the lockdown. I had anticipated that I would be able to conduct all the interviews by the end of March. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 prevented me from doing this as the country went into lockdown. I was faced with the decision to only conduct the last interview once the go-ahead had been given by the university. I, therefore, made the decision to conduct a telephonic interview with the last

participant. This attracted financial implications that I had not factored in at the planning of the research project. Furthermore, when analysing data from semi-structure interviews and mapping exercise, I had to constantly telephone the participants to clear up gaps in the research. This caused delays and prevented me from proceeding in the manner in which I had planned to.

According to Cohen et al. (2000), generalisability is a limitation that was applicable to this study. Since this study used a small number of participants, the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population. There were only six parents who were participants in this study, from one peri-urban school in KwaZulu-Natal. However, in qualitative research, findings are context-bound and do not draw conclusions that can be generalised to a larger population (Cohen et al., 2000). Therefore, it was not the intention of this study to generalise findings to other contexts and populations. For purposes of this study, the findings provide a contextualised and rich explanation of the parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their education.

### **5.7 Recommendations for future research**

Based on the research findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research:

- This study only explored parents' understanding and experiences of the role of education in the lives of their children in a peri-urban area. A much bigger study involving a range of participant's parents, teachers and learners is recommended in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the parents' understandings of the role of education.
- The parents who participated in this research study were black. It is recommended that research be conducted with participants from various racial and class backgrounds in South Africa. This would allow for a comprehensive understanding of the parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. Furthermore, research could also be conducted in schools in rural areas, as these are complex spaces with other factors that may also lead to more in-depth and fruitful understanding of how education is understood in the lives of children by parents.

Support for parents is critical if we are to inculcate the value and importance of education. Parents, therefore, must be supported on how to teach their children about the value and importance of education. It is, therefore, recommended that appropriate training programmes for parents in this regard be explored to enhance their roles in support their children's education.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This study focused on parents' understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children. All participants for this study were from low socio-economic backgrounds experience. The challenges faced by parents from disadvantaged backgrounds were elevated in this study. The findings of this study revealed that parents faced numerous challenges in their efforts to support the education of their children. Poverty was a major obstacle for the majority of the participants. This, including their own experiences of schooling, had significant impact on how parents understood the role of education in the lives of their children. However, participants could overcome some of the challenges that they encountered and support the education of their children. Findings revealed that participants' own experiences of education influenced their understandings of the role of education in the lives of their children.

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## Appendix A: Permission to conduct research: KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/1910

Miss SL Ngubane  
757 Navan Boulevard  
Panorama Gardens  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

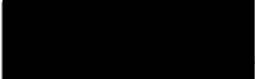
Dear Miss Ngubane

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

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“INVESTIGATING PARENTS UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN”**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 26 August 2019 to 10 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMgungundlovu District

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 29 August 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Postal Address: Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa

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Facebook: KZNDOE... Twitter: @DBE\_KZN... Instagram: kzn\_education... Youtube: kzndoe

...Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

## **Appendix B: Informed consent letter: Participants**

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Sthabile Ngubane. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg doing research for The Master's degree in Education for Social Justice 2019.

I am conducting a study on parental understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children. The aim of the study is to get parents to talk about their experiences of education in the lives of their children. To achieve this, I need six willing participants to be part of the study.

You are invited to consider participating in a study that involves understanding of education in the lives of your children. The aim of the study is to get you (parents) to talk about your experiences of education in the lives of your children. The study does not have any financial or other benefits for your participation and the participation is voluntary. However, the research will hopefully contribute to the limited research on parental understanding of the role of education and to give voice and space to the rich and poor parents about the role of education in the lives of their children.

Participants are not forced to take part in the study. Those who agree to take part will be requested to express their thoughts to me and I will ask probing questions as guided by the interview. You are however free to refuse answering questions that cause distress or pain. You are also free to withdraw from the study without being affected in any way.

If you agree to participate in this study, your involvement would include participating in an interview with me that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio-recorded. The audio-clips, and any transcriptions and documents that arise from these will be kept for a period of five years, and then disposed of. All the names of participants will not be published and the information that you provide will be kept confidentially. You will be given a chance to check if the information you have volunteered truly reflects what you said without distortion.

#### **Declaration**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of participants) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participate in the research study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time, should I so desire.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date (Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness**

**My contact details are as follows**

Sthabile Ngubane

Cell. Number: 0848587612

sthabilengubane.25@gmail.com

**My Supervisor's contact details**

Dr Melanie Martin

Cell Number: 083 651 4564

Office Number: 0332606456

Email: [martinm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:martinm@ukzn.ac.za)

**You may also contact the research office through:**

Ms P Ximba (HSSREC Research Office)

Tel: 0312603587

Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

## **Appendix C: Letter to Principal: Permission**

PO Box 757  
Pietermaritzburg  
3201

Dear Sir/ Madam

### **Re: Request to do a research at XXXX Primary School**

I am Sthabile Lucia Ngubane who is currently a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg doing a master's degree research in education under Social Justice 2019. I hereby wish to apply for permission to conduct a research at XXXX Primary School at Edendale District in KwaZulu-Natal. Participants for this study will be six parents living in XXXX area. My research topic is "Investigating parents understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children". The aim of the study is to investigate parents coming from different socio-economic background on how they understand the role of education in the lives of their children with specific emphasis on their class positioning.

This research study will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group. The information obtained will be treated with confidentiality and will be used for this research purpose only. Participation is voluntary, participants has a right to withdraw from the study at any time they wish to. Participants name will not be disclosed but they will use pseudonym.

With the research study I am hoping for the insight on parents and contribute to the knowledge that can have the effect of social change around the issue of parents.

I \_\_\_\_\_, gatekeeper have read and understood the consent of this document. I hereby grant \_\_\_\_\_ permission to conduct the research in the school.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Contact details**

Cell number: 0848587612  
[Sthabilengubane.25@gmail.com](mailto:Sthabilengubane.25@gmail.com)

My supervisor's contact details

Dr Melanie Martin cell number: 0836514564/ office: 0332606189 [martinm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:martinm@ukzn.ac.za)

## **Appendix D: Semi-structure interviews**

Introduction (establish rapport with participant, explain the purpose of our research, explain consent form, ethics, confidentiality etc., request permission to audio record).

### **Introduction questions**

- Please tell me about your children, how many children do you have and how many are at school? What grades are they in?
- Tell me a bit about your schooling experiences? (probe to find out how their schooling influenced decisions about work, family, differences in expectations of school then and now etc.

**Research question 1:** What do parents from different socio-economic backgrounds understand about the role that education plays in the lives of their children?

- What do you think the role of education in your children's lives are? What does education mean to you now?
- Tell me more about education received by your children?
- Do you think that the type of education received by your children benefits them? Why/Why not? How?
- Do you feel that children in this community have equal opportunities of education?
- Are you happy with your child performance at school?
- In what way/s are you involved in decision making at the school?
- Tell me more about the type of education received by your children?
- How do you support your children learning and why do you support them in the manner that you do?
- What activities (academic or non-academic) do you participate in, in your child's school?
- What are some of the ways that the school communicates with you about what is happening in the school? How do you feel about this? What other ways could the school communicate with you?
- Do you participate in any school government body? If yes, why? if not why?
- How do you feel when you go to school, the principal, the teachers? Why? How?
- What difficulties or problems that you have come across in your children education? And how do you overcome them?
- What are some of the other ways in which you have invested in your children's education?

**Research question 2:** How does socio-economic positioning influence their understanding about the role of education for their children?

- What difference/s do you notice concerning how schools treat parents coming from different socio-economic background?
- Suggest reasons for these differences.
- What groups of children do you feel are most and least favoured by education?
- What reasons can you suggest for the trends of this favouritism?
- Do you participate in school activities? If yes, why? If not, why?
- Which children do you think benefit from education when compared to others?
- What do you notice about those children?
- How do you overcome barriers that stop you from participating in your child's education and schooling activities?
- How do you encourage your child to be successful at school?

**Research question 3:** How does this understanding of the role of education influence the way parents support and promote education?

- Do you motivate your children to be educated? If yes how and if no, why?
- Have you been able to support your children with what school demands and expect? How?
- What do you do to promote education in your children's lives?
- Do you think it important to support your children education? Why?
- How does your support benefit your children?
- What activities do you participate in to support and promote education?
- What kind of academic support do you give your children?
- What is your future expectation or wishes for your children?

## **Isithasiselo E: Izinhlolokhono zezinhlaka ezakhiwe ngezakhiwo**

**Isingeniso (qalisa ubudlelwano nomhlanganyeli, chaza injongo yocwaningo lwethu, chaza ifomu lokuvuma, izimiso zokuziphatha, imfihlo njll., Cela imvume yokurekhoda umsindo).**

### **Imibuzo yesingeniso**

- Ngicela ungitshela ngezingane zakho, unezingane ezingaki nokuthi zingi kangakanani esikoleni? Bakuliphi ibanga?
- Ake ungitshela kancane ngokuhlangenwe nakho kwakho kokufunda isikole? (cwaninga ukuthola ukuthi ukufunda kwabo kube nomthelela muni ezinqumweni mayelana nomsebenzi, umndeni, umehluko kulokho okulindelwe esikoleni ngaleso sikhathi nanamuhla njll.

### **Umbuzo wokucwaninga 1: Yini abazali abayiqhamuka ezindaweni ezehlukene kwezenhlalo nakwezomnotho abayiqondayo ngendima edlalwa yimfundo ezimpilweni zezingane zabo?**

- Ucabanga ukuthi liyini iqhaza lemfundo ezimpilweni zezingane zakho? Isho ukuthini imfundo kuwe manje?
- Ngitshele kabanzi ngemfundo etholwe yizingane zakho?
- Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi uhlobo lwemfundo etholwa yizingane zakho luyabasiza? Kungani / Kungani kungenjalo? Kanjani?
- Ngabe ubona sengathi izingane kulo mphakathi zinamathuba alinganayo emfundo?

Ingabe ujabulile ngokusebenza kwengane yakho esikoleni?

- Ubandakanyeke ngaziphi izindlela ekuthathweni kwezinqumo esikoleni?
- Ngitshele kabanzi ngohlobo lwemfundo etholwe yizingane zakho?
- Uzisekela kanjani izingane zakho ekufundeni futhi kungani uzisekela ngendlela owenza ngayo?
- Yimiphi imisebenzi (yezifundo noma engeyona eyezifundo) obamba iqhaza kuyo, esikoleni sengane yakho?

Yiziphi ezinye zezindlela isikole esixhumana nawe ngazo ngokwenzeka esikoleni? Uzizwa kanjani ngalokhu? Yiziphi ezinye izindlela isikole esingaxhumana nawe ngazo?

- Ingabe uhlanganyela kunoma iyiphi inhlango kahulumeni yesikole? Uma kunjalo, kungani? uma kungenjalo kungani?
- Uzizwa kanjani lapho uya esikoleni, uthishanhloko, othisha? Kungani? Kanjani?
- Yibuphi ubunzima noma izinkinga oye wahlangabezana nazo emfundweni yezingane zakho? Futhi ubanqoba kanjani?
- Yiziphi ezinye izindlela otshale ngazo imfundo yezingane zakho?

**Umbuzo wocwaningo 2: Ukuma kwezenhlalo nezomnotho kuthinta kanjani ukuqonda kwabo ngendima yemfundo yezingane zabo?**

- Yimuphi umehluko owubonayo maqondana nokuthi izikole zibaphatha kanjani abazali abavela emikhakheni eyehlukene yezenzhlalo nezomnotho?
- Phakamisa izizathu zalokhu kwehluka.
- Yimaphi amaqembu ezingane ocabanga ukuthi athandwa kakhulu futhi angathandwa kakhulu yimfundo?
- Yiziphi izizathu ongaziphakamisa ngamathrendi walokhu kukhetha?
- Uyahlanganyela yini emisebenzini yesikole? Uma kunjalo, kungani? Uma kungenjalo, kungani?
- Yiziphi izingane ocabanga ukuthi zizuzisa emfundweni uma iqhathaniswa nezinye?

Yini oyibonayo ngalezo zingane?

- Unqoba kanjani izithiyo ezikumisa ekubambeni iqhaza emfundweni yezingane zakho nasemisebenzini yokufunda?
- Uyikhuthaza kanjani ingane yakho ukuthi iphumelele esikoleni?

**Umbuzo wocwaningo 3: Lokhu kuqonda kwendima yezemfundo kunamthelela muni endleleni abazali abaseka futhi bathuthukise ngayo imfundo?**

- Uyazikhuthaza yini izingane zakho ukuba zifunde? Uma kunjalo yebo, uma kunjalo, kungani?
- Ngabe ukwazile ukuxhasa izingane zakho ngalokho okudingwa isikole futhi okulindele? Kanjani?
  - Wenzani ukukhuthaza imfundo ezimpilweni zezingane zakho?
- Ucabanga ukuthi kubalulekile ukuxhasa izingane zakho ngemfundo? Kungani?
- Ukuxhaswa kwakho kuzizuzisa kanjani izingane zakho?
- Yimiphi imisebenzi obamba iqhaza kuyo ukuxhasa nokukhuthaza imfundo?
- Hlobo luni lokusekelwa kwezemfundo olunika izingane zakho?
- Liyini ikusasa lakho noma izifiso zakho ngezizingane zakho?



## Appendix E: Certificate from Language Editor

# Ntwintwi

Proofreading and Editing Solutions

Date: 11 July 2021

### CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis bearing the provisional title *Investigating parents' understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children*, to be submitted by **Sthabile Ngubane** has been edited for language correctness and spelling, consistency (i.e. repetition, long sentences and logical flow), and completeness of the list of references and cited authors, by Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions. Neither the research content and substance nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

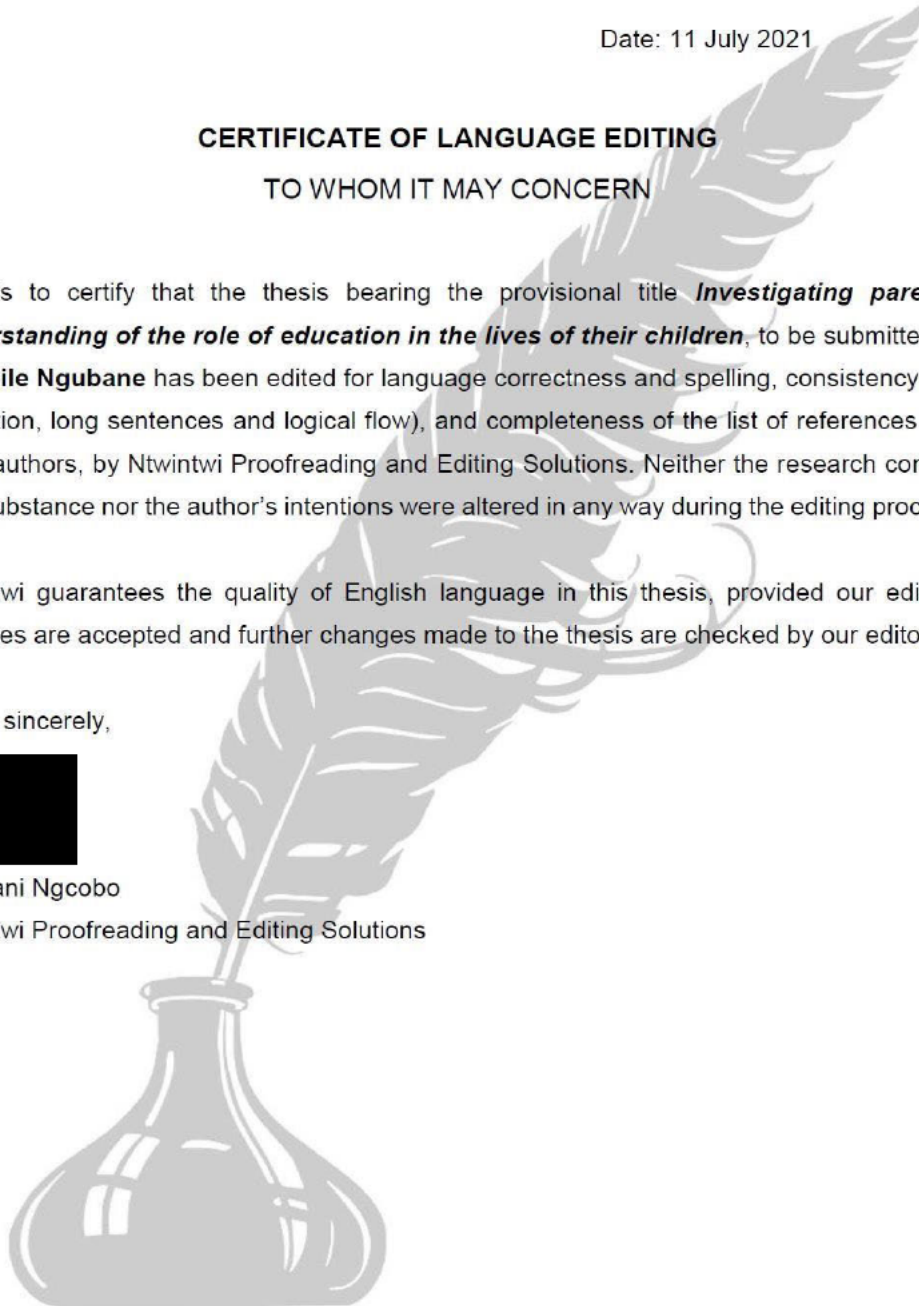
Ntwintwi guarantees the quality of English language in this thesis, provided our editor's changes are accepted and further changes made to the thesis are checked by our editor.

Yours sincerely,



Jabulani Ngcobo

Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions



## Appendix F: Originality report

### Examination submission

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#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

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|                  |                  |              |                |
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| <b>1</b> | Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal<br>Student Paper   | <b>5</b> %   |
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| <b>7</b> | Kyle Miller. "From past to present: how memories of school shape parental views of children's schooling", International Journal of Early Years Education, 2014<br>Publication | < <b>1</b> % |

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