

WHAT MAKES SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP WORK?

A CASE STUDY

by

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SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This dissertation has been submitted with my approval.

Professor Vitallis Chikoko

Date

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Perumal Naicker**, hereby declare that this dissertation is my work and does not contain any materials which have been submitted before for any degree in any institution. Use of any published material has been duly acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my eldest daughter Meraska Naicker who was cut down in her prime as a first year student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her thirst for life and the chutzpah she displayed is forever etched in my mind. I miss her.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

God has been merciful to me. Of the many things that He allowed me to achieve, this is but one.

My sincere gratitude goes to the following:

Charmaine, my wife who would sit for hours in the same house knowing I'm there but not there. What kept me going was knowing that she was there.

My two daughters, Roaine and Camalita who inspire me to do amazing things and challenge me with their own achievements. They make me reach upwards, always.

Professor Vitallis Chikoko, my supervisor who knew how to push boundaries and exact the best. Draft after draft after draft, his support refined my thinking and consequently my work.

The participants of this study who gave me their precious time and provided the information that forms the most important part of this dissertation. A special thanks to the principal of the school who assisted the process through his willingness to facilitate access to the school and the participants.

Finally, my late father will be smiling now. Day after day, time after number he would say the only future is in education. Thank you dad.

ABSTRACT

While school-community partnership is highly encouraged in South Africa, schools and their communities seem reluctant to take up this opportunity to develop themselves and in the process improve learner attainment. This qualitative study located in the interpretivist paradigm adopts a case study research design that utilises semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis to collect data.

This study explores the nature of school-community partnership seeking to understand what makes school-community partnership work and how the said partnership sustains itself. The evidence is drawn from a study of one school-community partnership in deep rural KwaZulu-Natal. From inception, the democratic government of South Africa indicated that the business of running education was not the preserve of government- it took place at the confluence of the school governing body and the government. Despite an enabling legislative framework, most school-community partnerships in South Africa do not seem to be succeeding. However, there appears to be some success 'stories' in this regard. The study focuses on one such 'story'. There does not seem to be sufficient knowledge about what makes school-community partnership successful. Such knowledge is necessary if more school-community partnerships are to add value to the communities in question. This study therefore seeks to address, in a small way, the question: What makes school-community partnership work and how does it sustain itself?

The study seeks to understand the findings by utilising a two-pronged theoretical framework, namely, Epstein's (1995) *spheres of influence* and the asset-based approach to organisation development. The study's findings suggest that action as opposed to rhetoric forms one of the important ingredients of this partnership. Such action is driven by visionary leadership. Through action, both the school and community enjoy tangible benefits such as the generation of employment and growing crops for food. A broad-based community asset mapping has harnessed many 'players' thereby allowing a multi-faceted partnership to unfold. Learner attainment has been positively impacted by these interactions. This inward looking, inclusive process in turn sustains the school-community partnership. The study recommended that plans be put in place to ensure continuity after the current crop of visionary leaders departs. A systems based approach was suggested as an interim measure.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DoE	Department of Education
GED	Gauteng Education Department
MEC	Member of the Executive Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SASA	South African School's Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study sought to explore the nature of a working school-community partnership in a deep rural context. It set out to investigate what makes school-community partnership work and how it sustains itself. Semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis were used to gather data for the study.

This chapter provides a brief background of school-community partnership focusing especially on the South African scenario in the run up to democracy in 1994 and what has been happening since the birth of democracy in our country. The chapter also provides the rationale and focus of the study followed by key research questions and the significance of the study. It concludes with an outline of the organisation of the entire dissertation.

I have spent my entire adult life deeply involved in community work involving school governing bodies, civic and child welfare organisations, education union activities and in local council work. Watching and assisting communities as they worked within each other and with each other has always been an interesting challenge for me. Later as a school principal in a deep rural area, I used this knowledge and experience to get the community to interact with my school with great success. I therefore have a deep interest in what happens on the ground when schools and their communities work together to develop the school, the community and improve learner attainment.

Seventeen years into democracy, the latest allocation of funds to the poorest schools in South Africa ranked as quintile one, which form the majority of public schools, is a meagre nine hundred and sixty rands per learner annually (Mbabela, 2011). It is the clearest indication yet that the state is still battling to deal with its responsibility to provide schools with the kind of funding required to provide the resources necessary to improve learner achievement. While this is a reality, on the other hand it continues to churn out policy to satisfy political symbolism (Jansen, 2002). The majority of schools utilise this meagre handout as their only source of funding and remain poverty stricken, under resourced and

underperforming. On the other end of the continuum, a few have found ways to overcome this hurdle by engaging the very communities they serve and have made major strides in resourcing themselves and in turn their communities, impacting positively on learner achievement (Engeln, 2003). They have seized on school-community partnership as the way to deal with their needs and in some cases to strengthen their assets and increase their social capital.

The pronouncement of education as a basic right by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 has served as a blue print for governments across the world to access educational opportunities for their citizens. In 1990 the Jomtein World Education Forum reaffirmed this worldwide commitment to basic education (Crossley & Watson, 2003). Understanding the economic dilemma of especially Third World countries and their budget deficits, the World Bank supported this commitment by exhorting governments to encourage and increase community participation in school governance (Bray, 2001). Africa echoed this legislative call as its states gained self rule. To illustrate, at independence in 1966, Botswana promulgated a policy of school-community partnership (Pansiri, 2008).

Ngwenya (1996) noted that policy statements by the South African Government prior to democracy cited school-community partnership as essential to the success of educating the South African child. True to its word, South Africa, post 1994 introduced legislation making education a high priority in its new constitution, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. Chapter two of the Constitution entrenches the right of all its citizens to equal and equitable education and allows for schools and communities to engage each other in this endeavour by declaring that everyone has the right to freedom of association. This paved the way for more specific legislation that supported school-community partnerships with the release of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. SASA states in its preamble that parents and schools should accept joint responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the state (DoE, 1996). Chapter 16 (1) provides for the formation of School Governing Bodies that would promote acceptance and responsibility of parents to govern schools (DoE, 1996). With this legislation the South African government put in place a strategy to encourage and guarantee parents school citizen status (Sayed, 1997). The message was clear: the business of education was

not the preserve of the government but would take place at the confluence of the school governing body and the government. Chapter 20 (1)(a) and 1(h) empowered governing bodies to rally their communities to render voluntary services to the school, help develop schools and ensure provision of quality education for all learners (DoE, 1996). It went further in Chapter 20 (1) (g) to say that school-community partnership should set out to improve the school's property, determine extra-mural curriculum and raise funds (DoE, 1996).

Since then, numerous policy documents and reports have prioritised school-community partnership emphasised by the government (DoE, 2010b; Kobe, 2001). In fact, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education lists as its strategic goal the development of schools into centres of community focus (DoE, 2010d). One of the important goals in the National Department of Education's indicators and targets for 2025 is to improve parent and community participation in school activities (DoE, 2010c). In its latest action plan released earlier this year the National Department of Education goes a step further stating that its goal of improving schooling is now supported by a clear policy framework to improve school-community partnership (DoE, 2010a). This year the Gauteng Education Department in a first for South African Education, advertised a vacancy for a senior official at provincial level to facilitate and enable school-community partnerships (GED, 2011).

1.2. Focus and purpose of the study

The focus of this research was to study a working school-community partnership in a deep rural context. The purpose was to explore and establish the nature of the school-community partnership as well as to establish how the partnership is sustained. In doing so the study tried to establish whether such school-community partnership has impacted positively or negatively on the school and its community and what effect it has on learner attainment.

1.3. Statement of the problem

The democratization of education in South Africa in 1994 coincided with a worldwide trend during the 1990's where governments encouraged schools to market themselves and open their doors to their communities (Bush, 1999; Sanders, 2006). Legislation, such as the SASA (DoE, 1996) changed schools from closed systems to open systems and paved the way to

create school-community partnership for the mutual benefit of schools and their communities. This initiative was to help schools improve performance by filling in the gap democracy had created as the state grappled with spreading limited resources evenly to all its schools. Raised expectations of increased interaction between schools and their communities failed to materialise as we see numerous schools still operating as islands and unable to even raise a quorum for their school governing body elections.

Policy symbolism and the establishment of new ideology during the early period of democracy was marked by a lack of will by the government to implement its own policies (Jansen, 2002). While in recent years there has been rapid change to reflect a new outlook of seriousness on the part of government to turnaround poor school performance and improve learner achievement, this does not seem to be translating into change on the ground. Finance minister, Pravin Gordhan confirmed this when he reported to the World Economic Forum that while government spends the highest portion of its budget on education, the outcomes were still weak (Vollgraaf, 2011). The statement reflected the challenge faced by governments across the globe where, despite their best efforts, governments cannot fix education alone. It needs the community to partner with schools to improve learner achievement. The problem is that communities are slow to take up the gauntlet thrown down to them by government. Schools need to partner with their communities to develop each other and consequently raise learner attainment. This is not happening. Joint ownership of school-community development is still lacking. There seems to be insufficient knowledge on the ground to make school-community partnership work.

1.4. Rationale for the study

Despite the policy overload and the renewed will on the part of government, discrepancies exist between the rhetoric of policy documents and the practice of school-community partnership (Goos, Lowrie, & Jolly, 2007). In an admission by the National Minister of Education, Angie Motshega, school-community partnership in South Africa generally does not seem to be taking off (Moeng, 2011; Ratsatsi, 2011). Poorly performing schools that could benefit most from school-community partnership are the ones that fear to tread this path. A direct consequence of this is the poor educator performance in the majority of South African schools and continued underachievement of our learners (Ratsatsi, 2011).

Government realizes that the danger in a majority of schools is that they are beginning to normalize failure. This is because an important component of the school- the *community* is conspicuous by its absence in schools. An example is that parents, who are one constituency of the community, find it difficult to come on board which is noticeable by their absence at school governing body elections.

Not much literature is available on best practice or what makes school-community partnership work. Trends in the education system still indicate that the majority of our schools are exactly where they were seventeen years ago with no sign of significant improvement in learner attainment and community involvement in schools (DoE, 2010b). Key education priorities such as the formation of school-community partnership are not being achieved. Leading educationists in Gauteng led by the Member of the Executive Council, Barbara Creecy recently started the long haul by nudging policy initiatives forward through the launch of the parental involvement programme to strengthen the involvement of the community in the education of their children (Moeng, 2011).

However, while many partnerships are not succeeding, there are some that seem to be working. It is necessary that school-community partnership succeeds in order for learner attainment to improve. Researching a working school-community partnership may help to provide the answers to unlock the school-community partnership drought in South Africa and also provide evidence of the improvement of quality that can be achieved in existing school-community partnerships. In my search for legislative and policy support for school-community partnership I also looked for difficult clauses or sections that may have prevented schools from reaching out to their communities and *vice versa* in their quest to improve themselves. I found none from the policy or legislative point of view, making it amply clear that the road ahead is wide and clear for school-community partnership to be forged. The problem is that very few have chosen to walk this road.

Many studies have explored rationales for partnerships, how to start them and what they do for school effectiveness and learner achievement (Bel, 2002; Falk & Mulford, 2001). Yet, there seems to be a gap in the knowledge about what makes them work and what sustains them. This is the gap I wish to explore.

1.5. Significance of the study

Research of this nature must benefit all the core actors within the study (Murray & Beglar, 2009) who in this case are the school, the community and the education department. This study hopes to contribute knowledge regarding school-community partnership. Such knowledge is necessary to understand what actually happens during the operational life of school-community partnership as well as practical ways in which it could sustain itself. This study explored this gap and as Smith (1995) suggests, hopes to enrich the knowledge base in this field.

The study utilises Epstein's (2001) theory of the *spheres of influence* as well as the asset based approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993) as its theoretical framework. While Epstein's (2001) theory deals with family, community and school as separate entities interacting and forming a partnership at their confluence, the asset based approach encourages inward looking school-community partnership. By viewing a school-community partnership through these lenses, the study tested the theories in the context which are explained in detail in the opening paragraphs of chapter two. In addition it will improve the reader's understanding of the theory. The third and most important contribution of the study are the findings of the study relating to its research questions. These findings may be important for the school and the community to help them improve their school-community partnership. It also sought to identify areas for further research and make recommendations that will benefit the school-community partnership. The Department of Education will be able to use the findings to improve policy in this area and encourage the formation of school-community partnership in greater numbers.

1.6. Key research questions

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature of school-community partnership?
- What sustains school-community partnership?

1.7. Clarification of terminology

In order to provide a clear understanding of the discussions in the study, terminology that features prominently is defined and explained within the context of this study.

1.7.1 Community

Community is defined variously, radiating from the families that live in a particular location outwards to include the wider body of people in the neighbourhood, churches, business, non-governmental organisations and so on (Bosma *et al.*, 2010; Foskett, 1999; Sanders, 1996). Communities are characterised by both interactions between people and geographic distance between groups of people and can therefore be defined as both physical occurrences and social processes (Steiner, 2002). Accordingly, school-community can be referred to as everybody that is associated with a school or can be associated with a school.

1.7.2 School

School is defined in the dictionary as a place where children are educated (Collins, 1987). The Department of Education defines school education or school as a period of education from grade R to grade twelve. The school referred to in this study is a primary school meaning it caters for learners from grade R to grade seven.

1.7.3 Partnership

A partnership is described broadly as a formal collaboration characterized by shared and long-term commitment of a diverse group of members to achieving a common goal (Goos, 2004; Goos, et al., 2007; Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk, & Mulford, 2010; Shapiro, DuPaul, Barnabas, Benson, & Slay, 2010). A partnership as opposed to collaboration is seen as being founded on formal agreements at various levels (Vogel & Avissar, 2009).

1.7.4 School-community partnership

A school-community partnership is the coming together of the various stakeholders who have a vested interest in a school and its community to improve learner achievement and in so doing help the school and the community to develop themselves.

1.7.5 Sustaining school-community partnership

The dictionary definition of sustaining something is to keep it going for a period of time (Collins, 1987). This study makes frequent reference to a school-community partnership sustaining itself. It refers to factors, events, processes and people that are involved in keeping the school-community partnership alive and operative.

1.7.6 Social capital

In the process of school-community partnership work people share skills and knowledge they have as well as learn new ones. Each time members work on and contribute to a project they go away having acquired something new that can benefit them and their community later. These assets are regarded as social capital. As they gather these assets the individual and the community is said to increase its social capital.

1.8 Research design and methodology

1.8.1 Research design

This qualitative study is located in the interpretivist paradigm that utilises the case study approach to elicit data (Cresswell, 1994) pertaining to the nature of school-community partnership and how it is sustained. The structure of the design is anchored in and guided by the interpretivist paradigm which provides insight into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation.

The qualitative approach was employed to understand the reality of the participants firsthand through an interactive process (Maree 2007) of immersing oneself in the everyday life of the school-community partnership. Qualitative studies are able to capture unique experiences, individual perceptions and reflections of persons in the study focus (Wheeldon, 2010). By applying the qualitative approach, the study intended to uncovering rich, thick data to satisfy its research questions.

The interpretative paradigm facilitates the understanding of individuals in terms of their own understanding thereby providing meaning of their realities (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The behaviour of the people inhabiting the central phenomenon and their actions are the

focus of the interpretivist paradigm which endeavours to negotiate the meaning of the experiences of those who are studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Maree, 2007). Observing the school-community partnership in action through these lenses yielded data that contributed to an understanding of how the members of the school-community partnership make sense of their reality.

The research was based on a single case study of a working school-community partnership. A case study is a naturalistic enquiry that investigates a specific phenomenon or instance within its real-life context (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Yin, 1984). It allows an entity to be ring fenced to study only the happenings within this boundary (Merriam, 1998). This research employed the case study to interpret and analyse the uniqueness of the school-community partnership through such a focus. It endeavoured to harness the complexity of the members' behaviour as they operated within the school-community partnership. The study presents the reality of the school-community partnership in such a way that the reader is given a sense of 'being there'.

1.8.2 The research setting

The study was conducted at a deep rural primary school located in the Ugu District on the Kwazulu Natal South Coast that suited the research objective which was to explore a working school-community partnership in a rural context to find out what makes it work and how it sustains itself. The school was chosen because it already had working school-community partnership that I was aware of.

1.8.3 Participants

Through purposive sampling, eight members of the school-community partnership were selected to participate in the study. Purpose sampling allows for the researcher to target a desired group of key informants to elicit the rich, thick data required for such an enquiry (Maree, 2007). The eight were made up of four from within the school personnel and four from the community. The school principal was one of the four chosen from amongst the school personnel. The four on the community side are the governing body deputy chair, the land donor and a community partner from a volunteer organisation and a service provider.

1.8.4 Data collection and analysis

Three types of data collection instruments were utilised in this study to strengthen the quality of its findings. Semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis are employed in the field work. Merriam (1998) points out that both semi-structured interviews and observation are primary sources of information in qualitative studies. Observation was preceded by semi-structured interviews which provided detailed background and clues for the observation process. Document analysis helped to corroborate data gained during the two earlier collection processes. These data production strategies bring the researcher face to face with the reality in the phenomenon being studied and facilitate collection of information unique to the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and analysed using a descriptive analysis technique advocated by Tesch (1990). Epstein's (2001) *spheres of influence* and the asset – based approach, the two pronged theoretical framework employed by this study were utilised to mitigate the findings to gather an in-depth understanding of the school-community partnership under study. Qualitative trustworthiness measures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) were applied to authenticate the findings.

1.9 Ethical consideration

The researcher has a responsibility to balance the search for the truth and the need to protect the participants' rights as well as to avoid embarrassment (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). To do this he has to abide by the rules of research set out by the university to minimise bias and avoid controversy. In order to comply, permission was sought from the university for ethical clearance. To pursue the study at the school, permission was obtained from the Department of Education. Signed consent was obtained from the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were consistently observed to protect the identities of the participants.

1.10 Design limitation

This is a small scale, in-depth study that took place in a particular context. The findings may not be applicable to different contexts.

1.11 Study outline

The study unfolds as follows:

Chapter one has presented a statement of intent and the introduction to the whole study. It set out the background to the study and provides an overview of the structure of the dissertation as it is expected to unfold in the chapters to follow. It concludes by identifying the research problem as well as stating why school-community partnership is necessary.

Chapter two provides a review of literature on school-community partnership. This chapter presents information on the formation of school-community partnership, the goals and the factors that enable a school-community partnership. In so doing, it also explains the gap that this study wishes to pursue. The two pronged theoretical framework, Epstein's (2001) *spheres of influence* theory as well as the asset- based approach of Kretzman and McKnight (1993) are discussed in detail illustrating their relevance to this study.

In chapter three the research design and methodology are unpacked. This chapter explains the qualitative approach, the interpretivist paradigm and the case study method of enquiry. It identifies the sampling procedures used to choose the setting and the participants, the procedures used to gather data and the analysis thereof. How ethical issues around the collection, analysis and publication of the findings are explained, as well as how the qualitative trustworthiness of the study was handled.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study and relates the story of the participants as seen through their eyes. This is followed by a discussion of the findings. As the findings unfold the chapter also reverts to the theoretical lenses every now and then to see if what was obtaining on the ground was consistent with what literature has been saying.

Chapter five brings up the finale. This chapter contains a summary of the findings related to the nature of the school-community partnership and how it sustains itself. The chapter concludes with recommendations that were identified during the course of the study in regard to school-community partnership and makes suggestions for pursuing research in this field in the future.

1.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the research problem namely the need for more information on what makes school-community partnership work and how to sustain the said partnership. I have argued that school-community partnership is necessary for schools and their communities to develop themselves while positively impacting on learner attainment.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature on school-community partnership. School-community partnership is referred to variously as family-school partnership, parent-school partnership or school-family-community partnership depending on what a researcher wishes to highlight in his study (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Chavkin, 2001). This study looks at community in its broader context, a seamless web of support radiating from the core of parents directly associated with schools because their children are enrolled there, outwards in widening circles to include individuals, organisations, institutions and industry (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

In interrogating the literature, an attempt is made to establish what makes school-community partnership work, what its nature is and what sustains it. The chapter first explores the term 'school-community partnership', working through the major themes that emerged in the literature search. A common thread running through much of the literature on school-community partnership regarding the intended goals is improvement of learner achievement (Chavkin, 2001; Danzberger & Usdan, 1984; Gonzalez, 2004). A second thread is the mutual benefit both schools and communities derive from school-community partnership. Themes include the need for a partnership, utilising assets and developing the social capital, collaboration and leadership. Second, the chapter endeavours to interrogate how school-community partnership is initiated, the workings of a school-community partnership and looks at findings relating to how school-community partnership is sustained. Finally, the chapter provides an explanation of the two theoretical frameworks, Epstein's (2001) *overlapping spheres of influence* and the asset-based approach of Kretzman and McKnight (1993). This two pronged approach seeks to provide the lenses through which to view and to understand the nature of school-community partnership, explore how it works and establish how it sustains itself. Chapter one has provided a discussion of the South African legislative and policy framework guiding school-community partnership as a

background. This chapter draws on that discussion to support the objectives of the study where necessary.

2.2. Understanding the concept of school-community partnership

In order to understand the term 'school-community partnership', it is necessary to first disaggregate it and examine its component parts namely 'partnership' and 'community'. A partnership is described broadly as a formal collaboration characterized by shared and long-term commitment of a diverse group of members to achieving a common goal (Goos, 2004; Goos, et al., 2007; Johns, et al., 2010; Shapiro, et al., 2010). Dhillon (2009) and Butcher *et al.*, (2011) argue that schools and communities can achieve more by working within partnerships. Working within a partnership could either be transactional where parties are concerned with achieving their individual purposes or it could be the transformational type. This study is interested in a partnership where parties come together for a common purpose creating opportunities for positive growth and change (Butcher et al., 2011). Epstein (2011) considers partnership as a shared responsibility where members collaborate to share information, guide learners, solve problems and enjoy joint success while another view by Gonzalez and Thomas (2011) suggests that increased participation and shared responsibility in exploring and addressing needs forms the basis of a partnership. A partnership as opposed to collaboration is seen as being founded on formal agreements at various levels (Vogel & Avissar, 2009).

Community is defined variously, radiating from the families that live in a particular location outwards to include the wider body of people in the neighbourhood, churches, business, non-governmental organisations and so on (Bosma, *et al.*, 2010; Foskett, 1999; Sanders, 1996). Communities are characterised by both interactions between people and geographic distance between groups of people and can therefore be defined as both physical occurrences and social processes (Steiner, 2002). Accordingly, school-community can be referred to as everybody that is associated with a school or can be associated with a school.

A school-community partnership is formed by relationships through which a school partners with its community to work together with a formal plan to help learners succeed in school (Chavkin, 2001; Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). The nature of school-community partnership must

be such that it is organized around common tasks and shared common values to achieve a common goal (Larry, 2003). This study subscribes to Sander's (2001) view of a school-community partnership as a connection between a school and community individuals, groups, organizations and businesses transcending local boundaries but are forged to promote students' social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Put simply, it is the coming together of the various stakeholders who have a vested interest in a school and its community to improve learner achievement and in so doing help the community improve itself.

2.2.1 Goals of school-community partnership

Establishing a common set of goals that keep a school-community partnership focused is a priority when initiating such partnership. Studies suggest that goals are necessary to ensure a school-community partnership keeps working and sustains itself (Albertson, Whitaker, & Perry, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Swick, 2003). The main goal of any school-community partnership is to improve learner achievement (Boullion & Gomez, 2001; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Johns (2003) concurs that school-community partnership is a formal collaboration necessary to deal with the challenge of improving learner achievement. Another body of research lists improvement of learner achievement and community upliftment as mutually beneficial joint primary goals of school-community partnership (Johns, 2003; Murray, Ackerman-Spain, Williams, & Ryley, 2011; O'Connor, Hanny, & Lewis, 2011).

Achieving the goals of school-community partnership hinges on the thoroughness of the process during goal setting. Goals are also phase specific, being set to ensure that each phase of the school-community partnership achieves its target. These phases could be the planning phase goals which focus on initiating the partnership, developing the partnership into a working one, and collaboratively sustaining the partnership (Molloy *et al.*, 1995). Resource support, long term commitment and communication are goals that should be aimed at sustaining school-community partnership (Vogel & Avissar, 2009).

While goals are partnership specific, there are goals that are applicable to school-community partnership on a general level. One such goal is to ensure that members of the

school-community partnership are capacitated, thereby allowing them to move beyond traditional roles and engaging in meaningful activities to improve the school and its community (Parker, Grenville, & Flessa, 2011). Epstein (2011) and Sanders (2006) consider setting teamwork as an important goal to achieve this. Swick (2003) develops this goal further, suggesting that teams be established to develop and train the community.

The movement from closed to open systems is still a slow process in many South African schools. Schools fortunate enough to initiate a school-community partnership should adopt as one of their goals a plan to prepare teachers to work with other partners which is something that may not be taught during their academic and professional training (Price-Mitchell, 2011). O'Connor *et al.*, (2011) argue that a central goal of school-community partnership should be to gather resources and build up its social capital. Continually extending the network of partners towards establishing a web of diverse resources is a goal that ensures longevity and sustainability of the school-community partnership (Johns, *et al.*, 2010). In summary, literature suggests that the main goals of school-community partnership tend to be identifying needs and development goals before setting out on the hunt for social capital to fulfil these goals and priorities.

2.3 Forming a school-community partnership

Described as bridges, springboards, connections, scaffolds or linkages (Boullion & Gomez, 2001; Miller, 2007; Pollard, 2010; Sanders & Lewis, 2005), the nature of school-community partnership's development from start to full blown operations is unique to its community. However, the way a school-community partnership is born is important to its sustenance. Many prospective school-community partnerships are doomed at the start because the goals and the process are not thoroughly considered before the start of collaboration and establishing connections. Most schools have some kind of linkages that exists besides the one formed through the school governing body which is specified by legislation. These are sometimes loose arrangements with people like a service provider who feeds the learners once a year, a farmer who helps keep the grounds trim or even a parent who the school calls occasionally to assist with some repairs. In her research on a school-community partnership that cared for HIV and AIDS orphans, Khanare (2010) found that at the school level collaboration with community was largely individualistic and uncoordinated. Sanders

(2006) in her study on building school-community partnerships found that identifying contacts in the community that could assist the school in some way or the other was a strategy used by some schools to initiate a temporary school-community partnership when the need arose. This kind of arrangement can become a tedious process that is counterproductive and usually never develops beyond asking for help when something arises within the school.

School-community partnership must serve a useful purpose. Its formation therefore, should be a deliberate, carefully thought out process that follows through on all the stages of planning if it is going to be successful at improving the school and developing the community (Molloy, *et al.*, 1995). A four stage planning framework is suggested by Molloy *et al.*, (1995) to assist in the formation of school-community partnership:

Stage one: Initiating the partnership. Potential members are gathered to begin discussions about the needs of the school and the community. The concept of a school-community partnership is mooted.

Stage two: Building the partnership. Members start identifying resources required and prioritize these while simultaneously mapping out the community for latent skills and resources. They begin networking and exchanging information.

Stage three: Developing a shared vision. Partners develop a vision and set goals based on discussions and interactions in the other two stages.

Stage four: Translating planning into collaborative action. Partners identify activities that will realize goals and develop plans to achieve these.

For the purposes of this study, a fifth stage can be added to this framework:

Stage five: sustaining the partnership. The partners will develop strategies to ensure that human and material resources required for the school-community partnership to continue its work are in continuous supply.

The stages are not stand alone but overlap each other. Sometimes there will be a conscious move from one stage to another while in many instances the transition is seamless or is a

parallel process. An example of this would be the way strategies are put in place to sustain a school-community partnership right from the beginning indicating that forming a school-community partnership is a continually developing process.

2.4 Factors that enable school-community partnership

Enabling factors include establishing a climate of collaboration, leadership, communication, teamwork, an open door policy, commitment to teaching and learning and the importance of knowledge, skills and capacity. I examine each of these below.

2.4.1 Establishing a climate of collaboration

Research studies show that a collaborative climate between the school and the community is a precondition for the cultivation of strong school-community partnership (Boullion & Gomez, 2001; Bryan & Henry, 2008; Danzberger & Usdan, 1984; Hands, 2010). Molloy *et al.*, (1995) clarify that collaboration is different from cooperation and coordination because it involves the establishment of common goals and agreement to use personal and institutional power to ensure that school-community partnership works. Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve common goals driven by the understanding that they might find it challenging to do it on their own (Butcher & Ashton 2004). In their study of school partnerships with rural communities in Australia, Kilpatrick and Johns (2001) found that the reason for collaboration was that rural schools' contribution to their communities was more than just the traditional forms of education. Many researchers support the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) model of collaboration as a reciprocal system which underscores the importance of school-community partnership to pursue common goals (Gretz, 2003; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004; Vogel & Avissar, 2009). Findings in other studies encouraged schools to act as catalysts for collaboration by initiating engagement with their communities (Pollard, 2010; Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Analyzing data collected from 400 schools across America, Sanders (2001) found that collaboration was a problem in poorly-resourced areas in which case the school had to take the lead in engaging their communities.

Chavkin (2001) and Miller (2007) suggest that a prerequisite for collaboration is to make the connection between schools and their community partners, creating a springboard to pursue common goals of the partnership. To get school-community partnership started Bryan & Henry (2008) suggest that connections are built one at a time until a network of support is created for the partnership. Compelling research by Vogel and Avissar (2009) into the growth of special education schools and their partnerships with their communities showed how the parent community readily collaborated because of the need to provide special support for children with special needs and universities came on board to study what was going on and provide feedback. Pollard (2010) suggests connecting stakeholders through a series of initial meetings and building a sense of place through community mapping thereby creating the right environment for collaboration. Boullion & Gomez (2001) see this as an opportunity to bring connected meaning to the school by intersecting powerful elements of motivation, support and expertise from the community with the school in a meaningful way. Kretzman and McKnight (1993) demonstrate this in their asset based approach where troubled communities, blighted by inner-city decay were rebuilt when they decided to rally together and establish collaborative environments to pursue strong school-community partnerships. What lubricates the linkage and authenticates the connect in school-community partnership is the information that passes between members and the frequency with which it happens (Bosma, *et al.*, 2010; Ford, 2004). It therefore creates a climate of cooperation and collaboration within the school-community partnership that is meaningful to them.

Arguments for collaboration and building connections centre on the necessity for and benefit awaiting school-community partnership. While initiating a school-community partnership will have different entry points for either the school or the community partners, the key element in providing the right kind of climate is finding a sense of commonality of purpose. Establishing a collaborative climate provides a contextual scaffold which mediates activity that will help bridge the divide between the school and the community and bring them closer to forming a full blown partnership (Bullion & Gomez, 2001). Schools especially, must be able to ensure a welcoming environment and demonstrate that there is scope for community partners to play meaningful roles (Kilpatrick & Johns 2001). Respect for partners

and appreciation for making themselves available all create a suitable climate in which to build school-community partnership.

2.4.2 Leadership

Putting a partnership in place and afterwards sustaining it requires adequate preparation and reinforcement on many fronts of which leadership is considered as the most important element (Epstein, 2001; Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). The road from idea to implementation, theory to practice is long and arduous and fraught with problems making it essential for a school-community partnership to adequately prepare itself to lead the process (Danzberger & Usdan, 1984). For school-community partnership to work it requires vibrant, innovative leadership on either side of the partnership that has the capacity to see a picture of the future and translate it into reality in the present (Ansari, Oskrochi, & Phillips, 2010). Starting off correctly is of vital importance. Some research studying the leadership process found that involvement of the community in school decision making built relationships that acted as a catalyst for other community linkages (Johns, Kilpatrick, & Falk, 1999).

In the early phase of initiating school-community partnership, strong charismatic leadership could work as a short term plan to get people around a table for informal meetings to explore the idea (Burns, 1978). But the nature of school-community partnership and its dependence on teamwork to sustain it afterwards excludes the idea of it being led by a single individual whether he possesses the necessary traits, charisma or attributes of a leader (Falk & Mulford, 2001). An Australian study by Johns (2003) on shared leadership in rural communities found that the strength of school-community partnership lay in leadership that is viewed as a shared responsibility. It rejected 'hero' leadership. The focus in a school-community partnership is not on a single leader but rather on the leadership process which encourages the 'voice' of the members to be heard (O'Connor, *et al.*, 2011).

Effective leadership for school-community partnership is a collective process where the school and the community work towards a common vision to deal with their collective needs and collective future (Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001). Johns (2003) found in her study that leadership gradually moved from the hands of a few at the initial stages of school-community partnership to a wider group as school-community partnership developed. This

strengthens the leadership process which continues to evolve and become more distributed as school-community partnership matures (Johns, 2003). The success of a school depends on the success of community participation as well (Gonzalez & Thomas, 2011). Many researchers consider distributed leadership integral to school-community partnership (Dotson-Blake, 2010; Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001; Larry, 2003). Kilpatrick and Johns (2001) view distributed leadership as a dynamic and collaborative process in which leadership roles are not defined but are a group process not dominated by an individual. Distributed leadership ensures involvement of school and community on a widespread level by allowing members to assume leadership roles in areas in which they are competent and skilled (Neuman & Simmons, 2004). Implicit in this kind of leadership is a shared purpose and common goals (Bryan & Henry, 2008). "Leadership is distributed, not by delegating it or giving it away, but by weaving together people, materials, and organizational structures in a common cause"(Larry, 2003). This is important because it highlights the multi-dimensional nature of leadership within school-community partnership.

This by no means underplays the role of formal leaders such as the school principal who is a key player in school-community partnership. The principal's support for community engagement was found to be central in a study by Sanders and Harvey (2002) for consequential partnerships to be struck between schools and their communities. Principals need to demonstrate this by gaining the attention of the community, creating interest in the school and stimulating action to participate in school-community partnership (Fielding, 2007; Foskett, 2002). In a leadership study on schools' contribution to rural communities it was found that for a school-community partnership to be successful, the school, led by the principal, should show the way in building high levels of cooperation, communication and trust with its community (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk, & Mulford, 2000). 'Boundary crossers' who, through their ability to network, form a link between the school and its community and harness important resources are also key players who bring a unique brand of leadership to school-community partnership (Johns, 2003). Formal leadership plays a central role in the process of building a school-community and lays the foundation for distributed leadership style (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk, & Mulford, 2003). Bridging the gap between this disconnect is a challenge facing many schools and communities. When nobody takes the initiative on either

side of the divide we end up with a situation where “Schools are *in* communities but not *of* communities” (Boullion & Gomez, 2001, p. 878). While emerging leadership from either side must be encouraged and built upon, if it is missing, it must be developed for school-community partnership to be successful (Hands, 2010; Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001; Sanders, 2006; Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). In such circumstances, Epstein (2001) suggests the school principal, a key player, initiates the school-community partnership process. His leadership at the early stages of informal talks about forming school-community partnership is just as crucial as his leadership role in the operation of the partnership as he guides it through the educational terrain familiar to him (Gonzalez & Thomas, 2011). The principal’s presence at meetings and his appearance at projects lend weight to school-community partnership.

A school-community partnership pursuing distributed leadership as a salient policy should avoid token leadership roles such as parents and community appearing on rosters without actively participating in partnership activities (Chavkin, 2001). Dotson-Blake (2010) in a study in Mexico, pointed out how parents were regarded as active leaders who were encouraged to make decisions about partnership purpose, activities and process. “Such leadership must enable the participation and interaction of the diversity of stakeholders”(Kilpatrick, Johns, & Mulford, 2003, p. 2). Related studies found that collective responsibility brings greater commitment and breeds ownership of the school-community partnership, contributing to the development and use of social capital for their collective needs and collective future (Joyce, 2009; Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001). This study tries to understand how partners who are brought on board are encouraged to become decision makers and contribute meaningfully to make school-community partnership work and to sustain it.

2.4.3 Communication

One of my research questions asks: What sustains the school-community partnership? School-community partnership requires ‘fuel’ to continue operating once it has been started. Swick (2003) in his study of strengthening school-community partnership cited communication as a critical factor in sustaining the collaborative nature of partnerships. While different members of a school-community partnership may have similar goals, they may differ on ways to reach these goals (Brooks, 2009). According to Miller (2007),

communicating collaborative expectations effectively and openly to the members of school-community partnership helps them to negotiate their way around these differences. Referring to this as open communication, Miller (2007) argues that the school and the community need to be aware that it is a foundational element to successful school-community partnership. Communication is the heartbeat of school-community partnership. It is what keeps it alive through the flow of information. Its purpose is to keep members abreast of developments and timeously provide its membership with adequate information that can prevent or remedy pitfalls that can befall school-community partnership (Colman, 2007; Ledoux & McHenry, 2008). Research has found that lack of communication leads to schools isolating themselves from their communities and *vice-versa* because collaboration is dependent on knowing what is going on (Abravanel, 2007; Brooks, 2009; Hohlfield, Ritzhaupt, & Barron, 2010).

Open, two way communications between task teams operating in the field and those at the school level involved in school-community partnership projects helps reduce conflicts and allows for change while maintaining continuity. Research has found that frequent and open two way communication is a mechanism through which school-community partnership keeps growing, intensifying and improving (Ansari, *et al.*, 2010; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). “Collaborating organizations that are able to effectively communicate about and integrate their unique ways of acting are most likely to reach mutually agreed-on ends” (Miller, 2007, p. 240). This sounds like the chicken and egg story. While you need the one for the other to take place you are unsure which comes first, creating another dilemma for the uninitiated. It is possible, though, that they can be dealt with simultaneously. These studies, while arguing the importance of communication characterising school-community partnership, do not delve far enough into the actual mechanics of communication as an operational tool contributing to making school-community partnership work and sustaining the said partnership. It is possible that school-community partnership cannot take off because members know that they should communicate but they don’t know how to speak the language of school-community partnership which is to ensure a continuous thick, rich stream of information flowing in either direction. Alternately the lines of communication have not yet been formalised.

This study sought also to investigate the role of communication as a factor that keeps school-community partnership in motion.

2.4.4 Teamwork

Research confirms the connection between teamwork and school-community partnership (Johns 2003). In trying to unpack this connection, it also creates the opportunity to provide some insight into some of the activities of school-community partnership. In their paper on transformational partnerships between schools and universities that expanded access to higher education, Butcher, Bezzina and Moran (2011) refer to teamwork as a web of relationships that grows out of a shared purpose. School-community partnerships that have been set up should also have effective project teams that handle specific events or processes (Sanders, 2007). Teams are formed according to needs identified by the school-community partnership during its planning session and along the way as necessary. An early activity is to put together a team to begin the important task of mapping out the community, identifying skills, resources and potential donors. Teamwork is important for the sustainability of school-community partnership. Molloy *et al.*, (1995) suggest that team-building should be a part of the initial planning process when setting up school-community partnership as this will help a diverse group of people to build trust, gain respect for diversity, share decision making and achieve consensus. A team activity in this regard is to train community members through programmes to interact with professionals as equal partners (Murray, *et al.*, 2011). Johns (2003) found in her study that school-community partnerships worked effectively when teams shared skills, were willing to work together and motivated each other as they undertook their roles. Sanders (2007) argues that single individuals or the whole partnership cannot implement a comprehensive school-community programme in its entirety. She adds that team approach allows for a multiple and diverse approach to implementing school wide partnership programmes. Fundraising, sporting activities, cultural activities, after-school care and field trips are some areas that could be managed by teams. School-community partnership driven by action teams operating as a collective and sharing a common vision and purpose will allow members to add new perspectives to projects within the partnership (Colman, 2007; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). The availability and willingness of team players to handle key roles or supporting ones

together with identification of skills and talents contributes to setting up of teams (Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001). This contributes to the shared responsibility of building partnership and prevents burnout, dropping out or disillusionment of individual members. More importantly, a team structure can remain constant long after members have left, ensuring the longevity and sustainability of school-community partnership (Danzberger & Usdan, 1984; Sanders, 2007). The differing approaches of the studies reveals the complex nature of making the team approach work within school-community partnership (Chavkin, 2001). The extent to which teamwork characterises the nature of the school-community partnership is significant for this study which seeks to explore the factors that make school-community partnership work. My study will seek to understand the role played by teamwork to achieve goals and sustain the school-community partnership.

2.4.5 An open door policy

Increasing the chances of community participation in a school, is the school's ability to demonstrate that it operates as an open system, is community focused and abides by the Batho Pele principles which is a charter for providing excellent service delivery in South African public schools. Studies show that a school's ability to make obvious that it has moved on from the closed, static systems of the past to an open one is by displaying a welcoming attitude in its community approach (Bush, 1999; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). A warm, friendly environment that opens its doors to the community and shows appreciation for their interest sets the tone for collaboration in school-community partnership (Ansari, *et al.*, 2010; Pansiri, 2008). Good communication within a school demonstrated by empathic listening and positive non-verbal body language as well as word choices such as 'us' instead of 'me' encourages the community to participate in school activities. School personnel exhibiting growth-promoting skills such as being approachable, being sensitive, showing flexibility and dependability, strengthen and create an inviting environment for community to feel comfortable about partnering with schools (Swick, 2003). School personnel should be able to answer themselves in the affirmative when they ask themselves, "Are we a community friendly school"?

Welcoming policies and procedures in the school have to be matched by the body language of the school principal when interacting with the community to show that he personally supports their involvement.

2.4.6 Commitment to teaching and learning

Communities are guarded about getting involved in schools where results are poor, discipline is bad and things are falling apart. Everybody would like to see schools providing value for the money that the state puts into them (Pounder, 1999). Research shows that communities more readily get involved in schools that show a commitment to creating a strong and supportive teaching and learning environment (Sanders, 2006; Sergiovanni, 1994). An organised school that is academically focused and creates a challenging and supportive learning environment impacts positively on issues that challenge parents such as learner achievement, attendance, dropping out and supporting their children at home (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Communities are attracted to such schools not only to resolve their own problems but to be part of the culture of success they see in schools that serve their communities by addressing many of the issues that concern them (Parker, *et al.*, 2011). By demonstrating that it is fulfilling its core duty of ensuring teaching and learning, a school will not struggle to attract its community into school-community partnership.

2.4.7 The importance of knowledge, skills and capacity

Literature suggests that developing a productive school-community partnership by engaging with community sets the foundation for a strength based collaboration (Albertson, *et al.*, 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). When schools and communities partner with each other, it allows for a varied and creative pool of resources to be built upon to capacitate the school-community partnership and develop its strengths (Murray, *et al.*, 2011; Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010). During the planning stage of school-community partnership, decisions are made about what it wants to do and what resources are necessary to get it done. Mapping out the community in the formative part of partnership building is crucial to the importation of varied knowledge, skills and capacity (Johns, 2003; Sanders, 2006). Partnering in this way ensures that school personnel gain access to resources within the community that are lacking in schools (Hands, 2010). Evaluating and strengthening partnership processes on a

continual basis is essential for the long term sustainability and relevance of a school-community partnership (Parker, *et al.*, 2011; Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010). The strength of school-community partnership also stems from its ability to know and understand the dearth of resources it possesses as well as the assets it possesses. Identifying and maximising the assets that are within reach of the school-community partnership is important for its sustenance (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). This thinking forms part of the asset-based approach of Kretzman and McKnight (1993) which is discussed in greater detail in the theoretical framework section of this study. Johns (2003) suggests that reflection is an important stage of the partnership process. It allows partners to reflect critically on the impact of school-community partnership as well as to celebrate interim successes enjoyed (Johns, 2003).

2.5 Some barriers to the formation and operation of school-community partnership

Breaking down the barriers to the formation of school-community partnership continues to challenge many schools and indeed their communities (Sanders, 2001). Communities may be distinct entities from their schools but the borders between them should be permeable (Hands, 2010). The battle, however, is the traditional 'hands off' approach by schools in regard to community involvement despite attempts by government to bridge this gap through legislation such as SASA (Bush, 1999). Identifying situations that hinder community educational values from shaping teaching and learning is an important challenge for school-community partnership (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Schools' whose boundaries are impermeable to their community context will not adapt to their communities and eventually fail (Crawson & Boyd, 2001). They should therefore take the first step by opening their doors and bring down the traditional boundaries and hierarchies between themselves and their communities (Parker, *et al.*, 2011).

The greatest barrier to setting up and continuing strong school-community partnership is perhaps low expectations and incorrect perceptions of the school by the community and *vice versa* (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). When a community looks at a school and decides that it offers nothing except keep the learners occupied during the day, it is a challenge for both sides to tackle. Their perspective may also be coloured by previous negative experiences, illiteracy, an inferiority complex, inhibition or the language barrier

(Obeidiat & Al-Hassan, 2009). Schools that resort to territorialism, refuse to share their resources and make information difficult to access, exacerbate this barrier (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). This demarcation of arenas has to be taken into account by research that wants to understand how school-community partnership is initiated.

Research shows that the deficit perspective could also act as a barrier to the formation of school-community partnership (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001; Kilpatrick, *et al.*, 2003). Communities used to the idea of outside assistance to them and their schools become reliant on such help and forget about the power of community building from within (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010; To, 2007). As a result they are reluctant to come forward and build a lasting school-community partnership that allows them to jointly influence the education of their children and build their own social capital (Hands, 2010).

Working with the community may be considered as additional work by teachers who already carry heavy responsibilities (Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004). Teachers may consider community, especially parents, a burden and not as an opportunity to exploit the partnership to gain access to the community. Lack of time and teacher burnout are other reasons established by research (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). On the other hand community may regard the school's offer of partnership as an intrusion and not as a means to develop their social capital (To, 2007).

Studies of school-community partnership show that policies at school level sometimes reflect a tendency to concentrate on academic work within the school fence and behind classroom doors because of pressure to show improved achievement (Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Steen & Noguera, 2010). This is a barrier to the long term well being of the school. A study on learner attendance at school found that factors such as dropping out of school, truancy and absenteeism that can harm learner academic performance are better handled if strong school-community partnership exists (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Research shows that school characteristics and practices such as system protocols, unfriendliness to community, difficult visiting procedures and inaccessible senior personnel are barriers to creating a climate for school-community partnership (Goos, 2004; Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004). This could also be attributed to the way teachers are trained with an

academic and professional bias that lacks training in engaging parents in meaningful activities (Parker, *et al.*, 2011). Linked to this is leadership (discussed at length earlier in this chapter) that does not empower community or recognize community strengths or skills (Fullan, 2009; Kolondny, 2002; Steen & Noguera, 2010).

In addition to these, other barriers identified are funding shortages and where the focus is on delivering resources timeously, inconvenient hours, and coordinating problems that arise when too many organisations share the school buildings (Goos, 2004; Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004).

In summary, research reveals that several barriers challenge the formation of school-community partnership and their continuation. Knowledge of these barriers and sharing the information amongst the school personnel and then the community in a planned and sensitive way can pave the way for the establishment of successful school-community partnership. This study which explored a working school-community partnership in a deep rural setting endeavoured to explore how such challenges are addressed.

2.6 Emerging issues

The literature review featured many aspects of school-community partnership. It also highlighted ways to ensure successful enabling of such partnership and factors that are important for school-community partnership to work. It identifies barriers to initiating school-community partnership. Exactly how a school-community partnership remains operational, as well as what it takes to sustain itself, are questions that still remain unanswered.

I now turn to the theoretical aspect of the study which provided a framework to understand better how to read the situation which confronted me during my research into school-community partnership.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

I utilised a two-pronged framework through which to view school-community partnership. The first is Epstein's theory of *overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein, 2001; Epstein &

Voorhis, 2010) while the other is the asset- based approach as developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993).

2.7.1. Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence

Epstein's theory (2001) of *overlapping spheres of influence* deals extensively with community individuals, organisations, and businesses and the way in which they interact in school-community partnership to improve learner achievement (Sanders, 2001). The theory asserts that students learn more when parents, educators, and others in the community recognize their shared goals and responsibilities for student learning and work together, rather than alone (Epstein, 2001). Epstein's (2001) model, referring to family, school and community as the contexts for the partnership, identifies separate and combined influences on learners who are deemed to be the main benefactors of school-community partnership (see Figure 1.). While Epstein sees them as three separate contexts, the model is still relevant as a theoretical framework for this study which speaks of school-community partnership with the understanding that family is an integral part of the community. Ndahayo & Gaikwad (2004), referring to the three contexts as three wheels, put forward that school-community partnership would move more efficiently if the three wheels of the school, family and community synchronized and shared the goal of developing positive and productive interactions within the said partnership. Taken on its own, each context exerts a positive influence on learner achievement and on itself. When a context intersects with another context such as family-school or school-community, it impacts positively on learner achievement and on each other.

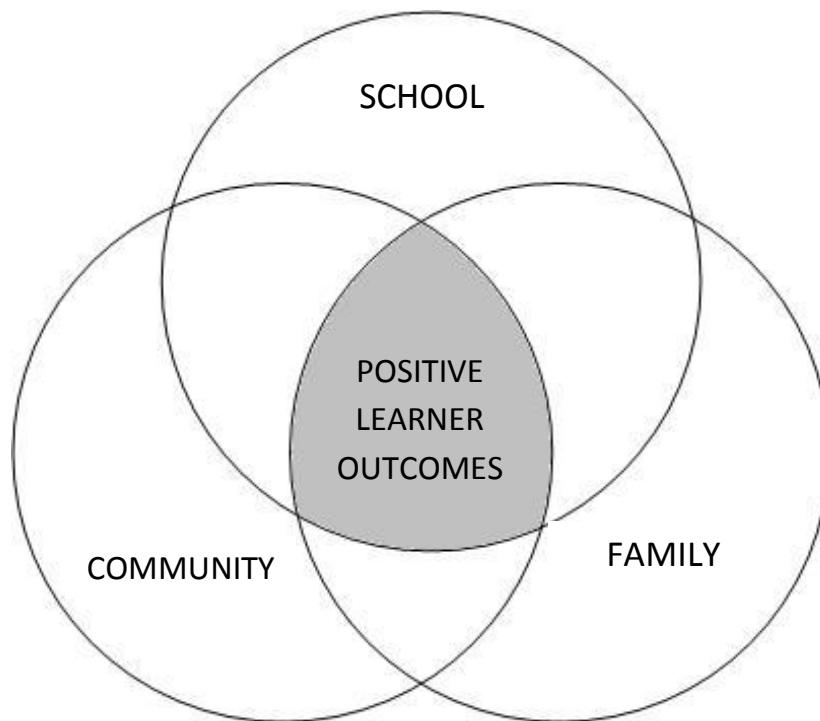


Figure 1. Epstein's (2001) *overlapping of spheres of influence* framework

The model shows how the contexts, by intersecting each other create areas of cooperation and enrichment with each other as well. Where the three contexts intersect each other, is the area that produces the greatest influence on learner performance. This confluence is the school-community partnership area which starts small when partners first come together in informal meetings and proceed to plan and initiate a full partnership. The growth of the partnership is depicted by the increased size of the area of influence (Epstein, 2011). The model advocates that the greater the interactions amongst the spheres, the more enhanced the learning amongst the learners. Higher involvement from higher levels of interactions results in the highest levels of positive outcomes for school-community partnership (Epstein, 2001).

In Figure 1 “The *external structure* of the model shows that these contexts may be pulled together or pushed apart by the philosophies, policies and selected activities that are operating in each context. The *internal structure* of the model identifies the interpersonal relationships and connections between and among parents, children, educators and others in the community that may affect student success in school” (Epstein, 2001). The internal structure represents the engine room or the intersections of the various components of school-community partnership while the external structure illustrates the actual

components and the manner in which they link as they work together (Epstein, 1995). Points of transition in the relationship between the *spheres of influence* allows for the flexibility and the constant change necessary for school-community partnership in motion (Chavkin, 2001). The overlap of and the movement of the components of the *spheres of influence* towards or away from each are indicative of the degree of communication and collaboration within school-community partnership (Hohlfield, *et al.*, 2010). Though schools and communities are distinct entities, the boundaries between them are permeable given that schools have moved from closed to open systems thus enhancing the possibility of exchange between them (Hands, 2010). Examining points of transition and the relationship between the spheres improves understanding of school-community partnership in action in relation to goals and outcomes (Chavkin, 2001).

The Epstein (2001) model which has a long and successful history and is simple in design, enjoys empirical support of many researchers (Bojuwoye, 2009; Chavkin, 2001; Sanders, 1996). In the United States it has been adopted by the United States Department of Education as a framework for its *No Child Left Behind* policy (Epstein, 2011). Various models exist that provide insight into the complex workings of school-community partnership (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Ferguson, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Nettles, 1991). In their model for school-community partnership, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) underscore cultural and other life context variables as the main reasons for parents and community involvement in a partnerships. Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) advocate shared outcomes in mentoring, volunteer programmes, classroom assistant opportunities, home visits, business partnerships and tutoring programmes as the thrust of their model. The theory of interactions between schools and communities as part of a process of change that gravitates towards a full blown partnership was conceptualised by Nettles (1991). Ferguson's (1999) developmental model of collaboration involves determining the need for and interest in partnerships. I found Epstein's theory (2001) of *overlapping spheres of influence* to be the most appropriate to the area of focus in this study which is to explore a working school-community partnership and to establish the nature of the partnership as well as how it is sustained.

An evaluation of Epstein's theory (2001) shows it to be overarching and broad based, encompassing the main aspects of all these theories while bringing an additional dimension to understanding how to make school-community partnerships work and what it takes to sustain them (Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004). Of particular interest are what puts school-community partnership in motion, what happens when partnerships are actually in operation and how they are sustained. Who is doing what? The model provides insight into the complexity of the partnership and the movement of the contexts as they heighten interaction or pull away as the need arises. School-community partnership framed by *overlapping spheres of influence* create community-like schools or school-like communities (David, 1998; Dunst, 2004). Within the areas of 'overlap' Epstein (1995) identifies a guiding framework of six types of involvement that help partnerships drive themselves in pursuit of its shared interests. "With frequent interactions between school, families and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, or working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another and of staying in school" (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). The types of involvement suggest partnership activities for members of the school-community partners in various locations and for specific purposes that will contribute to improved learner achievement.

2.7.1.1 The six types of involvement

The six types of involvement described by Epstein (1995) and shown below forms the basis of school-partnership activity operating on many fronts allowing for multiple involvement of the members.

(1) Parenting- Helping families establish home environments supportive of learners. Educating and training parents by running courses on literacy, health and nutrition issues, discipline etc.

(2) Communicating- Establishing effective two-way exchanges between the school and the community about school-community programmes and learner progress. These will include meetings, notices, newsletters and other communications.

(3) Volunteering- Recruiting and organising community help at school or other locations. Partnership members are needed for sports activities, certain classroom activities, doing an annual update of mapping the community for talents, volunteers and resources.

(4) Learning at home- Providing information to community about how to help learners with homework, study skills and curriculum information. Guidance should be provided to parents on how to monitor homework and how to discuss schoolwork and activities at home.

(5) Decision making- Ensuring that parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees. An important starting point is ensuring that parents are actively involved in electing and supporting governing bodies. Groups like the School Governing Body Forums must be encouraged to work for school improvement and reform.

(6) Collaborating with the community- Identifying resources within the community to strengthen school programmes and community support for improved learner achievement. School-community partnership must actively facilitate interaction between schools and their communities in areas of health, social, sporting, cultural and learning activities.

Ndahayo and Gaikwad (2004) found that the six types of involvement produced positive outcomes amongst school personnel, learners and community. School personnel developed a better understanding of the community, its needs and its strengths and improved their communication with the learners and their parents. Learners' became aware of their own progress, built positive relationships with community members, spent more time on homework and viewed parents as more similar to teachers. Community played a more active role in activities of the school, showed more interest in improving learner achievement, understood school programmes and policies better and felt ownership of the school.

This typology of partnership involvement provides a structure around which a comprehensive school-community partnership programme can be implemented (Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). It enables partnerships to design their own programmes by drawing on these elements based on their goals and the unique character of their communities (Obeidiat & Al-Hassan, 2009). The theory models itself on high involvement and multiple interactions to ensure positive results within school-community partnership (Ndahayo &

Gaikwad, 2004). Epstein (2001) advocates that leadership positions should be distributed amongst those within school-community partnerships to encourage ownership of the process. Bearing in mind that the goal is to develop positive interactions within the school-community partnership, the theory guides that these ought to be constantly monitored, measured and improved (Epstein, 1995).

This model has been widely used in urban, rural and suburban schools in the United States and has been found to be highly successful in setting up and sustaining school-community partnerships (Ramirez, 2001). The theory provides clear lenses through which to view and understand what makes school-community partnerships work and more importantly, how they are sustained. Moreover, the six types of involvement provide a working plan for the school-community partnership team to create conditions to sustain the partnership (Epstein, 2011).

In the second part of my theoretical framework, I look at the asset based approach as an additional lens to view school-community partnership. This approach is intrinsically linked to Epstein's (2001) suggestions for involvement and provides insight into how school-community partnership is sustained by the *overlapping spheres of influence*.

2.7.2 The asset-based approach

The asset-based approach devised by Kretzman and McKnight (1993) usefully complements Epstein's (2001) *overlapping spheres of influence* framework for the purposes of this study which seeks to understand the fundamental challenge of what sustains school-community partnership. While Epstein (2001) suggests the interlinking of the school and community to generate action from the intersections of the *overlapping spheres of influence*, Kretzman and McKnight (1993) advocate identifying and maximising the assets that are existent within the school-community partnership to strengthen the development process.

2.7.2.1. A departure from the deficit perspective

To understand the Kretzman and McKnight (1993) approach it is necessary to grasp their perspective of traditional approaches to school-community partnership. Lack of resources and opportunities, deficiencies and problems of communities characterise the needs based

approach (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006). Studies supporting this approach argue that the need to promote student achievement in the absence of adequate resources and support is an important reason for forming school-community partnership that will source outside assistance to meet their goals (Gonzalez, 2004; Hands, 2010; Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005; Kolondny, 2002). School-community partnership focused on needs are based on a deficiency model and operate from a deficit perspective which rely heavily on external resources and support (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Gretz, 2003; Molloy, *et al.*, 1995).

Juxtaposed against the deficit approach, the asset-based approach while acknowledging that both approaches have common goals, contends that the deficit approach is inefficient in addressing the challenge of making school-community partnerships sustainable (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001).

2.7.2.2. Tapping into latent resources

The asset-based approach begins with discovering a community's capacities and assets as a precursor to development. Lin (1999) refers to these capacities and assets as social capital. The approach works on the principle that potential partners with untapped resources are everywhere and need to be identified and mobilised (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006). This alternative path recommends the development of a vision and plan based on skills, capacities and assets of the school and community (Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010). The asset-based approach is significant for this study which seeks to explore an inward looking school-community partnership.

Kretzman and McKnight (1993) offer two main reasons for their capacity-oriented approach. The first is that school-community development is kick-started when the partners commit to investing in themselves and have mobilised their resources in the process. The second reason for the asset-based approach is that for many schools and their communities especially the rural ones, the prospect of outside assistance is bleak (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001). Kretzman & McKnight (1993) clarify that utilising internal resources does not mean that outside resources are not needed. These resources are better utilised to affirm the assets already identified and to fit in with plans created for such resources (Hands, 2010; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). In South African schools, monies given to schools are

already ring fenced by the department for learning and teaching support material, leaving nothing to pursue school-community partnership building projects to improve learner achievement. School-community partnership thus has to look inwards to start developing itself as one of its choices. This study of a school-community partnership in motion looked at the extent to which it is self generating and whether it is self sustaining as well.

2.7.2.3 Identifying and gathering assets

Kretzman and McKnight (1993) use as a point of departure the belief that all individuals, families and learning contexts have capacities, skills, resources and assets that may be developed to solve problems in a variety of contexts by school-community partnership. It is an approach that encourages the building and empowerment of communities from inside out. The three major categories of community assets they list are individuals, organisations and institutions. According to Kretzman and McKnight (1993) the process begins by identifying these assets and then setting out to map them. Mapping should start with a detailed list of the skills, gifts and capacities of individuals within the school-community neighbourhood. The next step would be to create an inventory of community organisations such as civic, cultural, sports and recreational associations. Beyond these, the more formal institutions such as clinics, hospitals, libraries, social services and non-governmental agencies should be mapped. These institutions are the most easily identifiable and formal part of the community's horizon (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). After recognizing and mapping out the asset base, the process moves on to mobilizing them for projects identified by the school-community partnership. The process of mobilization begins by connecting expertise with one another to improve their effectiveness in strengthening school-community partnership (Hands, 2010; Molloy, *et al.*, 1995). Connecting resources within school-community partnership depends on relationship building. Building these connections is a slow, patient process, bringing together partners one at a time (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Individuals brought on board by the guidelines provided in Epstein's (2001) model of *overlapping spheres of influence*, cultivate social relations which give them access to resources possessed by other individuals and thereby extend the network of asset-based resources (Bryan & Henry, 2008; 2010; Khanare, 2010). Once the mapping process is completed, it will have harvested a spider web of assets available to school-community

partnership (Bryan & Henry, 2008). Connecting people and resources in this way enables all members of school-community partnership to see their collective stake in improving learner achievement (Danzberger & Usdan, 1984). This study explored how the partners operated in this space, what meetings they held, what activities they were engaged in and exactly how they ran the operation.

2.7.2.4 Sustainability of school-community partnership through asset building

Beyond the fact that school-community partnership must be planned, initiated, developed and made to work, the need to sustain them should be one of the primary goals of the partnership. A body of research shows that sustainability is a key characteristic of school-community partnership that are inward looking (Kilpatrick, *et al.*, 2003; Miller, 2007; Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010).

Researchers have focused on the challenges of bridging connections and broadening the network of resources as a process necessary for continued sustainability of school-community partnership as opposed to dependency on external resources as quick fix tactics (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006; Hohlfield, *et al.*, 2010; Kilpatrick, *et al.*, 2003). Other research develops this further, finding that in their quest for an asset-rich network of support to establish strength-based school-community partnership, they should focus on ongoing capacity building (Bryan & Henry, 2008; Murray, *et al.*, 2011). Sustaining the participants is just as important as sustaining the partnership, something that could be achieved by regular workshopping and flow of information (Murray, *et al.*, 2011). While the needs based approach is regarded by some as the reason to start school-community partnership, Chavkin (2001) in contrast, argues that schools already performing well should build on this strength and their successes to sustain their effectiveness by forming partnerships with their communities. This is supported by the strength based approach to school-community partnership advocated by Bryan & Henry (2008) where school-community partnership are built on the need to consolidate the strengths of the components. Research studies of successful schools that pursued school-community partnership to achieve excellence found that school-community partnership exceeded their own expectations in raising their levels of effectiveness by working from a position of strength (Ansari, *et al.*, 2010; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Heightened community awareness and expectations, mutual exchange of

information and broadening knowledge leads to shared ownership of programmes which drives the sustainable nature of school-community partnership (Ebersohn & Eloff, 2006; Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010). Social capital accumulated through systematic capacitating of the asset base and building long term trust derives benefits to both the community and the school by providing the 'fuel' for sustainability (Kilpatrick & Johns, 2001; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). Research shows that generating and gathering social capital strengthens school-community partnership and allows them to continuously extend their work in new directions (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2001; Johns, 2003; Ndahayo & Gaikwad, 2004). This acts as a safety measure against stop-start school-community partnership that 'rest' when resources provided from outside dry up and then 'restart' when there is an injection of resources. Sustainability builds on itself when it creates renewable interest in school-community partnership.

Kretzman and McKnight (1993) emphasise that the asset-based approach is intended to complement good work already going on and to give school-community partnership support and direction but not to substitute it. Three main features of the inner strength of the process that lend themselves to sustainability are: (1) it is asset-based, meaning it starts with what is present in school-community partnership and not what is absent or needed; (2) because the process is asset-based, it is regarded as internally focused or inward looking; (3) the process is relationship driven, constantly building and re-building relationships between members of school-community partnership (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). School-community partnership is thus viewed as asset-based, internally focused and relationship driven, unique to its community and can last beyond the involvement of specific individuals and institutions (Danzberger & Usdan, 1984; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Shapiro, *et al.*, 2010).

2.8 CONCLUSION

The theories provide a balanced and clear theoretical framework to understand how school-community partnership is initiated, what makes it work and what sustains it. Epstein's (2001) model focuses on the importance of human relations within partnerships and how they should be maximised to improve learner achievement. The asset-based approach, in concentrating on the rich, latent assets that wait to be tapped from schools and their

communities opens up the possibility to shape these assets into a formidable force that combats dependency.

Epstein's (2001) theory deals with the intricacies of the intersections of the various components on the school-community partnership, highlighting cooperation, collaboration and communication. The effect of the purposeful collaboration of the school-community partners to interactively improve learner achievement is clearly described. What is practical about the theory is the flexibility which it allows for components of school-community partnership to move towards each other when the need is greater, and to create space when necessary.

Kretzman and McKnight's (1993) asset-based approach serves as the second theoretical framework. While the Epstein (2001) model emphasises human resources and the effect of their connections, the asset-based approach emphasises all types of latent resources and the way they could be harnessed to strengthen school-community partnerships. It's inward looking approach to strengthening school-community partnership supports the agenda of this study which wants to understand what makes school-community partnership work.

Much of the literature studied deals with what needs to be done and the importance of factors such as the formation of school-community partnership. Most of the studies fail to unpack the processes or transactions necessary to keep school-community partnership operational and how to sustain them. Schools attempting to establish school-community partnership will be challenged by what to do after establishing the said partnership. What happens after the start and maybe the first project? How do they harness the asset base of the school-community partnership? Once they have connected the dots, how do they get them operational? This is the gap that this study set out to explore.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This is a qualitative study located in the interpretivist paradigm. I utilise the case study approach to elicit data (Cresswell, 1994) pertaining to the nature of a school-community partnership and how it is sustained. The chapter opens with a discussion of the qualitative approach moving on to explain why the study is located in the interpretivist paradigm before going on to explain why I chose to adopt a case study design. In the second part it deals with the chosen site and the participants. It moves on to discuss the procedure used to gain entry and the data collection instruments used. An explanation of how the data will be analysed follows while ethical issues, trustworthiness and limitations bring the chapter to a close.

The use of the qualitative research approach is an attempt to present school-community partnership in terms of its concepts, behaviours, perceptions and the accounts of the partners who populate it (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Finlay, 2002). Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand particular situations or events through an ongoing interactive process by the researcher experiencing firsthand the everyday life of the setting of the central phenomenon being explored in this study (Cresswell, 2009). Capturing unique experiences, individual perceptions and reflections of persons in the study focus is the hallmark of qualitative research (Wheeldon, 2010). It is the interweaving of the everyday experiences of the members around school-community partnership that the exploratory nature of this study tried to unravel. The qualitative approach allows for immersion of the researcher into the focus area to elicit data and experiences (Maree, 2007). Gathering data through multiple, interactive means *via* the human instrument as opposed to impersonal questionnaires and surveys presents experiences as a whole, not as separate variables (Khanare, 2010; Wheeldon, 2010). Important for this study was how the data collected was mediated to make meaning of the phenomenon that was observed (Cresswell, 1994). Following this in-depth understanding of the experiences and issues of the school-

community partnership, the study was able to paint an inductive picture of its reality to facilitate understanding of the research problem (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Maree, 2007).

3.2 The interpretivist paradigm

Central to the interpretivist paradigm is the endeavour to gain an understanding of the subjective reality of human experience (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). The behaviour of the people inhabiting the central phenomenon and their actions are the focus of the interpretivist paradigm which tries to make meaning of the experiences of those studied (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Maree, 2007). By embracing this worldview, the study's orientation was able to guide it towards interpretive understanding rather than an explanation couched in universally valid laws (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cresswell, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study is located in the interpretivist paradigm to enable it to work directly with those at the coalface and learn from their experiences thereby developing an understanding of what they do and how they do it (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Observing the process of the school-community partnership in motion and the experiences of the members yielded data that contributed to an understanding of how they make meaning of their reality. Inductively recording and describing the human behaviour in the process of going about their activities allowed the interpretive construction of the multiple realities of this phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The interpretivist paradigm therefore allowed the research process to be informed by the participants and is reflective of how that particular group of people make sense of the situation they encounter in their interactions.

3.3 The research design

The qualitative approach guided by the interpretivist paradigm requires a strategy or an approach to the inquiry that prepares the terrain to explore the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell, 1994). This study adopted a case study research design.

This research is based on a single case study. A case study is a naturalistic enquiry that investigates a specific phenomenon or instance within its real-life context (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Yin, 1984). For research purposes it is understood to have three essential parts: the unit of analysis, the research process and the end product (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984). The unit

of analysis, in this instance the school-community partnership becomes the case. Observing that this allows the researcher to fence in what is to be studied, Merriam argues that the case is therefore “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). By considering a case study a specific instance framed by a boundary, it allows the researcher to interact with real people in real situations, to gain insight, discover and interpret the single phenomenon being studied (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). It follows a logical sequence of exploration, discovery and description. A case study then, is the collection and presentation of information providing descriptive detail of the phenomenon by examining it through the eyes of the people who populate the unit being studied (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). It is akin to a person being able to swim in a fishbowl to study goldfish that are able to talk to him and then reporting on the adventure.

A case study is distinguished by its specific nature. It could refer to a single institution, a specific teacher or a unique programme which in this case is the school-community partnership. The bounded context, which is seen as the specific, complex phenomenon, is the analytic focus of the study with the design specifying the number of people to be interviewed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A case study is also particularly suited to studies that ask the how and why questions (Yin, 1984). The strategy therefore suited this study that asked, “How does this school-community partnership sustain itself?” Merriam (1998) suggests further that qualitative case studies are characterised by special features of being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic is a reference to the study focusing on a particular instance, phenomenon or event while descriptive refers to the resultant “rich” thick description of the studied phenomenon; heuristic means the study brings clarity and meaning to the person trying to understand the phenomenon being studied (Merriam 1998). These elements have particular reference for this study that hones in on the nature of school-community partnership trying to glean information on what makes it work? Case studies are further characterised by the close up view they provide, the realities, feelings and the lived experiences of the subjects and the phenomenon in its real-life context (Geertz, 1973). It is a case of allowing the events and situations to speak for themselves rather than the researcher evaluating or judging the unique situation (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007).

Case studies just like other research designs have strengths and weaknesses. The choice of a design is dependent on the rationale for selecting it as the most appropriate strategy to address the research problem (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) argues that a case study is the best plan for answering research questions and its strengths outweigh the weaknesses. Some of the strengths of case studies which this study will exploit include: results are immediately understood by a wider audience because it reports on a reality; offers insights and illuminates meaning; reality is foregrounded; interpretation of similar cases is made easier with its insights; a single researcher can undertake the study; it plays a pivotal role in advancing knowledge in a particular field (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

The rationale for selecting case study research also comes with limitations that have to be considered. Due to a lack of a high degree of control over the whole process, the potential for bias can lead to the researcher either overstating or understating the case (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2003). Other weaknesses of case studies include: lack of time or money to come up with rich, thick descriptions; results may not be generalizable; the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher can affect selections and choices during the process; lack of training for researchers; oversimplification of the study (Dyer, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Awareness of the strengths and weaknesses helped to better prepare for the fieldwork. For example, negotiations around timeframes and for participants were done in good time while a constant reminder before each interview warned of the danger of bias.

In summary, this research employs the case study to interpret and analyse the uniqueness of school-community partnership. It endeavours to harness the complexity of the members' behaviour as they operate within the school-community partnership. In writing up the findings, it presents the reality in such a way that the reader is given a sense of 'being there'.

3.4. The research setting

The study was conducted at a deep rural primary school located in the Ugu District on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast that suited the research objective which was to explore a working school-community partnership in a deep rural context to find out what makes it work and how it sustains itself. My work in the area brought me into contact with this

school which I then purposively sampled because of its hard work, excellent results and its reputation as a good school. I also was aware that it had an established school-community partnership. This is a public school under the governance of a school governing body and managed by the school management team that consists of a principal, one deputy principal and three heads of departments. It has an administration clerk, a groundsman and a cleaner who doubles as a security guard. There are twenty five teachers in the school and 800 learners. The principal, deputy and the heads of department each have their own offices. The administrative assistant's office which also serves as the reception is highly organised and exudes a warm, welcoming feeling. The school is brightly painted, clean and neatly fenced with a security gate. Tanks filled by the municipality supply the water while the area awaits the bulk infrastructure necessary to supply piped water. Electricity has been available for a while now. A fully fitted and operational computer room recently officially opened by the MEC for education serves the young learners. At the back of the school lies a huge vegetable garden. The school also boasts a hall with retractable partitioning allowing it to double as classrooms. The enrolment at this school has been steadily increasing over the last five years. The Bapo family that donated the land to the school is very supportive of the school and the head of the family is a regular visitor to the school.

3.5 The participants

Having located the school with a working school-community partnership, the next task was to identify the primary source of information- the participants who would be crucial to the study. An important consideration for researchers is that the sample is representative of the population (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007) although this pertains mainly to survey studies. Further to this, purposive sampling was used to identify the participants so that those who had served the school-community partnership for periods between ten and nineteen years were included to ensure rich, thick information. Maree (2007) suggests that purposive sampling allows the researcher to handpick his participants for a specific purpose.

Eight participants were chosen to participate in this study, four from within the school and four from the community. School based participants included the principal, the deputy principal and two level one teachers. These were chosen specifically for their in-depth knowledge of the school-community partnership, its initiation, how it operated and how it

sustained itself. People who are knowledgeable about particular issues and by virtue of their role are better able to give information are usually chosen in a purposive sample (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Amongst the four at school the principal was an automatic choice because of the leadership position he holds in the school and in the school-community partnership. Gonzalez and Thomas (2011) stress that for a school to be successful its principal must take the lead in any outreach programme to attract the community. The community's perception of the school is also strengthened when the head of the school is seen to be leading a partnership programme (Swick, 2003). The second participant at the school came from within the school management team. This was the deputy principal who was the person who handled the communication and administrative detail of the school-community partnership work. Of the two level one teachers, one oversees a big school-community partnership project while the other was a random choice. On the community side, the landowner, Mr Bapo who donated the site to build the school and has been involved with the school from inception to the present was chosen. The other participant, Ms Shega is an interesting one, a parent who joined the school governing body over ten years ago, is now the deputy chairperson of the school governing body and has become a roving ambassador for the school. The third partner is a service provider that has become a member of the school-community partnership through his involvement in its development by supporting its projects. The fourth one was the leader of the Chinese group that supports the garden project as well as the literacy project at the school. All these members were suggested by the principal who introduced them to me.

3.6 Gaining entry

Negotiating access to the participants is an important part of the planning in a case study (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Besides access to the site, the access to the participants has to be practical to avoid disruption of the school and the routines of the individuals. The gatekeeper in this instance is the school principal. My work takes me to schools across the district which allowed me to easily identify the school which I wished to target as the site to do the study. I approached the school principal who is known to me, to sound out the idea of his school being the focus of the study. He bought into the idea, partly because he was happy to tell the story about how the school was developed through the partnership

process and partly because he thought it was a novel idea to be researching a school-community partnership in a deep rural area.

On a formal level, the school was first handed a copy of the letter from the Department of Education granting permission to conduct research. Accompanying this was a letter seeking permission of the school governing body to conduct research. After receiving a positive response from the school governing body, I called a meeting of the potential participants within the school as well as the governing body deputy chairperson, Ms Shega and Mr Bapo, the landowner. To be certain that they were comfortable to be part of the meeting, their permission was sought beforehand. After briefing them about the study, I confirmed their willingness to be interviewed and explained the implications thereof. As a second step, they were handed letters explaining the nature and purpose of the study and asked to consider it and respond to the letter on the attached reply slip. The service provider and the Chinese volunteer were treated differently because of geographical distance from the school and their availability. A telephone call was made to them to explain what is being done and to seek their permission for an informal briefing at their convenience. Thereafter, I met with them separately because their availability did not allow a joint briefing. Both agreed to meet me at the school during one of their visits there. They were briefed and handed letters explaining the study and a copy of the permission letter from the Department of Education. On receipt of the reply slip a date and time was confirmed to conduct the interviews.

3.7 Data collection instruments

This study utilised three types of data collection instruments namely semi-structured interviews, observations and document search. "Interviews are a primary source of data in qualitative research; so too are observations" (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). The semi-structured interviews were conducted first. This facilitated consideration of the data elicited and presented a grasp of the feelings and perceptions of the school-community partners as they interact with each other. It also helped to prepare for the next collection process, the observation by looking for things that were highlighted or stated. The detailed description of the instruments is to be able to provide a fuller understanding of the study (Murray & Beglar, 2009).

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

A school-community partnership may be small but the success it brings its school and community quickly becomes a big talking point throughout the community. “The entire Glen Cove, NY, community has embraced Robert M. Finley Middle School. Everyone- the mayor, small business owners, clergy, parents, teachers and students- feels that the school is important and successful” (Alston, 2011, p. 68). This turnaround which was non-existent five years earlier, is attributed to the strong, positive school-community partnership that was established (Alston, 2011). The literature review this study presents is studded with examples of such success stories told by various researchers. Each one is unique and has a special story to tell. Interviews are best able to capture these stories with the emotions and sentiments in real time and in the real world of the participants. Interviews enable the researcher to get inside the head of the participant and understand their interpretations of their story allowing them to express their situations from their point of view (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). I chose the interview as one of its approaches to gather data because of the up close human interaction that enables knowledge gathering and production (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews differ in the purpose they serve. They are characterised by how exploratory they are or how structured or unstructured they are (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). In a structured interview questions are framed to gain information around what the researcher is aware that he does not know while the semi-structured interview is employed when the researcher is unaware of what he does not know and depends on the participants to tell him (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The semi-structured interview allows participants to present unique information as they see the world and is not formally constructed (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). It allows a greater sense of freedom and flexibility to explore the social world of the participant (Smith, 1995). This allowed the interview to develop in unplanned directions as it went along providing unstandardised information and new clues to pursue. Hands (2010) used this approach successfully in her study to gather data from 25 interviews on differing reasons for the establishment of school-community partnership. The emergence of novel information from the participants strengthened the findings related to the case studies. In a related study Kilpatrick and Johns (2001) used the semi-structured interview approach to explore the role of leadership in school-community partnership in 5 case studies and in so

doing uncovered a wealth of additional data that was fed back to the schools to improve how they operated.

Semi-structured interviews allow the flexibility required to follow leads that are unintentionally presented during discussions thereby contributing to the rich, thick seam of information that unfolded as the participants presented their realities. Smith (1995) adds that semi-structured interviews are guided by the interview schedule rather than be directed by it. This allows the interviewer to establish rapport with the participant, probe interesting new directions and follow the participants interests or concerns (Smith, 1995). This school-community partnership in a rural context revealed the 'secrets of its survival' during the interview process and divulged issues that were not thought of before. Some of the advantages of the semi-structured interview could be listed as allowing greater flexibility of coverage, allowing the interview to explore novel areas, establishing empathy and the production of thick, rich data. The disadvantages which the interviewer needs to be aware of are difficulty in analysing data, prolonging the study and reduced control over the study (Smith, 1995).

3.7.2 Observation

Observation has been included in the process to strengthen the quality of the data and consequently the findings in the study. Semi-structured interviews are often interwoven with observation to produce a fuller interpretation of the phenomenon being researched (Merriam 1998). An interesting study related to school-community partnership conducted by Bryan and Henry (2008) successfully combined interviews and observations into an effective research tool that provided a deeper insight into their research area. The defining feature of observation is the opportunity it affords the investigator to gather data in natural situations (Merriam 1998). Another advantageous feature is that it provides a firsthand account of the phenomenon rather than the second-hand 'story' as presented by the participant in an interview (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Observing participants is an exercise conducted on the site which in the case of this study took place at the school where most of the school-community partnership activities occur. Observation as a research tool has to serve a research purpose, be deliberately planned,

systematically recorded and checked for validity and reliability (Merriam 1998). The main elements of data collection could be itemised as the physical setting, the participants, the various interactions that take place and the way the resources are organised (Morrison, 1998). The observation planned for this study was semi-structured to allow it the flexibility to follow developments as they unfolded during the fieldwork exercise. Merriam (1998) warns of the criticism against observation being subjective and the accompanying reliability issues which made it necessary for this study to pursue its exploration in a systematic and organised way. Recording field notes meticulously, writing descriptively and being able to separate relevant data from trivia are the hallmarks of disciplined observation (Morrison, 1998).

This study conducted two observations. Prior to this, a pre-observation visit was done. This was to get to know the environment and to meet interviewees and stakeholders. Merriam (1998) advises that this unobtrusive occasion should be to become familiar with the environment, show interest in activity and establish rapport. The first observation was to watch school-community partners at work. This study seeks to understand what the nature of a school-community partnership is and how it sustains itself. The observation sought amongst other things to gather data on participants, activities and interactions amongst members as well as their conversations. Notes were also made of what is not happening. With the information gathered here as the background to the school-community partnership, the second observation was watching the school-community partnership at work directly involving learners in the activity as well. It is important on these occasions to blend into the environment and be a passive observer as opposed to being an observer participant (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Merriam, 1998).

3.7.3 Document analysis

As the final part of data collection supporting documents were collected and scrutinized. The principal was asked to assist when analysing them. Documents are a useful way to understand better the phenomena being studied (Prior, 2003). Most of the documents studied were letters to and from potential and confirmed school-community partnership members which discussed projects at the school. Notes and memos were made during the

document search. This helped to better understand data gathered during interviews and observation as suggested by Prior (2003).

3.8 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the data collected after the fieldwork is completed (Vithal & Jansen, 2006). Data processing was done at two main stages, at the end of each collecting day and at the end of the research process. In a qualitative study such as this, data analysis is done by a three step method that involves cleaning the data, organising it and explaining or re-presenting it (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Vithal & Jansen, 2006). The process however, is not linear but an iterative one (Henning, Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). In the first step, data are read and checked for inaccuracies or inconsistencies and trends identified to facilitate meaningful grouping of data; organising the data during the second step allows the researcher to arrange it in manageable form to make sense of it; explaining or re-presenting the data as a third step allows the data to be interpreted and theorised (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007; Henning, Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Vithal & Jansen, 2006). Data should be analysed from early on as the collection process proceeds which will help control an overload of data (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007).

In analysing the data, an attempt was made to deal with data from each research question separately to allow a clearer picture to emerge through the descriptions, summarising and interpretations. Murray and Beglar (2009) suggest this as a technique to organise and present results. Bearing in mind that data collection can be done in many ways and that '*fitness for purpose*' suggested by Cohen, *et al.*, (2007, p. 461) should be the guide, I chose to generate categories and themes in response to both research question. Generating categories and themes requires the application of a descriptive analysis technique (Tesch, 1990). The following procedure was used:

- I commenced with reading the transcriptions of all the data gathered from interviews and observations, writing down comments and notes at the same time;
- The thick and rich parts were selected and perceptions and assumptions were recorded alongside;

- data segments of similar topics were clustered and used to identify patterns and conceptual similarities;
- Topics were abbreviated into codes and converted into categories with descriptive headings;
- Categories were abbreviated and assigned a code;
- Data relating to each category was assembled and I proceeded with a preliminary analysis;
- Themes were then generated.

It is important to approach data analysis with a rigid and structured plan to enable movement from description to explanation to generating theories (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). While this maybe time consuming, it enables the study to discover the substantive connections which bring meaning to the area of study (Khanare, 2010).

3.9 Ethical issues

The work and behaviour of a researcher has to subscribe to some ethical code (Murray and Beglar 2009). This becomes necessary as researchers try to balance the search for the truth with the need to protect the participants' rights and values and avoid any instances of embarrassment (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007). Being honest, keeping participants informed about the purpose and the use of data received from them and the handling of confidential information are important to ensuring a 'clean' study (Gibbs, 1997). In a qualitative study, the researcher should produce an ethical research design (Maree, 2007).

As a start, the data collection process must be a carefully thought out process. Another important consideration is to employ procedures that can constantly be used to check the trustworthiness of the study. To minimize bias and to avoid any controversy, the following procedural ethical considerations were applied and consistently maintained:

- Research clearance from the Department of Education has been obtained.
- Ethical clearance approval from the University of KwaZulu Natal was granted.
- Signed consent forms were obtained from all participants.

- Confidentiality and anonymity was consistently monitored and maintained by the use of aliases where and if necessary.
- Participants were made aware of every step of the process they were involved in. They were not exposed to questions or methods which are stressful, diminished their self-respect or caused embarrassment or shame.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the ability of the study to show that the findings are reliable and valid. Qualitative researchers approach this aspect of a study from various perspectives with competing claims as to what is a good quality piece of work. To ensure trustworthiness, this study dealt with validity and reliability concerns by identifying ways to check the results.

Validity is an attempt to establish whether the study has interpreted the meaning of the phenomenon accurately and to what degree it has explored what it set out to explore (Vithal & Jansen, 2006; Smith, 1995). It is a kind of test for the study to find out if it was right. Validity was addressed by heeding the guidelines provided by Cohen *et al.*, (2007) to report honestly, ensure quality of participants interviewed, provide in depth reporting, ensure rich, thick data is collected and remain objective throughout the study. Kvale (1996) describes validity as the truth and correctness of a study. Cohen *et al.*, (2007) however, warn that a study cannot be 100 percent valid. This study however, endeavoured to be as close as possible to that by employing triangulation to check for consistency in the data gathered from the interviews and that from the observations. Another triangulation method employed was Smith's (1995) suggestion to return drafts of the interviews and observations to participants to check if the social constructs portrayed by the researcher corresponded with the way they saw it.

Reliability is considered as the fit between what the research records as data and what actually occurs in the area under study (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Smith, 1995). It is about the consistency of the study conducted into the phenomenon (Vithal & Jansen, 2006). The reliability test for a study will be whether the results will remain stable over time, whether they will be consistent through repetition and to what degree the findings can be

reproduced or replicated (Smith, 1995). Reliability testing is used more often in quantitative studies rather than qualitative studies (Vithal & Jansen, 2006).

This study attempted to produce dependable and consistent findings that will be able to withstand a similar study of the phenomenon bearing in mind that no two persons looking at the same picture are 'seeing' the same things. It is possible for two different researchers studying the same phenomenon to come up with different but reliable findings (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). They should be able to concur that with the given data, the results make sense. Using multiple methods of data collection also improves reliability (Smith, 1995). This study used observation as well as semi-structured interviews and document search. These instruments were also constructed separately. An audit trail which enables the data to be traced to its source and findings arrived at through proper processes such as coding and categorising as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1994), provides additional reliability for this study. In addition, safeguards such as conveying reality as experienced, being specific about context and situation, providing detail, reporting honestly and presenting a depth of response as suggested by Cohen *et al.*, (2007) will ensure reliability of this study.

3.11 Limitations

All studies are limited by time, resources, access, availability of data and the credibility of data (Vithal & Jansen, 2006). This is a small scale, in-depth study that took place in a particular context. The findings may not be applicable to different contexts.

Considering the sample size, the study is limited to 4 members of the school personnel and 4 from the community. These were introduced to me by the principal who also makes up one of the 4 from the school personnel. I had to depend on his judgement in the choice of members for interviews.

I negotiated to attend and observe a meeting and an activity of the partners. I attended two of these. Whether the nature of these meetings and activities is the same when it is not observed I cannot tell. I will have to go by what was presented for observation.

3.12 Conclusion

The strategies employed to undertake the study have been covered here. In addition, the chapter explained the reason for the use of a qualitative approach and its appropriateness. It went on to discuss the methodological approach, the data collection procedures and analysis process. While it dealt with the qualitative trustworthy issues, it also clarified limitations to ensure credibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was breathtaking. Tucked away deep in the rural wasteland of the KwaZulu-Natal interior, amidst mud huts and dusty animal tracks lies a primary school that serves an impoverished community made up of mostly grandparents looking after grandchildren. There is no employment here, many of the parents of these children having left for towns to seek a better living while the largely uneducated grandparents try to ensure that the children left in their care go to school while they eke out a living from the earth. It is here, amidst the doom and gloom that Maplang Primary School sparkles with hope that radiates through this desolate community. The study unearthed a thick, rich description of a resolute group of people whose attitudes, beliefs and will to provide the best besides the obstacles that faced them created a unique school-community partnership that provides quality education and challenges poverty.

It was obvious from the interviews that the principal took the lead and set the tone for the school-community partnership that changed the lives of the people here. He said “When I was in college, I was taught by a very good man. He said when you go to school you must not only teach- you must uplift the community. You must not be dragged down by them”. The formation of the school-community partnership, its development and work, the development of the school and the community are best dealt with by looking at projects that brought people together at various points of the school’s growth. These provide insight into how the school-community partnership was initiated, how it developed and achieved its goals and how it sustained itself. It is necessary to understand that projects did not necessarily follow one another. Sometimes they ran parallel with each other while at other times they overlapped each other. Each one however, added a new dynamic to the school-community partnership.

The study sought to understand the nature of a school-community partnership in a deep rural context by setting out to explore what makes a school-community partnership work

and how it sustains itself. The chapter opens with a background to the setting and the role players prior to the school-community partnership being mooted. It moves on to describe how the school-community partnership was started and explores the role of the core team that started the process. Projects that brought the school and the community together, the significance for the school-community partnership and the developmental role they played in the school and the community are then unpacked. Data collection involved three processes. It began with semi-structured interviews, was followed up with observation of school-community activities and concluded with a document analysis.

4.2 Initiating the school-community partnership

For the sake of this research, I have used January 1988, the arrival date of the present principal up to the present as my timeline since it has documented evidence of school-community partnership activity for the period described. One of the biggest challenges faced by the principal on his appointment was the resistance by teachers to his attempts to build a culture of teaching and learning. Teachers were abusing alcohol, the school buildings which were not fenced were vandalised and accessed by all and sundry after hours. He explains:

Three of the teachers here were drinking and not coming to school. They said I was troubling them. Others would take money from learners and send them home. Then they would sleep in school. Teaching and learning was not taking place.

To make matters worse he found the school operating in three venues, at a church, next to a shop and at the school itself. This was because there were 800 learners enrolled at Maplang Primary but its seven classrooms were hopelessly inadequate. Monitoring all three venues was a huge challenge. The principal said:

I realized that the problem was a shortage of classroom space. There were only seven classrooms and the department was not building any more. I needed to consolidate the school and bring everyone under one roof to start dealing with all the problems here. Families paid school fees per family rather than per child. I noted that parents should be educated about this. So the only way to do it was by working with the community and sponsors.

This is the point at which the principal strengthened school-community partnership. I asked him if he was aware that he was embarking on school-community partnership to which he said “Yes, I remembered the principal of the college saying we must work with the community”. He began by mapping out useful and influential persons within the community first. He was unconsciously using the same point of departure suggested by Kretzman and McKnight (1993) in their asset-based approach. He came up with the names of the land owner who he describes as “very active”, the local church minister and a shopkeeper who was a retired principal from another school but quite influential within the community. He was described by the principal as “a very progressive somebody”. These three, it emerged from the interviews were willing to help the school during its past but were not supported by the school itself.

It is important to build a strength based partnership from the beginning (Bryan & Henry, 2008) that would act as sustenance in the uncertain times ahead of school-community partnership. The relationship driven approach is argued strongly by both Epstein (1995) and Kretzman and McKnight (1993) in the *spheres of influence* approach as well as the asset based approach respectively. There were no school governing bodies at that time. He first met with the landowner whom he found to be a visionary willing to support ideas to develop the school. The landowner was here since 1978 and chairperson of the school committee at the time the principal arrived. The school committee was, however, dysfunctional and not performing any work of note. When school governing bodies were introduced, he was elected as the first chairperson. He presently serves as a co-opted member, having asked to be relieved of the chairperson’s position. The landowner, now 85 years old, said in the interview, “We are one body and we talk the same things. We work together with a common vision. We sit down often and we discuss things, even if we are alone”. He described how the school was not fenced and people would use it in the weekend for nefarious activities. “I remember, one day I hit a man with a stick. He was sleeping in the school with a girl. He ran away”. Eloff and Ebersohn (2001) argue that intervention in the asset based approach starts with the *status quo*. Here was someone who was not accepting the *status quo*. It was obvious he was passionate about the school and schooling. He immediately took to the new principal and his ideas.

The principal knew that to convince parents to pay for their children individually and not per family, he needed the support of the influential people in the community. The other two, the shopkeeper is late and the church minister is no longer in the area and therefore not able to be interviewed. Later, after governing bodies were established, the SGB deputy chair, Ms Shega joined the core team of active individuals. The principal then gathered this core group and told them of his plans to improve the school. "They bought the idea, he said". The idea was to get parents to contribute school fees per child so that additional classrooms could be built. This core group would meet regularly from here on to chart the way forward for the school. Along the way they would form partnerships with various persons and organisations, some remaining as ongoing members of the partnership while others would enter and exit the school-community partnership as projects started and ended.

4.3 Project One- building two additional classrooms with Rural Foundation

Establishing a collaborative activity between a school and its community requires a great deal of effort by individuals (Hands, 2010). Before going to the parents, the group met to strategise and also look at building costs. It was discovered that even if parents agreed to pay per child, the money would be insufficient to build the 2 additional classrooms urgently required. The landowner, Mr Bapo said "We sat down with Mr Gondola, the principal and we saw the light". A new dimension to the school-community partnership was added at this point when the principal told the group about an organisation called Rural Foundation that supports rural schools by building additional classrooms. It was agreed to consult with them. After a quick calculation Rural Foundation discovered that for a school with 800 learners, it only collected R4000-00 in school fees. Their response to the request for assistance was that they were willing to help build classrooms if all the parents contributed to the school fees. "We then brought them on board", said Mr Bapo, referring to Rural Foundation. The core group had networked and found a partner that was needed for a specific project. Rural Foundation appointed a technical advisor who would represent the foundation on the project up to handover. This was the pattern that was to characterise this school-community partnership in the future as well. A project would be identified; a partner targeted and is brought on board as a member of the school-community partnership. At the

end of the project the new member usually ceased being an active member of the school-community partnership but remained available should another project arise. The core group of four then called a mass meeting of the community. Their attention was drawn to the fact that the principal spent much of the day walking between the three centres to supervise teaching and learning. He was also teaching and burdened with the challenge of getting teachers to work. "We explained to the parents that we needed to fix these things and give their children a good education. By the end of the meeting, the parents were on board", said the landowner Mr Bapo. He added:

The parents agreed that the school must be consolidated under one roof by building more classrooms. They also agreed to pay for this by contributing per child and not per family as was the practice in the past they would also pay an increased amount of R20-00 per child.

The school-community partnership had moved into its next phase- that which included the parent component as fee paying and a community informed and supportive of the idea. By 1989, barely a year after the principal arrived here, the school-community partnership, driven by the core committee had collected enough funds to convince Rural Foundation to come in as a partner and complete 2 classrooms for them. Rural Foundation's *modus operandi* was that it would come up with an equivalent amount of money that a community had collected to add to its school buildings. Here was evidence that the *spheres of influence* which Epstein (2001) advocates were interacting with each other to improve teaching and learning in the school. Rural Foundation, joining the school-community partnership immediately rewarded community for their interest in their school. It agreed that community members to be employed in the construction of the classrooms. The landowner said:

Rural Foundation reminded us that if the community is not part of the development of the school from the beginning, they would not look after it.

The asset-based approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993) was already being employed although they had not heard or read about it. Employment opportunities were being provided for an impoverished community while skills acquired in the process developed the

social capital. This was long before the days of the SASA which promulgated the formation of school governing bodies one of functions of which was to develop the school and its infrastructure.

The literature I reviewed for this study advocates the formal establishment of school-community partnership through the various steps suggested. The way I understood this school-community partnership as the interviews, observation and document search progressed was that there was a core group from the school and parent component that got together through a need to build more classrooms. Thereafter, they met regularly to set goals, plan and ensure that school development was supported. Through networking and community mapping, a spider web of assets was continually identified and engaged. The remoteness of the school made it unviable for outside members to stay on permanently after a project. These would actively participate in the school-community partnership during a project but left after the completion of the project, returning occasionally for support purposes. Although some of these left the area after the project was completed, the school's excellent reputation kept them on as dormant members who would readily come on board if another project required their involvement. Such a member was Rural Foundation that is continually involved in development projects here. The deputy principal, Ms Bele explained:

We do not end the relationship after a project. When we hold functions we invite these people, like when we won the National Choir Competition. We also write letters of appreciation. They see that we are looking after the things that they give us.

While these 'big' partners were away, the core school-community partnership had other local partnership projects that continued on a day to day level that kept the school-community partnership sustained. This in turn impacted on the local community and kept them interested and involved in the school's activities. It was the start of a pattern that was going to characterise the unique partnership that developed here out of this first project. It worked for the school because it also came with some flexibility. Early evidence of the school-community partnership sustaining itself was also emerging. When a big partner left after a project, the core partners continued other work.

4.4 Project Two- cottages for teachers

While the construction of the two classrooms was in progress, the principal had begun the process of replacing teachers who began leaving because he was getting them to work.

I set the right example. I started teaching and observed punctuality. I had to be on task on time. The community started noticing.

Mr Bapo, the landowner said that the shop owner remarked that, “We now have a committed principal we can work with”. There were also problems because the shebeen owner blamed the principal for his customers leaving the area. He was used to collecting the teachers’ cheques at the end of the month in lieu of the alcohol account they had run up. New teachers arriving to work here travelled from far and were without accommodation. The core team considered the issue and the shop owner agreed to build rooms that teachers could rent at reduced rentals. Skills learnt during the building of the classrooms were now employed on a smaller but important project.

Project Two had many positive spin-offs for the school and the community. Rooms were provided for the new teachers at cheap rental. The school employed an asset-based approach to utilise local labour, skilled by the classroom project in the construction and they in turn earned themselves some money. The principal, Mr Gondola said “New teachers followed my leadership style and became hard workers”. These teachers stayed behind at school after hours to do additional work. They also contributed to the area’s economy by paying rentals to the shopkeeper and buying food at the shop. The community, though initially alarmed by the exodus of the older teachers were now seeing the changes in a positive light and were reassured. Some of the old guard that remained grudgingly fell into line as the school gained increased support of the community.

4.5 Project Three- six classrooms with Renaissance Foundation

Immediately the two classrooms were handed over, the principal and the core committee embarked on an ambitious project to build six more classrooms. This was in response to what was happening within the community. Learners who were previously sent to other schools because of the fragmented education at Maplang Primary were now flooding the

school. The enrolment jumped to 1200 by 1989. Ms Bele the deputy principal who joined the school in 1989 said,

Teaching and learning was excellent because of the principal, Mr Gondola. He was very strong and had a passion for the school. He loved learners. He was a strict principal. Community was brought in by holding many meetings. This was a way of marketing the school. Parents were interested in coming to school. As a result we had the highest enrolment compared to neighbouring schools. The principal was good at making partnerships.

As a start, the core committee after bringing the parents on board again met with Rural Foundation, their partner from the first project. The funding model was that parents would make their contributions first and this would then be matched rand for rand by the department of education. The money accrued this way was far short of what would have been required to build six classrooms. Another dimension was about to be added to the school-community partnership. Rural Foundation, which was unable to come up with the top up amount, gave them the contact details of Renaissance Foundation in the United States and asked them to appeal for assistance while they would support it with their own letter to the foundation. Here is an excerpt from the response of the president of Renaissance Foundation, Robert Mitchum in a letter to the principal:

Mr Wigel Good of Rural Foundation has written to me to tell me what a good school Maplang is and how great your need for classrooms is. I've enclosed a questionnaire which seeks information about the school, please complete and return. My directors insist that I visit your school before they consider your application for funding.

The principal continued the story:

That Robert Mitchum, he corresponded. He phoned me. As president, he was writing to me directly. They did come and agreed to give us 6 new classrooms.

A new member had been added to the school-community partnership. While the communication between the school and the new partner was taking place, a new and

interesting development was taking place that would also unfold as the representatives of Renaissance arrived at Maplang Primary.

4.6 Project Four- building another school with Renaissance Foundation

Mr Bapo said:

Our children used to go to Phila High School for standard six and we thought it was not good because it was too far and expensive to travel. I remember one day when I left the principal of Phila he told me all the children from your side will never pass because they are always late.

When he returned he went to the core team and started discussions about a high school for their children. As usual, the parents had to be brought on board first. He said:

It was not easy because the parents of this place did not want to pay. I begged them and told them I was going to donate the land needed to build a high school.

Mr Gondola the principal said:

We had a vision that education should be continuous and motivated them by saying when they sent their children to other schools they paid over R100-00 for travel or to stay whereas here they could build their own school if they agreed to pay R25-00 more in school fees. I told them maybe your child is going to Phila High School and the whole week she stays there with a man and then comes back home to say she was in school. Here you can watch them.

The landowner said:

I told them in Isizulu, *ncelisa amawele*, which means to breast feed twins. They must pay for this school and pay for the new school. Finally they agreed.

The core team, understanding that this was a huge undertaking agreed to approach Renaissance Foundation when they arrived to inspect Maplang Primary. When Robert Mitchum arrived with his wife to donate the 6 classrooms they listened to the story of the school-community partnership up to this point, the donation of the land and the sacrifices

made by the parents and community determined to build a high school for their children. They immediately donated an amount of R250 000-00 for a 6 classroom high school. The landowner said, "When Robert and his wife turned the soil we gave them a knob kerrie and a big bunch of bananas. They were very happy. I also donated a site to build a church next to the school".

4.7 Project Five- school uniform to school hall

Bongi, a level one educator who has been at the school from 1990 said:

When I arrived, this community did not treat education as important at that time and learners were also older for their grades. The principal wanted things done in the right way and teachers bought into his vision.

The principal whose compassion for learners and interest in the well being of his community was attested to by the deputy principal earlier was concerned that parents were being ripped off by stores that sold the learner uniforms. These were also of varying qualities. Ms Shega the SGB deputy chair has been a member of the SGB for 12 years. She has become an important member of the partnership, liaising with the community and making regular visits to their homes. She said:

I got involved with this school because the advocacy of this school was good. It always communicates with parents and also invites them when it holds functions and also to discuss problems they have with their children. I link the school to the parents because I go around and talk to parents about the school and listen to what they say.

Linking school activity to concerns, goals and strengths of the community is an important ingredient that makes a school-community partnership work as well as sustain it (Boullion & Gomez, 2001). Ms Shega alerted the school to the difficulties parents faced with expensive school uniforms. The principal set off for Durban where he tracked down the manufacturer and arranged for him to meet with his committee. Bongi said, "But he was good because he would always consult with the staff and then take it to the committee and they would prepare how to approach the parents". A new member had been added to the school-

community partnership. Jens School Wear would supply school uniforms directly to the community at a reduced price with the proviso that they were fully supported. In return they would sponsor the school's excursions and provide donations when requested. Jens went on to be a long standing member of the school-community partnership providing free t-shirts for music competitions, track suits for teachers and more recently t-shirts for school governing members that they wear during official school functions. The deputy principal said, "Jens plays quite a role here. Parents support Jens because they provide quality school uniforms at a good price and they last long".

The school-community partnership had so far seen Jens as a long standing, almost permanent member although it ought to be made clear that it did not attend the meetings of the core group on an ongoing, regular basis. Jens was to strengthen its ties with the community with a new project in 2008. The committee noticed that the community did not have a hall and met under trying conditions for funerals and other important community functions. During Easter which was a religious period, huge tents were hired for the long weekend at enormous cost to an already burdened community for their prayer weekend. Ms Shega was a part of this and listened attentively to community members yearning for a decent venue to hold their functions. Having discussed it with the relevant stakeholders, the core team approached Jens with the idea of building a hall on the school property that will be made available to the community whenever needed. Jens agreed to build the hall in appreciation of the support the school and the community had given it over the years. The hall was built with retractable partitions that convert it into a block of four classrooms during normal school times when it was not utilised. The school-community partnership had yielded a sustainable project that served the needs of the community and the school, was cared for and maintained by the school and looked after by the community. The school-community partnership had blossomed- it was sustaining itself.

4.8 Project Six- the garden project with fingers in the community and Chinese interest

This school has a huge, well maintained garden that is planted with a variety of vegetables. On one end, neatly laid out beds of various shapes are growing seedlings that will be transplanted soon while in other sections vegetables such as carrots, butternut and cabbages are at various stages of readiness for harvesting. Zinhle, a level one teacher here

since 1990 started the project in 2006 with her learners as part of the Soul Buddies project which required learners to be involved in different types of activities. She explained:

There was no garden at all here. I told the principal I wanted to start a garden. He supported it by getting a farmer to plough a piece of land in the school where we started planting vegetables.

It now has the support of all teachers, with one other teacher helping her take charge of it. She added:

Classes come here in turns to work in the garden and we incorporated the curriculum into it. For example, we would use shapes such as hexagons and triangles for beds. You could incorporate almost all subjects into this project.

The project was destined to have a manifold effect on the school, the community and two new members about to enter the school-community partnership. The garden thrived and rapidly found itself in need of more space. Through the good work of Ms Shega, the SGB deputy chair, the call went out to community for assistance and the women responded by coming together to clear additional bushes to make way for more space. Zinhle said:

The school started selling the vegetables to buy food for the many orphans and vulnerable children we have here. We would even make food parcels for them to take home because there was nothing there.

Parents who used to travel to the nearest town that sold vegetables and paid R20-00 or more for transport now came to the school and bought vegetables at reduced prices. "The school understood their needs and sold them even one carrot" said Zinhle. Pollard (2010) highlighted the importance of community engagement if a school wants to make a positive impact on its all round improvement. In 2008 the department rewarded the school by supplying it with garden equipment. Another NGO fenced off the garden and added a gate.

In 2009 the Department of Education instituted the school nutrition scheme where a service provider identified by the school would supply the groceries and vegetables required to prepare meals for the learners. The core team wanted a partner and not just a supplier so they met and discussed the issue before choosing someone who would agree to purchase

the vegetables from the school and also offer to assist the school with some of its projects. They found one that fitted into their plans in Siyazama. It was interesting that the core team were now actively working out how any new member to the school-community partnership would fit into their plans before engaging them. Both Epstein (2001) and Kretzman and McKnight (1993) make reference to partnership members being planned for, to ensure sustainability of a school-community partnership. In the months that followed up to the present, besides Siyazama purchasing vegetables from the school ensuring that learners are fed fresh vegetables free of pesticides, the supplier has tiled and added a ceiling to the computer room as his contribution to the school's development plans.

Some challenges arose, however. The garden needed full time care especially during holidays when the learners and teachers were not there. Furthermore, fertilizer was expensive and was eating into the profits. The core team, having discussed the issue came up with a plan to further entrench the school-community partnership. The school would provide employment for a full time gardener who would be paid from the sale of the vegetables. The community responded by suggesting someone who would work for a minimal fee as part of their contribution to the vegetables being available cheaply close to their homes. Zinhle said, "Now when we come to school after the holiday, we find the garden in good condition". A person who reared cattle nearby agreed to supply the school with kraal manure at no cost. "He would send a message when it was ready and learners passing his kraal would collect it for their garden", said Zinhle. Literature suggests that schools that involve communities in their efforts to improve themselves also created a more open school culture and better school climate (Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). The school-community partnership was rapidly building up its asset value by continually increasing its social capital.

The good work that was emanating from the garden soon attracted another partner. Zinhle explains:

Last year at a workshop on food gardens, a group of Chinese were there. They were asking questions about gardens and I was answering all the questions. So they said they were going to visit us to see for themselves. When they came, they were very impressed and said they wanted to support our work.

The Chinese group subsequently returned to the school with its donors from China and formalised its partnership with the school. Members of the gardening committee were taken away to workshops on organic gardening. The school now only uses natural pesticides, kraal manure and is skilled in subsistence farming. "This group comes here twice a month and they meet with the other local partners before going into the garden to check progress, suggest improvements and provide expertise", said Zinhle. I arranged to be present when one such partnership activity was taking place. This has become a team activity involving the school, the parents and the Chinese group. The sponsor said, "We are happy that everyone is involved in this project, including the school children". In fact it has taken off so well that a new area outside the school fence has already been cleared by the community and is busy being planted. Asked why they had partnered with the school, the leader of the group, Moongie said, "We have been with this school for a few years now because they showed interest in themselves and take care of whatever is given to them. The parents too are very involved here so we are happy to support the project". The group supplies the school with seeds, seedlings and fruit trees. Zinhle said, "The Chinese want to enter us in a competition now. If we win we are going to get a new library. If we didn't meet these people, then maybe we will not get a library".

The new member of the school-community partnership is also contributing to improving the literacy amongst the learners in the school. They bring a mobile library to the school once a term for learners and teachers to borrow books. Learners are allowed to interchange the books amongst themselves while they await the next visit. A very useful member had been added to the school-community partnership. The spheres of influence (Epstein, 2001) and the asset-based approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993) emphasise the importance of encouraging members of school-community partnership to lead projects to ensure sustainability. It was evident that as the projects increased the role of the principal as the leader lessened but did not diminish.

4.9 Project Seven- computers and a computer room

The generosity of Mr Bapo and his history of community work which had its roots in his father's work in another community has also influenced his son who works in Durban but did his schooling here. When the young man finished his primary school education here the

school did not have electricity. Mr Gondola, the principal had been regularly writing letters to Eskom asking for electricity to be connected since the shop nearby had electricity. In 1994, shortly after democracy, Eskom provided electricity to the school. The principal had long made known his intention to create a computer room and find a sponsor to donate computers.

The landowner said, "I am proud of my son. He is continuing my work in this school. He got a bank to donate 31 computers to the school". This project started in 2009 and was completed in 2010 when the MEC for Education, Senzo Mchunu officially opened the centre. But the centre didn't just materialise. The school-community partnership had swung into action once again. The members identified a room in a secure part of the school and for their part prepared it by having it cleaned, painted and burglar guarded. The nutrition service provider stepped in and tiled the floor and added ceilings. The landowner's son worked with the bank to bring in another partner to network the computers for the school. The school-community partnership is now working as a well oiled machine. It was able to get the project up and running in record time. The landowner also had his wish granted. He wanted his family's continued participation in the school's development at the school. "What troubles me is age. I am 85, I have diabetes, I have a pace maker and I am not too well. I am happy to see my son is carrying on and my daughter is also teaching there".

4.10 Ongoing projects that provide continuity and sustainability

Besides the big projects that brought huge structural and physical changes, there have been smaller projects that had huge impact. It will not be possible to deal with all of these but one worth mentioning is the conversion of a room into offices for the clerk, deputy and heads of department. The effects of this will be dealt with in the discussion section below.

The school does not have big projects running back to back that continually keeps the members occupied. There are however, smaller projects that involve members and stakeholders that stimulate sufficient interest in the school's activities. These are by no means 'engineered' to do that but have become part of the school's activities and outreach programmes.

The most important amongst these is the garden project which keeps all stakeholders involved in the school-community partnership process on a daily basis. Zinhle, who started off the garden project with her learners initially, has been involved in spearheading other activities that have also engaged the school and community, as well as attracted the involvement of new partnership members.

“Phuza Wise” is a project started by the school to understand why alcohol abuse is so rife in the community. It led them to unemployment and then to a finding that was to bring the partners together again. There were many people here without identity documents because they didn’t have the money to pay to go to Home Affairs. The school hooked up with the local ward councillor who facilitated a meeting with Department of Home Affairs and now regularly invites officials to the school to process applications as well as to deliver new identity documents. The school hall is used as a venue for this. Ms Shega said, “The community said it was better to have a school like this one”. While this project was underway, the school came across old women unable to help themselves as well as disabled people who were neglected. Now they routinely collect this information and alert the Department of Social Welfare about the plight of these people, doing follow ups to see if they were assisted. Learners have become very proficient at collecting this information. The Soul Buddies regularly go out to a needy old person identified by the learners, cleans out her home, fetches water and does the washing.

This is a school steeped in music and cultural activities. Both these have opened new avenues for the school and its community. The principal who is an accomplished singer himself has encouraged the establishment of a school choir which is nationally recognized. This choir sung its way to the National Anthem Competition held in Pretoria in 2008 and won that competition amongst all participating schools in South Africa. As a result they are now listed on the National Department of Education website and regularly get invited to present their singing skills to various functions around the province. Most recently they were invited to an awareness day at nature reserve where journalists from Wales were interested in their school’s achievement and promised to twin them with their counterparts in Wales on their return. The choir now keeps teachers working hard to stay on top of the

game because their music brings curious interest to their school, sometimes from unexpected quarters.

The school has developed a very effective committee system that runs various smaller activities such as athletics and International Reading Day. According to Bongi each committee is given autonomy to plan and prepare activities. One of the partnership activities I was invited to observe was a programme called: *My values my life, my culture my life*. It was inspirational. The school and community through a carefully thought out and entertaining programme of song, dance and sketches emphasise and educate the young learners on the value of various aspects of their culture. Everyone including the principal was dressed in cultural attire. Teachers as well as community members participated in the programme to give it strength. Every class from grade R upwards presented items. The programme was topped off with a sumptuous lunch sponsored by the nutrition service provider for the school and community members who attended. Asked why he was so deeply involved in the school's activities, the service provider replied:

This school makes things happen. There is action here and everyone is happy to get involved. I love that and therefore support them. They also care for the things given to them.

For me it was a celebration of the school-community partnership that richly rewarded the members while harnessing the young minds they were entrusted with to focus on their lives ahead with discipline, respect and learning.

4.11 DISCUSSION

4.11.1 The multi-faceted school-community partnership

A broad-based community asset mapping started by the principal on his arrival and regularly updated has harnessed many 'players' thereby allowing a multi-faceted school-community partnership to unfold here. Records obtained during the document search at the school show 16 documented community partners. Categorized according to Sanders (2001), these partners are drawn from business/corporations, government agencies including Home Affairs, Social Welfare, faith based organisations, cultural and recreational organisations,

volunteer organisations, other community organisations and individuals. Some contributors to the school-community partnership that made a once off cash donation or had a fleeting interaction with the school played a significant role in this school's partnership strike-out because it encouraged them to continue looking for partners that could help them realise their goals. One was a paper company that made a donation of three hundred rand in the early days. The other was a cash crop farmer whose wife prepared a meal for the learners when the school won a competition.

This school-community partnership relates to specific programme linkages as well as ongoing linkages that are well placed to make continuous and extensive contributions to the school and the community. Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that the school has established a unique, working school-community partnership that delivers a variety of positive outcomes for the learners, the school and the community. The school-community partnership works because of an inclusive system that actively encourages participation from all the *spheres of influence* (Epstein, 2001) as well as because it has dug deep into its own assets and is continually inward looking. The themes that emerged during the analysis of the data will now be discussed. These themes also reveal what key factors have been sustaining the school-community partnership for the past twenty three years.

4.11.2 The impact of the school-community partnership

4.11.2.1 Positive influence on teaching and learning

The school-community partnership is forward thinking and looking constantly to incorporate more community based activities that focus on improved learner attainment and community development. It wishes to improve its school-community partnership programme over time. In so doing the school will meet key challenges for excellent community partnerships described by Epstein's *spheres of influence* model (2001).

As the problem of space was eliminated, so was the problem of errant teachers who did not want to teach and consequently poor teaching and learning. While using the linkage provided by the school-community partnership to build classrooms on the one hand, the linkage ensured the parent component was won over to support the search for new teachers who wanted to work. This impacted positively on learning at this school. Learner

achievements particularly in Mathematics and English improved almost immediately. The deputy principal said:

Effective teaching and learning takes place here. The basic vision is to produce quality learners. Good school planning ensures we achieve our goals. At first learners were having problems with reading. Now there is much change in English usage. We started leading in the Science Olympiads. You can see there is a positive change in class. Even in the early days the shopkeeper and Kabul, the lawyer sponsored trophies when we started winning subject and sports competitions. The principal has also increased accountability. Parents were workshopped on how to check learners' books and encouraged them to come to school to discuss problems and check learners' work. By making them aware of their rights and responsibilities, we also helped ourselves.

Epstein (1995) makes reference to this in her six types of involvement for school-community partnership. Creating offices for management staff through a partnership project had a positive impact on teaching and learning according to deputy principal, Ms Bele, "The school management team were able to do their work better. Educators are free to come to us with their problems. We can check their work". The principal is passionate about teaching and learning. He said, "Each and every lesson in my school is a reading lesson". The effect of teamwork is clearly evident here. When no big project is underway the team get on with regular activities with the *spheres of influence* interacting smoothly to advance the wholesome education of the child. As soon as another member arrives to start a new project the school-community partnership draws the member into the team and work proceeds smoothly.

4.11.2.2 Leadership

The landowner, the deputy principal, the level one educators, the Chinese group leader and the school nutrition scheme service provider all made reference to the positive effect of leadership that changed the face of Maplang Primary. It became obvious at the start of the interview that the principal arrived here with a vision to develop the school by taking a

comprehensive approach that included the learners, the educators and the community. He said:

I came from Mthuli Primary where I replaced mud classrooms with block ones. When I arrived here, I saw the school was partly established. I decided to change that but I knew that I could not do it alone, I needed help.

A critical factor for a school to develop and grow in effectiveness is the relationship between the school and the community (Pansiri, 2008). The principal's leadership showed early and remains strong up to today. Leadership plays a vital role in ensuring sustainability of school-community partnership (Johns, *et al.*, 1999). "The leadership of the principal is what makes this school successful" said Bongi. She speaks passionately about his leadership:

The principal makes things happen here. He does this in a positive way. He wants others around him to know what is happening, how it is done. He works with a team. He communicates with all stakeholders effectively. He is not selfish, self-centred you see.

Kilpatrick and Johns (2001) corroborate this when they say leadership is constituted of acts that help school-community partnership achieve its goals.

This school was lucky, though. The principal met with the like minded land owner who was equally strong and enthusiastic. He acknowledged that several times, "He was a very active person when I got here. When we moved from one project to another he was part and parcel of everything we did". Convincing the community to contribute school fees per child after paying per family for years showed the landowner's strength of leadership early in the partnership. Imploring the same community only a few years later to contribute to the building of a new school was brilliant. He also led the new school when it opened saying "When that school opened, nobody wanted to be in that committee. I said, "I'll go there". The SGB deputy chair also contributes to the leadership strength of the school-community partnership. She does home visits regularly, targeting homes of problem cases and encouraging those parents to come to school and talk to the class teacher or the principal. She said, referring to the parents, "They are fortunate in this area to get a leader who likes good things for the school".

This leadership has now permeated the whole school. Bongi said, “The principal wants things done the right way. Educators bought into this. We are told we are principals’ of our classes and have to account for everything”. He said “Also, my staff, they imitate me. All the ideas, they are using it. Even if I’m not here, I’m not afraid. The core business of the school is always going on”. The importance of the committee system in entrenching leadership at all levels shows on other platforms as well. Bongi explains, “Each thing that happens is directed to a particular committee. Each committee will have to go out and do its plan, gather its resources and look for funds and then go to the principal and say we have this and this and we are ready”. The inward looking asset-based ‘half glass full’ approach (McDonald, 1997, p. 115) is evident even at this level.

4.11.2.3 Communication

Communication is the heartbeat of any organisation. Communication skills must be strengthened to make school-community partnership effective (Pollard, 2010). In this school-community partnership a very high priority has been placed on communication at all levels from inception which is paying big dividends towards sustaining the partnership. Right at the outset the principal said, “Before we went to the mass meeting we consulted the other stakeholders”. This trend still characterises the school-community partnership today. The school has an established pattern of communication. The deputy principal explains how the importance of structure impacts on the level of communication, “Whenever something is going to be done the principal calls the SMT, thereafter he calls a staff meeting and then meets with the SGB before meeting the parents”.

The principal also keeps accurate records about communication with project partners and exhibits a willingness to engage in two-way communication with potential community partners about their level and kind of involvement. The committee makes themselves available to go out and meet potential partners if the need arises. The strength of this communication is evident by the way they were able to get the Renaissance Foundation to build classrooms here. The SGB deputy chair said, “I got involved with this school because the advocacy of this school was good. It was always sending messages and inviting parents to school”. This has evolved into two way communication. Zinhle refers to this as ‘open communication’ saying, “The councillor comes here, we go into the community, parents are

always calling at the school and the teachers appreciate what is going on". Bongi made an interesting observation about the principal:

You will see him stopped on the road sometimes and engaging a parent in conversation. Sometimes he gives them a lift. He communicates with them.

4.11.2.4 The school's practice of inclusivity

Community involvement plays a vital role in enhancing school quality and improving learner achievement (Sanders & Lewis, 2005a). The school and community partners that were interviewed reported that they were equally comfortable with whoever initiated school-community partnership projects or ideas. This is evident from the wide ranging involvement amongst the partners. The school is quite happy to let the SGB deputy chair (the chairperson works and is unavailable during the day) visit parents in their homes and encourage them to bring their problems and suggestions to school. The committee welcomes partners that approach the school to start a project as was the case with the group. The landowner's idea to build another school was supported. Learners have taken this openness to a new level and started working with the community through their Soul Buddies initiative. The principal ensures that committees workshop parents on how to manage their children's homework and invites them to come to school and discuss problems. The community is therefore deeply involved in the school's garden project. The deputy principal said, "When we hold functions, we invite people who were involved with us. We also write letters of appreciation". Both programmes that I was privileged to observe showed how this school-community partnership has grown and cemented itself through the welcoming attitude of the school. Parents freely participated in the *My values my life, my culture my life* programme that was organised jointly. During the visit by the Chinese group, teachers, learners and the community were present to discuss the progress of the project. Zinhle said, "The strength of the school is drawn from the community".

4.12 Conclusion

Instead of slipping back into the 'comfort zone' of the deficit model school type that dots the South African disadvantaged landscape, Maplang Primary strives towards excellence by being inward looking and harnessing the *spheres of influence* that Epstein (2001) says can

make it possible for positive school-community partnership to be fostered in any setting by pulling together the various components of the community to share in the pursuit of a common goal. It has adopted an asset-based approach to its challenges and has turned around into opportunities many threats to its well being.

This is no boardroom school-community partnership based on the models of successful partnership types discussed in my literature review. It was borne out of a need to survive, a home grown response to challenges faced by a visionary principal who joined forces with an equally visionary landowner and a core group of community members determined to lead their community and their school to achieve what many still regard as impossible today: to improve learner attainment, to develop the school and to develop this community.

The thread that holds these themes together in this school-community partnership is the principal's support and vision for community involvement and development. As the stories unfolded, people kept referring to how things changed after the present principal arrived. The support he gave and the support he received in return was overwhelming. Each time I listened to stories people related, something new would pop up that would lead to another discussion about the road this school-community partnership walked. It was interesting and thought provoking. Boullion and Gomez (2001) said the problem commonly faced is, "Schools are *in* communities but not *of* communities". The opposite is true of Maplang Primary School. If this deep rural school can pull off something like this while the majority of schools still sit back and normalise their dysfunctional and disadvantaged status because they are waiting for government to make something happen, it probably explains our South African education malaise seventeen years into democracy.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of what the study was about and how the report unfolds. It does this by summarising what each chapter achieved. The chapter then goes on to draw conclusions and recommendations about the study. The conclusions and recommendations are informed by the findings. The study investigated the nature of a working school-community partnership with the aim of trying to establish what makes it work and how it sustains itself.

5.2 Summary

Having gone through the process of setting up the study and following through with the field work, I present a condensed form of the chapters to capture the essence of the study before I proceed with the conclusions and recommendations.

In chapter one I attempted to present a background of the development of school-community partnership as a concept across the world and how the idea was propelled by various organisations globally by placing it on their agendas. The chapter moved on to show how school-community partnership was embraced by Africa and the status of school-community partnership prior to and after democracy in South Africa. It concludes by stressing that while the government encourages school-community partnership and there are sporadic examples of success with it, the said partnership is not happening as it should around the country. It suggests that parents not coming on board may be doing so due to a lack of knowledge. The chapter outlines that this study will investigate what the nature of a school-community partnership is and how the said partnership sustains itself.

Chapter two sought to present literature reviewed in the light of the research questions. The review shows that literature mainly deals with the formation of school-community partnership, what factors are necessary for it to work and what barriers exist to its formation. It goes on to identify the gap that this study wishes to pursue which is the nature

of school-community partnership and what sustains it. The second part of the chapter explains the two-pronged theoretical framework of the study and its relevance. Epstein's (2001) model of the *overlapping spheres of influence* which is relationship driven and the asset-based approach which promotes an inward looking school-community partnership are presented.

Chapter three presented the technical aspects of the study- the toolbox and the tools as it were. The chapter describes the study as qualitative involving the choice of the design and methodology. Clarification on aspects such as sampling and trustworthiness are also presented.

The findings are presented in chapter four. The chapter relates how the theoretical framework lenses were operationalised in the data collection process and the various ways in which data were gathered. It presents the rich, thick information that resulted from interviewing, observing and analysing documents relating to this school-community partnership. It analyses and interprets the data against the research questions chosen for the study.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

This study found that action as opposed to rhetoric forms one of the important ingredients of this school-community partnership. Such action is driven by visionary leadership. Through action, both the school and community enjoy tangible benefits such as infrastructure development, improved learner attainment, the generation of employment and growing crops for food. A broad-based community asset mapping has harnessed many 'players' thereby allowing a multi-faceted partnership to unfold.

While the study was small scale, based on one school and its partners, it revealed that indeed school-community partnership can work because it is relationship driven and the social capital it generates in the process is ample fuel for it to sustain itself. Studying this school-community partnership through a two pronged theoretical framework is with hindsight, questionable. Both Epstein's (2001) model of the *spheres of influence* and Kretzman and McKnight's (1993) asset-based approach intersect each other at various points such as building positive relationships with the community and utilising the

communities own resources to remedy problems identified. While both are suitable, I could have successfully completed the study by viewing the field work through the *spheres of influence* lens.

The following inferences are drawn, based on the themes discussed in the previous chapter and indicate what contributes to school-community partnership, what makes the said partnership work as well as what sustains it:

5.3.1 Building social capital and holding its interest

The study revealed how the search for support started by looking inward and how resources that were targeted were planned for and complemented the goals of the team. It went on to show that the partnership placed a very high premium on drawing on community strength and then went further by dissolving the boundary between the school and the community as they worked together harmoniously in the area of influence that maximised learner attainment. Looking at the future, this initial success will soon be flat lined if opportunities for wider inclusion of the community in other and maybe bigger projects are not created. There is no more need for additional classroom space here as a result of a regular exodus of people leaving the area in search of jobs and the resultant drop in learner numbers. The key partners fore-grounded assets within the school and community before searching for help further outwards.

5.3.2 Positive influence on teaching and learning

A community desperate to dig itself out of the hole of poverty has demonstrated how the benefits of every activity undertaken by the school-community partnership are channelled back into the classroom to improve learner achievement in the hope that these children would become successful and return to improve the conditions under which their parents and grandparents live. The key conclusion which can be related to other issues seems to be: The key partners focused on the importance of teaching and learning. While there is ample evidence of quality learning and teaching the school still has a long way to go in terms of preparing its learners for a twenty first century technological world. It still has not broken the mould of the rural disadvantaged school despite all the advances made. A simple example is that both learners and teachers continue to converse in Isizulu during the breaks

and outside the classroom. English proficiency is important for success in tertiary education and the work environment.

5.3.3 Leadership

Visionary leadership is one of the strongest assets of this community. Those who came together initially as the core committee provided the foundation for strength based partnership that continues just as strongly today as it did in the early days. Credit must go to the two main players, the principal, Mr Gondola and Mr Bapo, the landowner who came together and worked swiftly to bring the various stakeholders on board to make the school-community partnership work towards realising their goals and vision. Therein lies the challenge. The principal has already indicated that he is nearing his retirement. The landowner concluded his interview by saying:

What troubles me is my age. I am 85, I have diabetes, I have a pace maker and I am not too well. I have built 2 schools, I built a church and the last thing I want to do is build a clinic before I die.

Although leadership is evident at classroom and committee level and some of it has rubbed off on learners in the Soul Buddies movement, there is no evidence here of the type of visionary leadership following in the footsteps of these two. It seems to indicate a leadership vacuum should these two depart. Also, visionary leadership is difficult to teach.

5.3.4 Communication

The success of school-community partnership depends on networking. Positive effects of communication are evident throughout the spider web of connections that exist here. For now this contributes to the sustenance of the school-community partnership as well. Communication is intrinsically linked to leadership because good leaders know where people ought to go. This could also suffer if adequate succession planning is not put in place.

5.3.5 The school's receptiveness and openness to community involvement

This multi-faceted school-community partnership embraces the open system that government advocated after attaining democracy. The centre of focus here is neither the

school nor the community but the school-community partnership. Everything revolves around this nucleus. Partners wishing to work with the school are quickly linked up with the community. Evidence abounds here of the school's receptiveness and its openness. Partnership activity facilitates community involvement. But, as highlighted earlier, major infrastructure projects which allowed the school to attract and keep its community partners close are starting to slow down now.

These factors have contributed to a strong, inward looking team that constantly draw the *spheres of influence* closer thereby widening the area of influence and creating more space for the different members to make meaningful contributions to the school and the community for now. The nature of this strength based school-community partnership is to be inward looking while continually reaching outwards to increase its spider web of network partners. In doing so it has been able to reach its primary goals which are to develop the school and the community while raising learner achievement. It has largely achieved this and it seems to me a cycle is coming to an end.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Maplang Primary's school-community partnership is ideally poised to make an even more significant impact on this impoverished community. Improvements to the school, community and especially learner achievement have raised the esteem of the school-community partnership with the school being regarded highly by all who interact with it. Riding on the cusp of this wave of support and respect, is an important point at which the school-community partnership refocuses on the way forward.

The partnership needs to find ways to improve the quality of its social capital and enrich its offering beyond the building and gardening skills acquired through the projects undertaken thus far. It has to take urgent note of the leadership vacuum that will arise when the principal and the landowner depart. The principal's charismatic leadership has been partly responsible for good work taking place in the classroom and the interest shown by parents. Sourcing new members for the school-community partnership was also due to this trait that he displayed. Reliance on the visionary leadership of Mr Bapo and the principal may also be a weakness of the present school-community partnership. A new crop of visionary leaders is

not waiting in the wings to take over. The systems run school-community partnership will need new leaders to take it forward.

The future is already a concern for the some. Ms Shega, the deputy chair of the SGB expressed this rhetorically when she said:

I see the future of the school is bright but I am worried about what will happen if the principal retires. Will the school be the same or will the future be blemished?

The principal has a willing team around him whose leadership abilities he needs to nurture and develop. In a community that is largely illiterate, it looks for leadership from within the school. In this regard the principal must start succession planning with the school-community partnership and allow the trainees to start assuming more decisive roles. This process ought to be formalised if the school wishes to continue its good work by striking up partnerships with its community. A list of completed projects could be put up somewhere for all to see names of members of the school-community partnership and their contributions. This will remind those that join the school later of how projects were successfully completed here. Staff meetings, SMT meetings and SGB meetings should place progress reports of the school-community partnership projects on their agenda. They should also create space for inputs and new suggestions. Members of the school-community partnership not within the immediate community should be invited at least once a year to a formal or informal meeting to see the fruit of their endeavours as well to look at the school's future goals. This will ensure continuity in the future.

The study was conducted in a deep rural primary school. It would be interesting to conduct a study of this sort within a different context, such as an ex-Model C school. Such a study would explore how the school-community partnership is supported and its influence on teaching and learning. Alternately, the study can be extended to include more schools in a semi-rural context.

Leadership plays an important role in school-community partnership. Another study of school-community partnership that focuses on leadership that impacted positively on school and its community would be interesting to conduct.

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APPENDIX A

PROVISIONAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Interview schedule for members of the school-community partnership

The purpose of this interview is to collect information about the school's partnership with the community and possibly your involvement in it, how it was started, how it works and how it sustains itself.

Only researchers will have access to the information collected in this project which will be kept in locked storage at the university for a period of five years following the completion of the research project. Neither your name nor your school's name will appear in any reports of this research. You will have the right to review any information being used in regard to your participation.

1. School and community history

- 1.1 What led to the establishment of this school?
- 1.2 How did you become associated with the school?

2. Initiating the school-community partnership

- 2.1 What prompted the school-community partnership?
- 2.2 When did it start?
- 2.3 Who initiated it?

3. Building the school-community partnership

- 3.1 What were some of the challenges you experienced while you were building the school-community partnership?
- 3.2 What are some of the successes you have had?

4. Goals of the school-community partnership

- 4.1 What is the vision and goals of the school-community partnership?

5. Translating the vision and goals into collaborative action

- 5.1 How do you go about making things happen?
- 5.2 What projects or activities have you achieved up to now?
- 5.3 What impact has it had on your learner achievement?
- 5.4 How has it improved your school otherwise?

6. Sustaining the school-community partnership

- 6.1 What keeps your school-community partnership going?
- 6.2 What challenges did you have to overcome to sustain your school-community partnership?

7. What makes your school-community partnership successful?

APPENDIX B

PROVISIONAL OBSERVATION SCHEDULE FOR OBSERVING OF SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AT WORK

Observation of partners of the school-community partnership at work

Critical questions:

1. What is the nature of the school-community partnership?
2. What sustains the school-community partnership?

Criteria	comment
Leadership	
Communication	
Commitment To teaching and Learning	
Right climate Teamwork	
Open door Policy	
Sustainability	
New issues	

Elaboration (Any other relevant information, clarification, puzzles, elaborations)

APPENDIX C

P. NAICKER

Flat 3a 52 Scott Street Scottburgh 4200

Telephone: 039 9740149

Mobile: 0845567598

The Principal

Maplang Primary School

Scottburgh

27 May 2011

Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT MAPLANG PRIMARY SCHOOL

I am presently studying towards a Master of Education Degree at the University of Kwazulu Natal. I wish to conduct my research at Maplang Primary during the month of August 2011 and hereby seek your permission.

The research topic is: **What makes school-community partnerships work? A case study.** The purpose of the research is to study a working school-community partnership in a rural context. Furthermore it will endeavour to explore and establish the nature of the school-community partnership as well as to establish how the partnership is sustained.

The study will involve interviews and observation of meetings. Consent forms will be issued to all participants prior to interviews. School personnel will be interviewed after school hours at the convenience of the interviewee. Observation of meetings will be negotiated with the school and take place at the convenience of the school.

I wish to reassure of the following:

- Educators or learners will not be identifiable in any way from the research results.
- Participation will be voluntary.
- Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be respected and assured.
- The institution will not be identifiable by name in the research results.
- A synopsis of findings and recommendations will be made available to the school.

I trust that my request will be favourably considered.

Yours sincerely

P. Naicker

APPENDIX D

P. NAICKER

Flat 3a 52 Scott Street Scottburgh 4200

Telephone: 039 9740149

Mobile: 0845567598

For attention:

Date:

Sir/ Madam

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I wish to include you in a research project that studies what makes a school-community partnership work in a rural context. The study wishes to explore and establish the nature of the school-community partnership as well as to establish how the partnership is sustained. The study will be conducted by me as a researcher for a Masters in Education project at the University of Kwazulu Natal. My supervisor is Professor V. Chikoko and can be contacted at the university on 031 2602639.

To help me in my research, I require you to participate in an interview with me that will revolve around the school's partnership with the community and possibly your involvement in it. The interview will deal with successes as well as challenges to enable me to get a full picture of the workings of your school-community partnership.

Only researchers will have access to the information collected in this project which will be kept in locked storage at the university for a period of five years following the completion of the research project. Neither your name nor your school's name will appear in any reports of this research. You will have the right to review any information being used in regard to your participation.

Participation in this project is voluntary and involves no unusual risks to you or your school. You may withdraw from the project at any time with no negative or undesirable consequences to yourself. Your participation in the project will help me develop improved ways in which school-community partnerships operate and sustain themselves. This may also assist other schools and communities to improve their partnerships or to initiate one.

If you are willing to participate, please indicate this decision on the attached permission slip. In addition, if you have any questions about the research project or would like me to review the information prior to providing consent, I may be contacted at the numbers listed above. Other questions can be directed to the school principal, Mr G. M. Gondola on 0823452789

Yours sincerely

P. Naicker

APPENDIX E

REPLY SLIP

I,.....(designation)
hereby

Grant/ do not grant permission to be interviewed by Mr P. Naicker for research that will be conducted at Maplang Primary School.

PERMISSION GRANTED	
PERMISSION NOT GRANTED	

.....

Signature

.....

Name

.....

Designation

.....

Date

APPENDIX F