PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
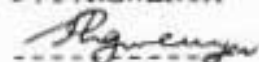# IN A RURAL RESIDENTIAL SPECIAL SCHOOL:
A Case Study

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, PRISCILLA THULISILE NGWENYA, DECLARE THAT THIS RESEARCH REPORT: " PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A RURAL RESIDENTIAL SPECIAL SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY " IS MY OWN WORK AND THAT ALL SOURCES I HAVE USED OR QUOTED HAVE BEEN INDICATED AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY MEANS OF COMPLETE REFERENCES.

P.T.NGWENYA

DURBAN
1996

DEDICATION

I DEDICATE THIS WORK TO MY LONG-SUFFERING
CHILDREN; NTOKOZO KHONZIWE AND NONTOBEKO
NQOBILE, IN APPRECIATION OF THEIR COURAGE,
SUPPORT AND PATIENCE DURING THE DIFFERENT
STAGES OF THIS RESEARCH.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the work that is currently being done to promote contact between home and school at a residential school situated in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal. The school serves primary school children with physical disabilities between the ages of five and seventeen years. The subjects in this study were twenty five parents, teachers, learners, and support staff. The research methodology was in the form of a qualitative case study. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, observation as well as document analysis were used to investigate the nature and extent of parental involvement, the areas in which parents participated, and how the school supported parents and the learners.

The results revealed that the school acknowledges the value of parents a partners, and has initiated a parent involvement programme. Parents are involved in structures created by the school, namely, a parent teacher association, parent groups in the communities, learner adoption scheme. However, findings revealed that in a number of important areas parents are not equal partners. These are school governance, curriculum decisions regarding their children, choice of school placement, and admission and discharge of their children. An important finding was that in residential schools, because parents are not part of the immediate school community the concept of "parents as partners" is difficult to achieve. Most rural parents live great distances away from the school. Time, distance, work commitments, family commitments, and financial constraints make participation almost impossible.

An implication of this study is that if residential schools continue to exist there is a need for the school to take cognisance of the various contextual factors that influence parental involvement in such a setting. Schools should find creative ways to overcome barriers that may exist. Schools need to be aware of recent policy developments regarding the rights of parents, for example, the South African Schools Act. Issues such as parent participation in school governance, their right to choice, and their rights regarding educational decisions on their children, enshrined in policy documents need to be , addressed collaboratively with parents. Another important implication is that policy makers need to review the role of large residential schools in meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities, in particular the long term goal of children gaining full citizenship in their communities.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Involving parents in the education of children with disabilities is considered crucial to the success of any education programme, and to the eventual integration of the child into the community (Beattie, 1985; Jowett & Baginsky, 1988; Dye, 1989; McConkey, 1995).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in June 1994, reaffirmed the role of parents in education for all children, including children with disabilities. The role of parents was seen to be central to all education. The Salamanca Statement declared that:

> neither parents nor professionals can make significant and sustainable progress alone. (p.46)

The statement highlighted that:

> nothing should be done without the participation of families and that families need support and recognition in their task. (p.47)

In developed countries, for instance the UK, parents' rights in schools have been increased. Parents participate in school governance structures; they are kept well informed of their children's' progress at school; and they influence decision-making as well as the choice of schools for their children. In the USA, family resource centres were established near schools as a means of parent support. Parents are involved in assessment and the implementation of individual education programmes for children. In the Netherlands, parent co-operation between home and school is maintained through the provision of home counselling and giving parents opportunities to draw up the curricula for their children (O'Toole, 1989; Morgan et al, 1993; Ysseldyke, Lange & Gorney, 1994).

In developing or third world countries parents are stressed by poverty, illiteracy and general underdevelopment. Parental involvement is facilitated through community-based programmes that are developed jointly with the parents and managed by members of their own

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communities. Parent involvement in the education of children with disabilities forms a component of the total community development plan that involves economic development (Artilles & Pianta,1993; O'Toole, 1989; McConkey, 1995).

In the rural areas of South Africa, parent involvement in schools has been effected through co-operation between parents and teachers. Parents in rural areas elect committees which provide physical resources for schooling. They are involved in decisions such as the employment and remuneration of temporary teachers and in disciplinary issues. New education policies in South Africa that call for equitable education for all children, are challenged by the problem of bridging the gap between policy and practice.

The purpose of this study was to document the extent to which rural parents of children with disabilities were participating in the education of their children at a residential special school. Fostering partnerships between home and school is a challenge that needs to be addressed in all special schools.

1.2 The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were:

> To examine and define the concept of parental involvement in a residential school situated in a rural setting.

> To analyse the range of work that the school is undertaking to involve parents in their children's education through the use of individual interviews with parents and teachers.

> To establish the extent of parental involvement , the particular areas in which parents participate, the strategies that are employed to enhance parental involvement and the methods that the school adopts to support parents of the learners at the school.

> To explore the effect of socio-economic factors on parents ability to participate fully in the school activities.

1.3 The context of the school

1.3.1 The setting

The school under study is a primary school with boarding facilities for children with physical disabilities. It is situated about twenty five kilometres from the nearest country town, on a mission site. The school is a part of a continuum of services provided by a church. These services include a clinic, a developmental centre for adults with disabilities, a creche, a regular primary school, a secondary school, a church building and a rectory.

The school has modern buildings which include a boarding house with a well-equipped modern kitchen, a workshop, an administration building, a principal's house, a fully-equipped assessment building, six classrooms and several garages. There are several cottages one of which has been turned into a guest house for parents who come from outlying areas and who may need overnight accommodation facilities.

The people of this area speak Zulu. The mission where the school is situated lies near two tribal areas. There are several farms separating the mission land from the nearest town. A pump-engine system provides running water from boreholes to the school. Public transport runs relatively well near the school.

The school was sponsored by a South African church. Being what was previously known as a state-subsidised school, the funding was provided by both the church and government. The government employed staff and erected buildings. The church contributed towards the building and running costs. The sponsoring body was still very strong and had useful international connections in European countries. Through networking overseas the sponsoring body had been able to provide the school with a bus, a 4X4 vehicle, and a car. The training and development of a community rehabilitation facilitator had been made possible through the efforts of the sponsoring body. The role of the community rehabilitation facilitator would be to co-ordinate groups of parents of the children in the school for parent development and support within the parents own communities. She would conduct home visits. She would form the link between the parent groups to facilitate networking among the parents.

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The school was managed by a board comprising of the sponsoring body representatives, state officials, members of the church and the farming fraternity of the area. All the management board's meetings were conducted in English. Teachers attended management meetings on a rotation bases. There was no parent representation on the board of management.

The school had grown tremendously in the eight years that it had been operating. The school residence originally built to house sixty pupils, had a total of ninety-one boarders. The residence staff comprises four house-mothers, two cooks, two laundry workers, two handy- men, and an assistant superintendent..

1.3.2 The parents

For the purposes of this study, a parent is defined as the primary care-giver for the child. The principal of the school claimed that he had met neighbours, family members, friends and siblings who stood in loco-parentis of the children with disabilities.

A survey was conducted by the school in June 1996, with an aim of establishing the number of parents that could be successfully involved in the school activities. According to that survey, all the parents spoke Zulu at home. Twelve percent could use English. Sixty percent of the whole parent body was illiterate. Only 14% of the total parents of the school lived within a twenty kilometre radius of the school. The survey showed that six percent of the children were abandoned children. The parents left their children at the school and disappeared.

Twenty-five parents representing twenty-four learners participated in the present study: four males and twenty-one females. Of this total, sixteen were the biological parents of the children, the others being relatives. There were two aunts, three grandparents, three elder sisters and an uncle. Fourteen out of the sixteen biological parents were married parents but only one spouse attended the interviews due to financial constraints. The other two biological parents had married new spouses who were not related to the children at the school. Eight parents in the study were single parents. Married parents had the largest families among all the parents interviewed.

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There is a strong interplay of poverty and disability in the rural area. More than half of parents interviewed were unemployed, some had never found a job in their lifetime. A small percentage were on government pension. A quarter of the parents in the sample had no source of income at all. In most cases the extended family and sometimes neighbours assisted.

1.3.3 The learners

The learner enrolment had grown from sixty in 1991 to ninety-one in 1994. The learner's ages ranged from five years to seventeen years. There were more boys than girls. All the learners used the school's residence. There were thus no day scholars. All learners spoke Zulu as home language. The older children used conversational English well. The medium of instruction in the senior primary section was English.

Learners were admitted according to their physical disability. The categories of disabilities admitted to the school ranged from spina bifida, osteogenesis imperfecta, polio victims, trauma victims, amputees, scolioses, dwarfism and cerebral palsy. All learners were expected to follow the regular school syllabus.

1.3.4. The teachers

The teaching staff was made up of the principal, a male; two heads of departments, both women; and ten teachers; two of whom were males and the rest females. The principal and the two heads of departments formed the control staff. One head of department was responsible for the junior primary section of the school whilst the other one was responsible for the senior primary sections.

The junior primary section had four teachers, all female, and all Zulu speaking. All were qualified teachers but none of them had any qualification in the education of children with cerebral palsy or children with physical disabilities. All of them had been working with children with disabilities for more than three years. The section was headed by an Afrikaans speaking female.

The senior primary staff contingent comprised two males and four females. Fifty percent of the staff spoke Zulu. Their experience at the school ranged form several weeks to three years. The head of this department was a Zulu speaking woman with seven years experience in the teaching of learners with physical disabilities. All were qualified teachers. The principal had an additional qualification in special education.

1.3.5 Teacher-support staff

The teacher support staff included three teacher-aides who were not professionals but had completed standard ten; and other professionals including a fully qualified nursing sister, an occupational therapist and a part-time physiotherapist. None of these professionals knew the language spoken by the parents. The nurse is crucial in the initial screening and assessment of learners for admission. She is the person who has to get the medical history of the learners and their family. She has to take care of the physical well-being of all learners. It is her task to give advise on health issues.

The occupational therapist works closely with teachers. She has to conduct tests on the learners and interpret the test result. The tests results are used in collaboration with the teacher to design an individual education programme for each child. The physiotherapist trains the pupils in activities of daily living that aim to lead to full rehabilitation and to give independence to the learner. The physiotherapist sees to the physical well-being of each learner to make it possible for the learner to attend classes and to benefit from the teaching.

1.4 Summary

The present study aimed at exploring the nature of parental involvement in this rural setting. The school initiated a parental involvement programme in November 1992. It was still in the developmental stage. It was hoped that the present study would assess processes; strategies and structures and based on findings suggest recommendations to facilitate the initiative.

CHAPTER 2

2. PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

2.1 Introduction

Parental involvement is regarded as crucial for education to succeed. Parents and teachers have widely varying conceptions of what parental involvement is and the differing forms that it should take. In first world countries such as the USA and the UK parental involvement is mandated by law. The South African School's Act of 1996 stipulates clearly that parents must serve on the governing body of a school. The Act states:

> The number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights. (Clause 23 (1), p.18)

Parental involvement may be seen as the coming together of the educational and the social institutions that shape each individual's development. The home, the child and the school thus form a tripartite that creates a special climate that is desirable for effective education.

Ideally, parental involvement can be described as the relationship which parents and teachers have that allows both groups to use their abilities fully, to give children the best possible education (Maharaj, 1987).

Parents are the first and primary educators of a child. Child development occurs concurrently at home and at school. What happens at home influences what happens at school and vice versa. Inasmuch as the home cannot unilaterally meet all the needs of the growing child, the school also cannot and does not meet all the child's needs. The home and the family members play a significant role in the shaping of the child's notions about school as well as in determining the child's positive and or negative views about schooling in general (Jephson, 1995).

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2.2 Theoretical overview

2.2.1 Aims of parental involvement

Beattie (1985) argues that the reasons for involving parents are rooted in a specific ideology as well as a specific context. He elaborates:

> the attempt to introduce an element of parental participation in the running of schools is at its best an attempt to actualise a more idealistic and dynamic notion of democracy. (p.4)

He explains this idea of democracy by describing four reasons, which he calls aims for the introduction of participation democracy into schools. The first two reasons, he argues, are institutional and conservative because they are concerned mainly with the smooth functioning and the perpetuation of the status quo. The first aim which he calls "responsiveness", is when participation is supposed to improve governmental output by increasing flows of information. Responsiveness also enables a more flexible response to the needs of the parents.

The second aim is termed "legitimacy". According to this aim, participation should make governmental output more acceptable to the people who are being governed. The third aim is " personal development" by which it is meant that total moral, and intellectual development of each individual may be achieved by having some responsibility for matters which affect him/her. The fourth reason " overcoming alienation" is seen as enabling individuals to appreciate unity and to understand more clearly, the collective purposes in the society.

The last two reasons are seen to correspond with the viewpoint of persons outside the institution such as a school and to emanate from a feeling of powerlessness. Beattie argues that the last two aims are potentially reformist while the final aim may be termed revolutionary as well.

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Beattie claims that it is these four aims that are used to justify parental involvement in schools. The aims are also used when individuals critique the practice of involvement and the effectiveness of participatory programmes . The aims are emphasised and prioritised according to the needs in each particular situation. Beattie further asserts that such broad categorisation of participation will be most useful in establishing trends and types of participation than a more detailed classification of aims which would not be comprehensive enough. Political theorists would judge the success or failure of involvement by whether the participants did in fact influence the decisions made.

Parental involvement can also be better understood through a further exposition of the nature of participation styles. Three categories of participation are identified after Paterman in Beattie (1985). These are firstly, pseudo participation which refers to techniques used to persuade parents to accept decisions that have already been made by the management; secondly, partial participation where the final power of decision-making rests with the management although the parents do influence the decision. The last category is full participation, where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal powers to determine the outcomes of the decisions.

Participatory action has also been described as behaviour involving actions like deciding, ensuring, advising, and communicating. Beattie points out that activities do not all fit in with the general theoretical writings on participatory democracy. Only the first one, namely "deciding", fits in while the other three are pre-conditions for effective decision-making. He maintains that the function of parents in a participatory democracy is in reality not rigorously defined into entities. It is, therefore, difficult to evaluate participation because there is no single yardstick that has been found to be appropriate.

Finally, Beattie outlines the complexities of participation as a policy because of the strong element of subjectivity that is inherent in such policies. He claims that participation is designed to affect what people think or feel. Consequently, he argues, involvement should be seen within the socio-cultural context of each area in order to be understood clearly.

Bean and Thornburn (1995) suggest that the socio-cultural context includes traditional beliefs. They argue:

> Since parents of disabled children came from the same cultural background as the society in general, one has to examine the attitudes and beliefs of the people of the region. (p.108)

According to Wood (1988) the aim of parental involvement in special education, is not wholly based on the theoretical frameworks such as the democratic ideology as espoused by Beattie for instance. The aim appears to be based on the professionals' needs to extend their philosophies on disability to the parents, the home, and the wider community. It seems to be a colonisation of the minds of the parents with the views of the professionals. Generally, the professionals' conception of parents-as-partners has been found to be a mere teaching strategy and not a sharing in any sense. The professionals take for granted that their help will be regarded as beneficial by the recipients. If a parent is involved in decision-making at all, it is usually in decisions that concern his/her particular child and not policy-making per se.

In this study the researcher will establish the aim of parental involvement in the setting as manifested by the participatory styles at the school. The study aims to explore the philosophy that informs the aim of parental involvement in the setting.

2.2.2 Ecological theory and Parental Involvement

Contextualising parental involvement derives from the view that understanding the child with disabilities becomes possible and effective when the child is seen against the backdrop of his family, the community and the society. The modus operandi for interventions is influenced by how the family functions within the wider societal spheres of influence.

According to the ecological theory of family functioning, the child with disabilities interacts and is influenced by parents and siblings while the child also influences their

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behaviour and attitudes. The immediate home environment of the child is influenced by the extended family, the school and the church. The family of the child is also affected indirectly through the mass media, the education system and the non-governmental organisations. Lastly, the ideological system, such as religious, economic and political beliefs, informs the other structures that in turn influence the child. There is ongoing interaction between the home and the church, the home and the school, the church and the school. The home, school and church are influenced by the economics and politics of the country. All these levels of the entire social system influence the total development of the child (Hornby,1991). It becomes obvious then that for any intervention strategy to succeed in the rehabilitation of the child with disabilities, the child should not be isolated from the its total environment, and family because :

> intervention at the level of the family system is therefore likely to have more impact than intervention aimed at one of its members. (Hornby, 1991; p.214)

Contextualising parental involvement further implies looking at involvement from the democratic perspective of education. From the democratic ideology emanates the theory of learning as espoused in visions of theorists such as Young (1971) and Williams (1986) in Meighan (1986). The democratic ideology of education adopts the radical reformers' social position which seeks to overhaul the system into a more participatory style. Educational policies derived from the democratic ideology are the called the expansionist policies. An expansionist policy of education calls for "Education for All". As a result the policy would highlight, at most, egalitarian issues like equality of opportunity of access and decision-making in the schooling system..

To be truly democratic, a system of education should acknowledge the existence of multiple-realities of life. Multiple-realities in education can be briefly described thus: The children of a particular area should be educated with an aim of enskilling the children to enable them to survive in their particular environment. As an example, children in an agrarian society could be empowered in skills that will ensure survival and productivity in an agrarian environment as adults. Education will thus respond and be appropriate to each particular reality. The specific aim of education will be to enhance the quality of life

rather than alienating the educated from their environment. Parents are a central component of the life-world of each child and the "reality" of each community and society. Parental involvement therefore stands to promote the development of a child in totality and to ensure that the education will be relevant and informed by the total normative system of the child.

In this study, the researcher will explore the issue of parental involvement and the interactions between the home and the school. The study will attempt to relate the interaction between the home and the school to the wider economic and political influences that impact on the extent and the manner of interaction.

2.2.3 A model for parental involvement

The model that will be discussed here is adapted from the work of other scholars such as Kroth (1985), and Lombana (1983) as espoused by Hornby (1991). The point of departure for this model is the identification and description of four major strengths and four major needs of parents. Parents in this model are not regarded as a homogeneous group but are recognised as having different intra-parental and inter-parental varying strengths and needs. There are some areas where all parents would need to be involved, that is, common needs. There are also specific strengths and needs that are influenced by the personality of the parent. The parents previous experiences in life may determine what he/she considers to be his /her strengths at a given time. The level of involvement could swing from the extreme end of total involvement in all school intervention programmes to the other extreme of non-involvement. The same parent may want involvement at one stage of his/her life but not at another time.

Parent-professional interaction would need to be based on a sound model to ensure effectiveness. Hornby (1991) suggests a model for parent involvement. He presents four major strengths that he assumes may either be generic or apply to some but not all the parents. In the model for parental involvement Hornby lists the following strengths of parents:

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Information: parents have all the information about the total background of the child. It is necessary that all the information that the parent can provide is used as it is essential for any intervention to be effective

Support: parent support could be solicited because parents are generally willing to participate in programme planning or therapy activities. In this manner parents can support the professional.

Resource: parents have varying abilities and special skills that can be utilised to the benefit of the of the children with disabilities. Some parents do have time to help the professionals physically in any given task.

Leadership: Some parents do have leadership potential. Others are low-profile leaders in their communities, for instance church elders or chairpersons of local clubs. It is parents of this calibre that could be involved in training others and in assuming leadership roles for parent action groups.

The four parental needs identified include firstly, communication needs of parents because parents need information about services available to help their children. Parents also need to communicate their problems and needs with the professionals, and to be kept informed about their children's progress at school. Such needs are described as conferencing needs where the parent can be approached individually or as part of a group of parents for counselling.

The implications of the identified needs are that parents may need well-defined communication lines with the professionals. A channel for individual conferencing through regular contacts needs to be maintained for continuous parent education. Parent education includes both individual and group counselling and is determined primarily by the needs at any given point in time. Parent involvement has to be tailor-made to the

specific parents' needs to avoid overburdening as well as emotional overload of both the professional and the parent.

The present study aims to ascertain whether the above patterns or models emerge in this setting.

2.3 Parental involvement

2.3.1 Forms of parental involvement

The style of parent participation in schools is informed by assumptions underlying the reasons for involvement as well as the conceptions about the rights of parents. Parental involvement manifests itself in numerous and different activities that may range from direct involvement in the curriculum to home-based activities. Each activity serves a particular aim and a specific need. Schools design diverse programmes to promote the range of activities that fall under parental involvement (Morgan et al ,1993).

Pugh in Wood (1988) identifies what he calls dimensions of parental involvement to illustrate the different forms that parental involvement can take. He includes the following dimensions of involvement: non-participation, external support, participation, partnership and control. While non-participation is a self-explanatory term, external support refers to involvement to activities such as fund-raising, and attending school social functions. Participation refers to the activities that the parent undertakes under the direction of the professionals such as participation in committees or in the general maintenance of the school's resources. Partnership involves the sharing of power, resources, knowledge and decision-making between the home and the school. Partnership could occur between the parent(s) and the professional; the parents and a scheme or group and between the parents and policy-makers. The final dimension , control, implies decision-making, accountability and responsibility by the parents `who should not only make the decisions but implement them and assume full responsibility for the actions resulting from their decisions.

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Activities that parents could be involved in include the monitoring of the progress of individual pupils in matters such as promotion and/or discipline; the curriculum of the school; the extra-curricular activities; personnel matters like the appointment and control of staff; fund-raising ; planning of the school provisioning and resources as well as improvement of the school-community's relations.

In this study the researcher will identify the activities in which parents are involved, the manner in which they are involved and the extent of their involvement in relation to their perceived role at the school in order to determine the forms of parental involvement that emerge in the setting.

2.3.2 Implications of parental involvement

In a local study, Maharaj (1987) asserts that parent involvement implies a change of attitude and approaches to teaching and learning among the educators. She further suggests that parental involvement issues should form part of the curriculum for pre-service teacher-education. This would educate teachers to accept parents as partners in education and to actively include parents in school committees. Maharaj maintains that parents know their children best and should therefore be given the opportunity to express what they consider to be the needs of their children. She made this suggestion because her study of parent-teacher relationships in Durban, South Africa, revealed that parents were alienated from the school owing to a reluctance among teachers to include parents because of the perception that parents would upset the schools' status quo. She maintains that such a conflict of interests among teachers and parents points at a need for the transformation of the school policies.

2.3.3 The parent-professional relationship

Parental involvement should be a joint negotiated process whereby boundaries in the relationship will be agreed upon and ground rules set for a sound working relationship. Parent-professional collaboration will be possible through effective dialogue. The professional should ensure a facilitative relationship with the parents in order to promote

constructive parent involvement. An active dialogue between the teachers and the parents will ensure that parents share power and control through full involvement in the planning, development, policy-making, implementation of educational services (Wood, 1988). It must be pointed out that the parent may not immediately find dialogue and negotiations easy and comfortable.

In the parent-professional relationship, it will be crucial for the parents to be seen in the social context of their community backgrounds rather than as individuals independent of their social context. It has been argued that a human being exists within a family, a community and a society, that is unique in terms of its socio-political and economic components.

The researcher will explore the parent-professional relationship in the setting and how the relationship between the parents and the professionals influence the parent participation.

2.3.4 Barriers and constraints

Parent involvement might be constrained by factors like the educational background of the parent, the social class, race, religion, assumptions about parents by professionals as well as perceptions of power and control.

2.3.4.1 Educational background of parents

The relationship between the parent and the school may be adversely affected by the educational background of the parent. The less educated parent may feel intimidated by all that the school represents. The parent may feel inadequate and confused by what goes on at school. Meighan (1986) asserts that the more confused the parents, the less likely it is that dialogues with the school staff will proceed smoothly. The teachers themselves may be apprehensive of working with parents who may not understand them due to social class differences. The professional parent is not, according to Meighan (1986), a solution to parent-

professional communication and co-operation in schools. Educated parents are skilled in what he terms "functional hypocrisy". Professional parents may be seen to be 'good' parents who co-operate well while they are actually aware of the teachers' expectations and they therefore 'act' the part.

2.3.4.2 Socio-economic constraints

It should be borne in mind that the parent may not immediately find dialogues and negotiations easy and comfortable. Socio-economic constraints like social class, economic status, race and religion of parent may influence the extent of participation in the school.

Parents who are poor and who are struggling to make ends meet may not have the resources and the psychological energy to participate in the programmes. It may be difficult for a parent who is grappling with basic survival problems such as basic needs like food and shelter, to contemplate involvement in school intervention programmes, however beneficial.

When a parent from a low socio-economic group has to compete for limited special education services, the parent feels "forced to accept demeaning relationships with professionals" (Wood, 1988). Scarcity of services limits choices tremendously and reduces the power of the parent because he/she cannot make choices. Where the gateway out of poverty is seen to be education, parents do their best to get their children with disabilities through the education system that is available.

Despite the impracticalities mentioned above, some parents are enthusiastic about assuming responsibility should they be given the necessary guidance and assistance (Werner 1985 cited in O'Toole, 1989).

2.3.4.3 Language

Kisanji (1995) in his study of the relationship between culture and disability in Tanzania maintains that the language spoken by the parent and the professional becomes a barrier to parental involvement if and when the parent and the professional cannot communicate in the same language. The parent may find the inability to communicate her anxieties, fears and hopes to the professional rather frustrating and disabling. Absence of common ground becomes deskilling for the parent who finds it impossible to discuss confidential matters with the professional. If the parent has to communicate with a professional such as psychologist or physiotherapist through an interpreter, much of the meaning of the parent's expressions is edited, paraphrased and therefore becomes incomplete. The professional also misses the non-verbal utterances and body language, for these cannot be translated successfully given that the interpreter may not be very proficient in the professional's language. Wood (1988) asserts that the parent may decide to consent to whatever is said and offered by the professional in order to secure the services desired for his/her child.

Common language promotes effective dialogue between the parent and the professional. Effective dialogue remains the primary vehicle for real involvement and partnership between the parent and the professional.

Language is culture-loaded. It is easier to understand a language from within a culture. Language contains the fundamental beliefs and primal ideologies of each society. Kisanji (1995) argues that culture is a critical factor for effective provisioning of services to communities. He elaborates:

> the success of any new programme or service will depend on a thorough assessment of the relevant community's culture especially its folk belief system, customs and values (p. 106).

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2.3.4.4 Assumptions about parent involvement held by professionals

O'Toole (1989) in his study of the relevance of parental involvement programmes in developing countries in Guyana argues that assumptions by professionals should be challenged and questioned. He quotes assumptions such as the following :

> 'parents would find involvement emotionally fulfilling'
>   and
> 'parents would welcome greater involvement in the education process'(p.331)

He claims that such assumptions have been proved by research to be unfounded and untrue. In all cases, he asserts, it had been found that on the contrary, parents welcome time away from their children in order to work, attend church and other social gatherings. His study of the Guyanese parents revealed that parents of the more severely disabled children, emphasised the need for periodic relief.

Parents have been generally described as part of the problem in education especially to the pre-service teachers. Professionals tend to categorise parents. Categorisation becomes a self-defeating exercise because the professional tends to assume that each parent should fit into a category. Instead of genuinely trying to find the unique concerns of the parent, the professional will engage in finding a relevant category to slot the parent in. When the parent is seen to take care of the child, that parent is branded as an overprotective parent while on the other hand, should the parent treat the child as normally as he/she can, the professional will assume that the parent is denying that the disability exists. The parents words are weighed and carefully analysed by the professional and subsequently the right label is found for the parent. The assumption about the parental category therefore blocks genuine understanding between the parent and the professional because the parent becomes embroiled in a no-win situation where whatever the parent says or does is used against him/her by professionals (O'Toole, 1989).

In this study the researcher will investigate perceived barriers to parental involvement in the setting. The researcher will establish the extent to which the identified barriers correspond to the barriers identified in the literature.

2.3.5 Benefits of parental involvement

A study conducted by Jowett and Baginsky (1988) on the forms that contact between home and school take in local education authorities in England and Wales, reaffirmed that parental involvement improved the parents' understanding of schools and education; enabled parents to share the knowledge of their own children with professionals and allowed parents to learn from professionals coping and parenting skills. .

Parental involvement would also sensitise schools on the immediate community's needs so that the schools could provide relevant and appropriate services. It is through the involvement of parents that the professionals could understand cultural beliefs, norms and values of the specific community that could impact on the life and education of children with disabilities (Kisanji,1995; Jowett and Baginsky,1988).

For parents, the benefits are that involvement provides support; and the parent also experiences temporary relief during the periods when the child is at school. The school becomes an accessible resource for the parent and the community. Pupils' achievements have been found to improve tremendously when parents were involved in schools (Jowett and Baginsky, 1988).

2.4 Conclusion

The present study will be informed by perspectives on parental involvement outlined in this chapter. The study will explore the aims of parental involvement in a specific setting, a residential special school. The researcher will examine parental involvement in this setting against the model suggested by Hornby (1991). The research will investigate parent involvement in the setting within the ambit of the ecological theory. The study will look at the forms that parental involvement takes

in the setting; and the implications of parent involvement to the participants in the setting. The study will explore the existing parent-professional relationship. It will identify the barriers and constraints that impact on parent involvement in the setting; explore the perceived benefits of parent involvement and make recommendations that may facilitate parent involvement in the specific setting.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify, examine and document the range of work that is being undertaken by a single social unit, a residential school, to promote contact between home and school. The study was conducted in August 1996.

3.2 Research questions

The key questions of the study are :

(1)   To what extent are parents involved in the school?

(2)   In which areas do parents participate?

(3)   How can parental involvement be enhanced?

(4)   How can the school support the parents in the acquisition of skills and the development of coping strategies for the rearing of children with disabilities?

3.3 The research design

3.3.1 Choice of the research design

The nature of the research questions, the bounded system of the school as a socio-pedagogical unit over which the researcher had no control, as well as the desired end-product, that is, detailed, thick descriptions and explanations, informed the choice of a qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1988).

Furthermore, the case study research method was chosen because the cost of the study would be reasonable since the study focused on one school and on an identifiable group of parents drawn mainly from one generally homogenous geographical area.

3.3.2 Entry into the setting

Entry into the school was effected through written and telephonic communication spanning a period of eight months prior to the interview dates. The negotiations were facilitated by the fact that as a local person and a former employee of the school, the researcher was known to the sponsoring body and the control staff of the school. The time-frame afforded the stake-holders at the school sufficient opportunity to deliberate on the matter at the annual general meeting (AGM) of the school management board, as well as with the parent body during the biannual Parent-Teacher Association meeting. The researcher gained the impression that the decision to allow research at the school was made by the whole community of the school.

3.3.3 Sources of information

The primary sources of information included the parents of the registered pupils at the school, the registered children in the school, the control staff, teachers and teacher-support staff as well as documents such as minutes of the school board meetings, minutes of different committees' meetings, the school's annual publication, and the assessment book.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Choice of data collection method

Raw qualitative data was collected through interviews. Both the person-to-person encounter and the focus group or panel interview formats were used. The decision to use interviews was informed by the need to explore and to analyse the interpretations that the different participants have of the concept of parental involvement based on their own beliefs, experiences, attitudes and thoughts in line with the nature of the questions this study wished to address (Merriam, 1988). The researcher had applied the interviewing technique successfully in a previous study (Nkabinde & Ngwenya, 1996). The researcher found that the interviewing technique's flexibility and open-endedness would be suitable for the rural parents as she had worked with them before as a teacher and acting principal at the same school.

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The interviewing technique, being open-ended allowed for the interviewees to add information that was not asked for by the interviewer. The interviewees were asked to mention any points, besides those asked, which they liked to discuss (Lund, 1995; Penney & Wilgosh 1995). Semi-structured interview schedules were used in order to elicit and facilitate discussion on the theme of parental involvement in the residential school. Data was recorded by means of audio-tapes supplemented by written notes.

3.4.2 Research assistants

The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. For the parent interviews, it was necessary to organise and acquire people to assist with interviewing and recording. One could not arrange definite appointments with parents because of the travel distances and other commitments that parents had.

The need for additional interviewers was two-fold. Firstly, the researcher had been advised that parents would need prompt attention because of inconvenient transport in the area. To assist this process, the school arranged two resource rooms which could be used simultaneously, especially if a group of parents arrived at the same time. Secondly, additional help would be necessary in case a parent arrived while the researcher was out with the school's community outreach staff on a home visit.

Two teachers, one from the junior primary section and the other from the senior primary section, volunteered to assist with the interviewing. Both teachers had served an average of five years at the school and were well-known to the parents. Both teachers were Zulu speakers and community members who were conversant with the socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of the communities. There would be no communication barriers.

The teachers had to be given a hands-on type of training on interviewing skills. During the first session of training, each teacher was interviewed by the researcher . The interview was audio-taped and played back. The researcher used the interview to highlight the different points that needed noting for successful interviewing such as:

-the establishment of a good workable rapport with the parents. The teachers belonged to the same cultural and language group as the parents. The teachers thus had the knowledge of the conventions of the group to be interviewed.

-how to use the probe as an interviewing tool using body language, non-verbal cues, and silence to encourage the parents to elaborate on their original responses.

-the adoption and the maintenance of a neutral role as much as possible.

-entry techniques, including introductory remarks such as the reasons for conducting the interview.

-some ethical considerations such as explaining to the parents the short-term benefits of their contributions as well as the long-term benefits. The confidential nature of the whole exercise had to be explained, and that the parents consent would be sought before any issue arising from the discussion was passed on to other professionals should such needs arise (Merriam, 1988).

The parent interview schedule was discussed with each research assistant to familiarise them with the questions and to allow for an opportunity to clarify any problems.

For the second session of training, each research assistant had to observe the researcher conducting an interview. The presence of the teacher was explained to the parent and the parent's assurance sought that (s)he felt comfortable with the presence of the teacher. The interview techniques were then discussed with the research assistant after the interview.

3.4.3 Sampling procedure

The parent population of the school formed the sampling frame. Probability

sampling using a purposive sample, the major variable being distance from the school was used (Simon, 1983).

The sampling procedure involved the senior primary head of department. This Head of Department had been assigned the duty of being responsible for the researcher, and all the work undertaken together with the administration clerk who controlled the correspondence to the parents.

The sampling frame comprised eighty-four parents out of a possible ninety-one, due to the fact that five children had been abandoned at the school and two were orphans.

Letters inviting parents to interviews were sent to forty-seven parents. The sample was selected because of the high possibility of a positive response from these parents. Parents residing in neighbouring rural districts were considered close enough to be able to come to the school, sit through an interview and be able to obtain transport back home in good time. Parents from areas that were more than two-hundred and fifty kilometres away from the school were excluded.

The decision to exclude parents from areas that were more than two-hundred and fifty kilometres away, was taken by the control staff and was influenced by financial and practical considerations. The researcher had informed the school that she would re-imburse the parents' travelling expenses. The school decided to invite only those parents whose travelling expenses were below fifty rand for a return journey. The school hoped to minimise the researcher's expenditure.

The principal also pointed out that parents who live further away from the school could not be easily invited. The interviews would be conducted during working hours. A working parent in the Durban area, for instance, would need to take a day off from work in order to be able to travel to the school to attend the interview. It was for this reason that the school targeted and invited those parents known to be free, such as the unemployed parents and housewives .

Parents were grouped according to the grade levels of their children. Appointments

were made for a separate specific day for each group of parents. This was considered to be the most appropriate administrative measure for checking how many parents responded positively in each group. Moreover, grouping according to grade levels would minimise and focus possible disruption of lessons that could be caused by the visits of family members. Families who did come were expected to use the opportunity to meet and spend time with their children. At least two grades per day would be interrupted by visitors. The teachers of the grades whose parents were on campus would also assist by supervising the classes of the two research assistants mentioned earlier.

3.4.3.1 Problems with sampling

The main problem with written notices to the parents was the unreliability of the parents' postal addresses. Some parents would, due to the wave of political unrest that was sweeping the region, relocate and omit to notify the school. Other parents who were farm employees would transfer to an adjacent farm but would not inform the school of the change of address. Most parents used local schools' postal addresses whenever a child from the family attended that school. Once the child completed schooling locally and moved to another institution, it became virtually impossible for the family to receive any correspondence. It was thus to be expected that some parents out of the forty-seven invited, might not receive the letters at all.

There were also those parents, although very few, who could not be relied upon, for they appeared to have relegated all responsibility to the school and were unco-operative. Such parents were not expected to respond to the invitation despite their proximity to the school. One such parent lived within walking distance of the school but was not expected to respond because of her apparent lack of interest. She was also a working mother.

It was not feasible for the researcher to conduct interviews by visiting parents in their homes because of the distance between homes of the registered pupils which spans seven extensive rural districts. Financial and time constraints limited the possibility of extensive travel. Besides the

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logistics of visiting parents in their homes for interviews, there was an additional problem that most areas were not electrified which could create problems with the recording equipment. Parents were thus invited to the school.

3.4.4 Data collection techniques

In order to address the critical questions, the following data collection techniques were applied: interviews; questionnaires; observation and document analysis (Merriam, 1988).

3.4.4.1 Interviews

Parents, teachers, and learners were interviewed. The interviews lasted between twenty and forty minutes.

(i) Parent interviews

The parents were interviewed by means of the person-to-person technique using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interview questions addressed issues such as personal details, the socio-economic status of parents, perceptions about involvement in the school, the effects of residential schooling, parent organisations in the area, and parent support by communities, the school and the government. (See Appendix 1). All interviews were conducted in Zulu, the parents own language. Twenty five parents participated in the study.

(ii) Teacher interviews

The teaching staff who participated included the principal, two heads of departments, two junior primary and two senior primary teachers, one of them being the residence superintendent. The limited participation of teachers

was due to the fluidity of the staff: one teacher was away on accouchement leave; the second had recently been appointed; the third teacher was a temporary teacher, and the fourth one was away on sick leave.

The teacher's interview questions aimed to investigate personal details; interaction with parents ; perception of parental involvement; and parent organisations. (See Appendix 2).

The Heads Of Departments' interviews explored issues like personal details; interaction with parents ; perception of parental involvement; parent organisations; and the perception of the effect of residential schooling on the socialisation of the children. (See Appendix 3).

The principal's interview addressed the personal details; the school's background details; parent organisations; parent involvement; and parent empowerment strategies. (See Appendix 4)

(iii) Learners' interviews

The panel or group interview technique was followed with the pupils. Groups were selected according to grade levels so that the children could be with familiar classmates. The teachers who were research assistants took part in these sessions which had to be as informal as possible in order to encourage participation. The questions dealt with interaction between the home and the school; perceptions of parental participation in the school; socio-cultural similarities and differences between the school and their homes; the perceived advantages and disadvantages of residential schooling; and the role of the school and the state in the education of children with disabilities (See Appendix 5). The purpose of the exercise as well as the issue of confidentiality were explained to the learners. All four senior primary classes and two junior primary classes participated.

3.4.4.2 Questionnaires

Teacher-support staff

The school-nurse and the occupational therapist are permanent support staff. The physiotherapist visits the school twice a week. They were asked to outline their views on the parents' role in: assessment and therapy; basic health care; and parent empowerment, by means of an open-ended questionnaire which they complete at their own convenience. The support staff has a very hectic daily work schedule.

3.4.4.3 Observation

The researcher had the opportunity of observing the school's different committees in action:

The researcher attended the meeting of the Community Outreach Committee which comprised of the school-nurse, the occupational therapist, the physiotherapist, a junior primary teacher, and a housemother. The researcher accompanied them on the school's 4x4 vehicle to a village about fifty kilometres away where they were visiting a home to assess a young adult with disabilities for possible placement in the school's three month training programme. The aim of this observation was to ascertain the co-operation between home and the school in the identification and assessment of children with disabilities. The researcher participated in the interview as an additional interpreter for the nurse and the occupational therapist who were both Afrikaans speaking. The main duty of this sub-committee is to afford the learners and parents of the school and parents of children with disabilities in the community support. The committee's activities include needs assessment, financial aid, and providing information on disability.

The researcher also sat through two meetings of the multi-professional team whose members were all the teaching staff, control staff, therapists and the school nurse. On one occasion the housemothers and the teacher-aides were

invited. At both meetings, health education lectures were conducted; the first one by the nurse and the second by visiting company representatives from Durban.

3.4.4.4 Document analysis

The school made all available records accessible. These included minutes of the Community Outreach Committee meetings, the board of management meetings, the assessment record book and the school's current annual publication. The aim was to investigate whether the issue on " parental involvement" was included in the discussions of the various committees in the school, as well as to assess the perceptions of parental involvement held by these significant groups in the school. The researcher could not find the record of the minutes of the parent involvement sub-committee which was supposed to be in existence.

3.5 Validity concerns

Validity and reliability concerns were addressed, firstly, through methodological triangulation. Although parental involvement was being investigated, contributions were not sought from parents alone but included the perceptions of the whole school community: the principal, the heads of departments, the teachers, the teacher-support staff as well as both the junior and the senior learners. Secondly, two interviewees besides the researcher were used in the data-collection phase. Finally a meeting was held with the school's control staff whereby the researcher discussed the general impressions they had on the issue of parental involvement.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Issues such as the aim and purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the sources of data, and the assurance of the anonymity of subjects if the research was published, were discussed prior to each interview (Simon, 1983).

3.7 Procedure for organisation of findings

Procedures outlined by Colaizzi (1978) in Penney & Wilgosh (1995) will be followed for the analysis of data and the organisation of the findings:

All the data will be read in order to extract phrases and sentences that pertain directly to the investigated phenomenon: "parental involvement." The researcher will try to establish the meaning of each significant statement and aggregate the formulated meanings into clusters of themes. The themes will be validated by re-checking the original data to ensure the relevancy of the emerging themes. The findings will be integrated into a detailed thematic description of the researched topic.

3.8 Limitation of the study

The study undertaken was limited by factors such as time which impacted on the availability of the participants who in their own way were unsure of the reasons why they should visit the school again shortly after the re-opening after the mid-term holiday break.

3.8.1 Time

The time available for conducting research was limited. There was no time available to follow-up all parents. All the interviews that could be granted, had to be completed by the end of August. A research visit by the outsider does impose on the time and energy of the people researched; needs for accuracy, details and standardisation of information being antithetical to the researched project's needs to continue on its daily work schedules (Lund, 1987).

3.8.2 Parent body representation

The majority of the parents interviewed were from the district in which the school is situated. The other districts were poorly represented. Two districts were not represented at all.

The parents interviewed were all rural parents. It would have been interesting to obtain the views of urban parents as well. None of the parents interviewed was a professional, two were semi-skilled workers and the rest were either unemployed or worked as vendors. The views of professional parents would possibly had provided a different perspective on parental involvement. None of the more affluent parents were interviewed. It cannot thus be argued that this was a comprehensive study of parental involvement. The aim was to explore parent involvement in a particular context.

Summary

In this chapter the research questions were outlined. The rationale for the choice of the research design was explained. Procedures followed to gain entry into the setting, possible sources of information, sampling procedure, problems with sampling, and the following data collection techniques: interviews, questionnaires, observation as well as document analysis were discussed. Motivation was given for the choice of the data collection method and for the use of research assistants. The chapter was concluded by brief considerations of validity and ethical issues; the outline of the procedure adopted for the organisation of findings; and a brief discussion of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4

4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

All the data collected from the school was read and recorded. Phrases and sentences that pertained directly to parental involvement were highlighted and extracted. The researcher established the meaning of these statements and grouped the statements into clusters of themes. The researcher then rechecked the original data in order to ensure the relevancy of the emerging themes and to validate the themes. The findings are thus presented in a detailed thematic description of the researched topic. The following themes emerged from the data:

4.2 Philosophy of the school regarding parental involvement

The results of this study reveal that the school was genuinely keen to involve parents in the education of the children with disabilities. In examining the minutes of the school's Community Outreach Sub-committee (1991) and the minutes of the Board of Management (1990) the researcher found that the school had identified a three faceted method of dealing with education and disability in the area:

Firstly there would be education and rehabilitation whereby the children with disabilities came to the school for the services. The major disadvantage of this method was the financial implications and the limited number of children that could be serviced. This limitation was complicated by the poor educational provision in the rural areas, the absence of transport and a poorly developed infrastructure. Overcrowded classrooms, poorly qualified staff and lack of educational resources which could be used to meet the needs of children with disabilities in regular schools, highlighted the need for school-based special education services for children with disabilities.

The second method was referred to as "outreach rehabilitation" whereby the professionals from the school go to the community to deliver the service. The third method, the community-based rehabilitation viewed rehabilitation as a component of a community whereby the knowledge and skills are made available to the people with disabilities who take control over their own programmes.

The school saw its role as an "institution within the community-based rehabilitation". The role of the school would be to provide support at community level, to provide referral services for parents of children with disabilities and to train person power for rehabilitation.

Provision of support at community level involves educating parents, school staff at the local schools, admitting pupils for a limited time for rehabilitation in case of social problems, identifying children with disabilities in communities and following up pupils that have been discharged from the school.

The provision of referral services meant that the school was to help parents find suitable rehabilitation services for their children; liaise with community rehabilitation workers by cross-referencing cases between all services available in the region; and act as a consultancy for children with special needs who attend local schools.

The training of person-power for rehabilitation would include the training of community workers for the community and the training of parents and guardians.

Parents were encouraged, as policy, to visit the pupils in the residence and to collect the pupils home for visits on weekends. Such a policy was intended to ensure that contact between the home and the school was maintained. It was also an effort to guarantee that children were not alienated from their families.

As the school grew, the policy regarding frequent contact between the home and the school weakened because the school admitted pupils from distant areas from where it was difficult to fetch the pupils frequently. Moreover, weekend programmes began at the school whereby pupils

were taught skills like sewing, mosaic making, beadwork, macramé and basketry. Sports tournaments were attended by senior pupils. Sometimes the school choir was invited to perform in the local town. Contact with homes dwindled as the enrolment of pupils grew.

4.3 Parental involvement: Current situation

The school regarded parents as the link between the wider community and the school. Parents were to be incorporated into the efforts to promote contact through the Parent-Teacher Association. Parents were to be represented on the board of management. It was hoped that community-based rehabilitation strategies would be promoted easily in communities where parents lived. Parents together with friends of the school and interested people were regarded as the community. It was necessary for the information to flow from parents to the school and vice-versa. Problems could be shared. The families and the school would work together for the benefit of the learners in their striving for education, career education and eventual job placement. Two committees had been formed to initiate and facilitate parent involvement in the school: the Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA) and the Parent Involvement Sub-committee.

Parents were involved during the initial assessment phase, in teaching and learning, in therapy, child support and fund-raising. The parents' involvement in policy-making was yet minimal.

4.3.1 Parental role in initial assessment

Parents were required to accompany the prospective pupil for the initial interview with the school. The parent gave his/her details to the administrative staff who helped with the filling-in of forms. The parent produced positive identification. The nurse, the physiotherapist and the occupational therapist assessed the child according to criteria set by the school. They gave the reports to the head of department. The parent then moved from the therapy department to the school to introduce the child to the teacher who would assess the child. The parent helped to establish a relationship of trust between the teacher and the child. Once some rapport had been established, the teacher could assess

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the child. The parent left the assessment room because the teachers had found that some parents:

> Want to help the child when the teacher tests the child. (a teacher)

The teacher's assessment of the new child was aimed at determining the level at which the child was operating in terms of basic academic skills. This helped the teacher in placing the child in an appropriate grade level.

The staff at school saw the role of the parent as that of introducing the child to the school, the parent:

> Has to give the historical background of the child, the past illnesses, medication, toilet habits, general health conditions and activities of daily living. (school nurse)

and a link between the school and the pupil:

> It is the parent who keeps all the medical records of the child safely and hands them over to the school nurse when the time comes. (a teacher)

The parent is the spokesperson for the child who:

> aids in the communication process. There is often the need for a mediator ; children are often shy or unresponsive. (school nurse)

It was during this initial assessment period that the teacher met and got to know the parent.

> I need to assess the parent as well, to know what kind of parent he/she is, where he/she comes from with whom he/she lives. (a teacher)

According to this teacher, knowing parents well before the child began schooling would enable the teacher to know and understand the child more deeply. The school could only start its rehabilitation programme after meeting and conferencing with the parent:

> We need the parents so as to give him/her a programme to enrich
> the child at home if the child is not independent yet.(residence
> superintendent)

It was during the initial assessment period where the teachers felt they needed to meet the parents in order to talk with them and set the parents at ease. The parents felt that teachers were:

> very accommodating and always welcoming... they are warm and free ...approachable.

A climate conducive to co-operation and partnership was deliberately promoted by the teachers to encourage parental involvement.

4.3.2 The role of the parent in teaching and learning

The researcher observed that parental involvement in teaching and learning depended on each teacher. There was no evidence of policy guidelines in the school on the matter. The role of the parent changed as the child progressed from one grade level to the next. Teachers, especially the pre-primary teacher, found parents to be interested in the learning of their children. The younger the child the higher the interest. When the child starts school the parents' expectations are low. They believed that because of the physical disability, the child could not learn. The pre-primary teacher thought that some parents took a keen interest in the academic progress of the child at this stage because of curiosity. In this particular class, however, the teacher had initiated ongoing communication with the parents by showing the work of the children with to the parents.

According to one junior primary teacher once the child's scholastic ability had been uncovered and the child was reading, singing and reciting poetry to the parent the parent's interest becomes less intense.

During the mid-term breaks at school, the teachers gave homework to the children. The work was supposed to be done with the help of the parent, siblings or the extended family:

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When schools close, it is then that I hand over to the parent. I know that the children, simply forget everything. When we re-open, they know nothing. If the parent is illiterate, there are some members of the family who are schooling. They help.(a teacher)

The school tried to involve parents in the learning process of their children by sending comprehensive school reports home at the end of each term. The heads of departments found the response of the parents to be generally unsatisfactory. Parents did not seem too keen to comment on the content of the reports of their children. The majority of parents did not sign and return the reports to school. One head of department felt that:

It should concern the parent what is in the report. The parent must come back to discuss the report.

When there were specific learning problems, the school had not been able to secure the parents co-operation. The school principal mentioned that although the parents might like to co-operate, the task at hand was usually beyond the parents' capabilities because:

They (the parents) are heavily illiterate. The parents themselves cannot stand here and help the school.

Concern was expressed by teachers that the parents did not borrow books for their children to read during holidays. The feeling among the teachers interviewed was that the academic stimulation of the learners should be continuous and extend to the learners homes.

4.3.3 The role of the parent in sports

According to the residence superintendent, the majority of people including parents, doubted the learners' abilities in sports. Parents were not aware that the learners could and did play soccer, netball, table tennis and hockey. Learners also enjoyed frequent matches against other schools for children with physical disabilities in the province. An annual tournament was attended where mainly soccer and netball were played. Learners with disabilities participated in athletics as well. Learners achieved and got recognition

during the tournaments. Teachers mentioned that they would love to see parents participating as spectators so that:

> They (parents) can learn that their children are capable of playing
> in sports. Such knowledge would give the parents complete
> peace of mind. (a teacher)

Parents, according to one teacher, had not up to that time responded positively to the invitations to sports days. She commented:

> We invite them but they never pitch up; they only come for
>
> important issues due to distance or work..

Parents in the study seemed unaware of such invitations to the school. They claimed to be willing to go out to help the teachers if and when invited. A mother said:

> If I' m asked, so far no-one has asked. I can help on visits, even
> during the week if I'm approached on time.

A control staff member mentioned that once parents were aware of the sporting codes that their children liked or participated in, they would encourage and support their children:

> I think the children would like that;

thus strengthening the links between the life at school and at home.

4.3.4 The role of the parents in fund-raising

Parents contributed an amount of R450-00 annually per child as school fees. All parents were supposed to contribute the same amount of money.

The principal of the school affirmed that parents were not involved in any other fund-raising activities in the school. He felt that the parents lived far from one another. Parents did not see each other during the year to be able to organise and carry out fund-raising endeavours. It was the local individuals, businesses, clubs or groups, churches, community-based organisations and industries in the area that were very much involved in fund-raising and that supported the school financially. The first boarding house for the

school was donated by a local industry. Overseas congregations and clubs contribute to fund-raising either by providing bursaries for the learners or by donating lump sums to the school. The principal commented that:

> The community is 100% involved in the school: be it money, food, or just goodwill, there is a long list of names, all friends of the school.

The principal was referring to the wider community who did not have children at the school.

4.3.5 The role of parents in child support

On acceptance of the child to the school, the parent was given a list of requirements that the child would need for school as well as for life in the residence. Parents had to support their children in the residence facility by bringing the child in when schools re-opened and fetching the child to go home when schools closed for holidays. The parent provided uniforms, clothing for church and for after school, toiletries, washing powder and pocket money. The parents paid for the assistive mobility devices used by children such as orthopaedic shoes, crutches and callipers as well as wheelchairs. One head of department reported that all the children who used wheelchairs had been given free wheelchairs by the State President through the national body for people with disabilities, the Disabled People of South Africa. This gesture, she said, meant some financial relief for the parents.

Parents supported children emotionally by taking the children home for visits. Not all parents managed that, but those who did cited reasons such as the need for bonding with the children and emotional well-being of the children. One parent felt that she should take her child for visits home regularly:

> just to make him happy

An aunt said:

> I believe that as a child she should visit home regularly.

Some parents in the study reported that they found it impossible to take their children home for weekend visits because transport was scarce over weekends. Some of the parents mentioned that the cost of travelling to the school was very high. Such parents visited the children at school to minimise the costs.

The teaching staff sometimes regulated the learners' visits to their homes and the visits to the school by parents, to suit the teachers and for the perceived well being of the child at a given time. A mother of a pre-schooler said:

> The class teacher suggested that I should not come to visit as often as I did, because he cries when I leave. So now I stay away as much as I can.

Another parent commented that:

> The school said they did not like her to visit home every weekend so she returns home once a month. She was missing the weekend programmes offered here.

4.3.6 The role of the parent in therapy

The therapy for some learners had to continue at home during holidays. The school prepares a programme which is discussed with the parent. Reasons for continuous therapy is explained to them. The continued use of assistive devices such as orthopaedic boots during holidays, is strongly emphasised to the pupils and parents.

The school had established that not all parents continued giving pupils therapy at home. Teachers attributed this to the socio-economic standards of each family. The families to which the children belong differed. Teachers argued that there was continuity between the school and the homes in the higher socio-economic bracket but the children from underprivileged homes usually returned from holidays:

> With problems like bedsores, ringworm and contracture of limbs.
> (all teachers)

A parent found that her son was very uncooperative at home:

> He does not want to put his orthopaedic boots on at home. Maybe the other children stare at him.

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4.4 Parents' perception of their ability to be involved

According to the survey conducted by the school in June 1996, fifty-nine percent of the total parent population lived within a hundred kilometre radius of the school. The parents who were interviewed came from this area. These parents could be involved in the school activities to a greater extent.

4.4.1 Possible areas of involvement

The parents expressed willingness to be involved in the school. They did not envisage any major problems as long as the school co-operated with them. Despite constraints such as money, distance, lack of education, language for communication and inflexible work situations, fifty percent of the parents interviewed stated that they had no problems in interacting with the school to offer their services and to help at any given time. One parent even suggested possible solutions to the problems:

> The school own cars, they can fetch me and take me back.

Parents in the study were enthusiastic and felt that they possessed the necessary skills and expertise to be involved in handicraft, crop cultivation (vegetable), baby-sitting, sports and recreation, seminars and in any other area that did not require a certain level of education. Parents were willing to do general work at the school, for instance, they could cut the long grass within the school perimeters, clean the dormitories, work in the laundry and help in the kitchen with the cooking and dishwashing. Some parents suggested that they could help for a few hours and return home while others mentioned that they would sleep over at the school and leave the following day.

4.4.2 Perception of teacher-attitudes

Parents found teachers' attitudes encouraging. This attitude made parents to be sympathetic to the school and to be highly appreciative of the work done there. Parents were thus willing to help if and when invited.

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Although most parents interviewed felt that there was nothing that they could teach the teachers, they did mention that they were quite willing to co-operate should the teachers lead the way. Parents repeatedly mentioned that they found the teachers very pragmatic and approachable. Parents interviewed, being less educated, maintained that they were not willing to initiate any programmes but felt that it was their duty to help, should teachers initiate programmes in which parents were needed. One grandmother said:

> I am willing to give them the knowledge that I have (handicraft).
> They have put us at ease.

And another mother reported with much emotion:

> Whenever we meet as parents we discuss how wonderful and
> patient these teachers are. They love our children, they teach with
> care and dedication ... really we are always amazed ...we would
> help them ... anything

Since parents generally admired the work of the teachers, parental involvement initiatives by teachers would apparently be supported by parents.

4.4.3 The image of the school from the parental perspective

The school under study's outside appearance is very impressive compared to other ordinary schools in the area. It is not like the other community schools. Some parents suggested that the presence of white teachers had emphasised the extent to which the school differed from the rest of the other schools.

It was the only school in the area formerly for black children that had a white principal. Parental impressions were that the school belonged to the government. It was therefore, according to them, a school not really in need of their help.

4.4.4 Perceived benefits of parental involvement

Some parents reasoned that if all the vegetables for school consumption were produced at the school instead of being bought from the market, money could be saved and fees would be reduced. Rearing chickens for the school would , according to some of the mothers, reduce the school's food bill.

4.4.5 Perception of involvement as leaders

Parents seemed to be relieved to sit back and let the teachers take over the leadership role. None of the parents mentioned a desire to participate in the management board or the PTA. Most parents showed preparedness to assist in the co-ordination of local parents' meetings. A few could even provide venues for meetings in their localities. The management and leadership of such get-togethers would however be happily left in the perceived capable hands of the teachers until the parents had learnt how to manage themselves. One teacher attributed the lack of initiative by the parents as being the result of lack of information about the school. She said:

> The parents should be taught the history of the school, the
> structure, the power structure and the aims, everything.

According to this teacher, knowledge about the aims of such a school would enlighten the parents enough to make them see their role in a new perspective. Some parents were community leaders but underplayed their leadership roles when working with professionals.

Teachers seemed too accommodating and over-protective of the parents especially those who showed love and care of their children. Parents felt cushioned by the knowledge that the teachers cared and tended to relax. One teacher mentioned that the parents regarded teachers as better people who had no problems. Parents generally concurred with whatever the school decided on. One teacher commented:

> Mostly they don't oppose issues that we discuss with them as a
> school.

4.5 Dilemmas for parents, professionals and learners

Parents were aware of the problems of being an adult with disabilities. Dependency on other people dehumanises the adult with disabilities. As a result parents sought out institutions of learning that could educate and prepare their children for the future as independent adults with disabilities. Parents were not blind to the fact that they could not be there for their children forever:

> If only I could get money for this child. I'm going to die one day and don't know when, but I do not know how he will survive without me.

4.5.1 Lack of choice of schools for children with disabilities

Education is regarded by the rural population as the path to independence and the only way out of the cycle of poverty. Unfortunately for the parents there are very few schools that cater for learners with disabilities. The parent either takes what is offered, however unsatisfactory, or lets the child stay at home and miss the "golden" opportunity of schooling. Children had to board away from home. This was not what the parents wanted but they had to ensure that the children got education. In the region where the school under study is located, it was the only school that catered for learners with physical disabilities. This placed the school in a very powerful position to select learners meanwhile disempowering the parents and children.

4.5.2 Emotional dilemma and the independence of children

Parents are forced by circumstances to separate from their children who spend each term boarding in the school's residence. Parents find this experience very trying emotionally but have to choose to. release their children so that the children might acquire education. One mother elaborated:

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> I never slept at night when he first left. I'm used to it now... really and truly we suffer but we are happy that he is learning... he has passed.

While it is obvious that rearing a child with disabilities is more difficult, the parents preferred the children to stay with them rather than allow them to board somewhere else. Eighty-three percent of the parents in this study would rather have their children return home each afternoon. The teaching staff agreed that it would be best but pointed out the impracticability due to two crucial factors:

Firstly, conditions in the rural area make it virtually impossible for the children to travel to and from school everyday. Transport flow is not conducive to daily travel. The communities are scattered far apart over a large area therefore even if transport was provided, there would still be the problem caused by the time factor.

Secondly, parents themselves have been found to be so overprotective of the children with disabilities that the child's total development is stunted. One head of department had this to say on this issue:

> I suppose it is better for the child to stay at home although on the other hand, you know, some parents want to do everything for the child because it is handicapped and the child never learns to do things, to be independent. In some cases it is good for the children to be here in the hostel. They have some duties while at home everything is done for them.

Parents agreed with the teachers because, as one mother elaborated in retrospection:

> He could not wash himself, now he can wash, dress himself, polish his own shoes and do lots more. I would still be washing him even now! You know, teacher, he is the last born and will always be a baby, so I thought the baby was ill and did everything for him!

The learners could not agree more. They pointed out that they had acquired several skills since they started staying in the school's residence. They enumerated bathing themselves, washing their own clothes, dressing themselves up, bed making, polishing their shoes,

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general house keeping, sewing as well as praying. Some had also learnt to walk and to trust themselves. A senior learner pointed out that:

> Even though you are disabled you should tell yourself that you can do what other people can do.

4.5.3 Advocacy

Another dilemma facing the parents, is that of advocacy. It is the parents who initiate and maintain contact between the learners and the school. It is also the parents' duty to protect the children from practices by others that might be translated as violating the children's human rights.

Parents do not advocate for their children's rights, they don't query practices which they perceive to be questionable, abusive or unfair. They would rather keep quiet. They teach learners to persevere. The parents' comments on contentious issues were made in subdued voices during the interviews. Such modulation of voices may be because they wanted to put across to the interviewer that what they were saying was in strict confidence or that it expressed the parents deepest feelings. Dissatisfaction arose from loss of the children's clothes as one mother commented:

> Her things get lost and some disappear for good. It is not easy to ask the people who look after the children. I do not like this but prefer to keep quiet.

the manner of changing the pupils curricula without sufficient consultation:

> She was changed to the career class. I had no choice on the matter. I had to accept because the alternative was discharge from the school (a mother).

and even the perceived negligence of pastoral duty by the staff:

> When the child has to be sent outside the school perimeter, proper care should be taken to ensure the child's safety. What if a car hits the child? Who will agree to be held responsible for the accident? (a mother).

The general perception among parents was that by querying and or setting the record straight they would be jeopardising the welfare of the child at the school. They feared that by questioning anything they might minimise the chances of re-admission of the child with special needs into the only school that could help him. Some groups of learners were totally against parental intervention and advocacy because they claimed that:

> That would be promoting strife and quarrels. It is better to persevere ... our parents advise us that when there are problems, we should persevere. It was only a matter of a few years and finally it would be all over.

The question of advocacy appeared to be permeated by feelings like fear and insecurity because learners thought it might create problems for them once the parent had left. Collective bargaining was suggested by both the learners and the parents as a more productive method of intervention:

> it would be better if parents talk collectively...(a learner)
> we parents must unite... (a parent)

The concern among some parents was that should parents show their feelings openly, especially about negative incidences to their children, the children would become difficult to discipline. Children may eventually reject schooling. Parents want their children to remain at school at all costs so as to acquire education, which is crucial for all children with disabilities; therefore:

> even when he (the child) says something, as a parent one has to be careful to side with the teacher, otherwise the child becomes spoiled and ends up being disobedient to the teachers. The child is here to learn. (a father)

4.6 Barriers to parental involvement

Despite the fact that the school's parents are generally co-operative and responsive, the parents cannot be easily involved because of social barriers such as lack of education, scarcity of parent organisations, as well as parental attitudes; and economic barriers like unemployment, poverty, underdevelopment, unfavourable working conditions, scarce transport and distance from the school:

4.6.1 Underdevelopment in the area

The school is situated in rural area where little or no development took place. The parents are secluded from the general stream of events. They are not conversant with the current issues and debates in the field of education. The principal commented that:

> This is a remote area with no facilities for development of the community and the parent population at large.

4.6.2 Socio-economic factors

The parents are rural people. The area does not offer any employment opportunities for them. Unemployment is rife. It is very difficult to exist. Most families live below the bread-line level and cannot even afford school fees. A teacher highlighted this when she pointed out that:

> About three quarters of my class is on bursaries.

The main concern in such communities is the struggle to satisfy the physiological needs.

Poverty compounded by illiteracy are the major barriers to parental involvement. Parents found it difficult to raise money to go to the school when they were invited. Teachers had often been told by parents that:

> I was interested in coming to school but had no money. (a control staff member)

The control staff at the school understood the plight of the parent well:

> These are real factors (poverty and illiteracy)... they are real (school principal)

The school principal pointed out that only about twenty percent of the total school parent population were developed people. This is seen as a great barrier by the control staff because:

> Parents are not free. They cannot visit the school at will. They are bogged down by poverty. (a head of department)

4.6.3 Distance from school

The inconvenience of getting to the school due to the distance limited visits from parents. For the parents who worked in distant towns or cities, it was a hassle to travel to the school. Some needed to negotiate for a special leave of absence from employers. When they arrived at the school, they had to hurry their business because they had to use the scarce public transport facilities. Teachers mentioned the difficulty and impossibility of assembling all parents at the school at the same time:

> They (parents) are far away. They do not have their
> own transport and when we have a function, they
> have to put in a day's leave.

4.6.4 Scarcity of parent organisations

There were no parent organisations in most communities. This created a barrier to information access. Parent organisations promote networking among parents. Informed parents are in a better position to advocate for their children's rights. Informed communities are enabled to deal with the matters of disability at their own level and within their own contexts. The few communities which belonged to an organisation called Thuthukani for instance were pro-active, more knowledgeable and progressive.

4.6.5 Direction by the school

Parents had not been invited to be really involved in the school other matters besides child support. Even the executive committee of the PTA was chaired by a staff member whose child with no disabilities attended classes at the school.

4.6.6 Parental attitudes

The negative attitude of some parents was another barrier. There was a feeling among teachers that some parents wanted to relegate all the care of their children with disabilities to the staff of the school. This attitude has been noticed even among parents who do earn some money. One teacher unhappily pointed out that:

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They (parents) think the children belong to the government and they are reluctant to pay even though both of them work.. I don't like that. Some don't pay at all.

4.7 Perception of factors that might facilitate parental involvement

Education, planning, parents needs-analysis, collaboration with other governmental departments as well as organising and giving support to parents were factors that were regarded as crucial in the facilitation of parental involvement in this particular school at the time.

4.7.1 Education of parents

Teachers saw parent education as the major positive factor that can facilitated parental involvement. Parents could be educated:

> also in lots of areas such as the early years. They must realise how important those years are. They must not let the child wait for pre-school Some of them do nothing. They do not even tell the child a story or make it listen to something or whatever.
> (a head of department)

The schools daily academic programme finished in the early afternoon. Afternoon literacy classes for the community could be slotted in easily by the teachers. One teacher declared:

> I am willing to teach adults in the afternoon, free of charge.

Lesson content would extend to lessons on disability issues in order to sensitise the community. There is a tendency to hide children with disabilities from the public.

Programmes for parents to develop appropriate child rearing skills were suggested as a priority by teachers. The teachers claimed that there was evidence from some of the parents' behaviour that not all parents were able to cope with rearing a child with disabilities. Such parents did not show love and longing for their children. A junior primary teacher elaborated:

> It seems they (parents) have not accepted the child's disability. They refer to the child as: "this child with disabilities" as if the child is not theirs, sort of distancing themselves from the child.

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Teachers had noticed that the last parents to take the learners home when schools closed were the first parents to bring them back when schools re-opened. Some parents dumped their children with relatives and or grandparents. One teacher explained what she had observed as a trend among such parents:

> Once the child is born the father disappears and blames the woman for giving birth to a freak. The mother is then at fault. It is better with parents who have other children. The younger mothers dump the children and disappear. If the child is a first born, she is also dumped. It is a disgrace for them to bear a child with a disability.

Parent did according to all teachers need information because:

> If you give them advice, they do follow it.

4.7.2 Education of staff in the school

Learners emphasised the importance of teachers' exposure to special education. They claimed that teachers who had special knowledge about disabilities treated learners differently. Such teachers rarely applied corporal punishment and if they did it was acceptable punishment. The education of care-givers in the residence would, according to the learners, reduce feelings of frustration and anger among parents.

4.7.3 Strategic planning

The staff suggested that it might help to facilitate parental involvement if the joint meetings with parents were planned more democratically. Factors affecting parental mobility like distance and employment have to be considered. Employers could then be informed well in advance of a day so that all parents are free to come to school and get acquainted. The school would also need to revisit its strategy for the organisation of parents meetings. One control staff member offered an alternative strategy and said:

> I wonder whether we could not try and meet them halfway when it is more convenient or on a day that is more convenient for them because we always make it convenient for us on a weekday... and then even provide transport from a certain point. We have the school bus.

There was a perception in the school that provision of accommodation for parents from further afield might facilitate parent involvement. Steps had been taken to ensure that parents were able to sleep overnight at the school free of charge. A guest house had been prepared. The researcher was shown a revamped cottage. This was the original wattle, daub and thatch boarding house. It comprised of two furnished bedrooms, a fully-equipped kitchen, a shower, a small lounge and an outside toilet. The cottage was electrified. It would be formally launched during the parents' meeting in December 1996.

4.7.4 Parents needs analysis

Parents had never, according to the teachers, been formally asked what their needs were. Some teachers felt that identification and analysis of the parents needs would facilitate parental involvement. The teachers could

> Ask them (parents) what their problems are. Are they
> interested? You just speculate, maybe this or maybe that ...
> (a control staff member)

Purposive consultation with the parents may facilitate involvement. There is a consensus from both parents and professionals that parents have never really been invited:

> We have never asked them to participate (a teacher)

> We live near the school... I have never been approached
> (a parent).

4.7.5 Collaboration with other government departments

The principal explained that the school was actively marshalling government departments, professionals, schools and communities in the area around disability issues. The school had joined a forum consisting of professionals from hospitals, clinics, the education department, social welfare and rehabilitation officers in the area.

The co-operation, he claimed, aimed at widening outreach to parents through all the service departments in the area. Parents would be incorporated into early intervention programmes through a joint effort of all these departments. It was hoped that the

continuum of services provided through a collaboration of these departments would be a major positive factor in effecting a mind shift in the parents. Parents would be involved in rehabilitation as early as possible through a joint effort of the forum.

4.7.6 Parent support strategies

According to the records in the school's Community Outreach Subcommittee (1996), parent support strategies in the school took the form of parent organisation and home visits. As a result of the home visits, advice, assistance with basic needs such as foodstuffs, financial assistance with school fees was given to the parents of the learners. A few parents had been given temporary jobs at the school. The minutes of the Board of Management (1994) identified strategies that included annual parents' days; annual parents' meetings; and the inclusion of parents in board committees. Such strategies would, as outlined in the minutes, promote closer contact between the home and the school.

The long-term goal of parental support programmes at the school was the transfer of ownership of disability matters from the professionals to the parents. This was to ensure sustainability of the rehabilitation programmes. It also served to extend the services to the primary level of each community.(Community Outreach Subcommittee records, 1990).

4.7.6.1 Parent organisation

Both the parents and teachers agreed that it was imperative that parents should belong to community-based organisations. There was a group of parents from one district who belonged to such an establishment. Their organisation was totally involved in disability matters providing solutions collaboratively. One parent commented on the value of this group to her:

> I have gained knowledge about all disabilities such as blindness,
> deafness, speech problems as well as basic health issues.

Teachers in the school hoped that it would be in such organisations that parents might start to deal with issues that concern their needs, instead of leaving it all to the professionals. A parent pointed out that she wanted to belong to a parent support organisation so as to:

> Discuss problems we encounter as parents, to learn how to look
> after children with disabilities.

4.7.6.2 Home-visits

The school principal mentioned that the school had established a home-visits programme in order to connect the school with the homes of the learners. The school had acquired a 4x4 vehicle for that purpose. The home-visits were done once every week The teachers prioritised the home-visits according to the perceived needs of each child. Each visit was discussed in a multi-disciplinary meeting beforehand. After each visit the grade teacher gave a report back to the multi-disciplinary committee and to the Community Outreach Subcommittee which made recommendations to the executive of the Board of Management. The executive of the Board of Management discussed and endorsed the recommendations. Thereafter the Community Outreach Subcommittee executed the endorsed recommendation which might be the awarding of a bursary to the learner or a temporary job for the parent.

4.7.6.3 The learner-adoption scheme

The principal informed the researcher that three parents were spearheading a learner-adoption scheme, a programme whereby individuals, churches, clubs, businesses and organisations were approached and asked to take responsibility for the education of a child attending at the school. The aim of this scheme, he said, was to help the parents and the relatives to cope financially in order to ensure the education of the child with disabilities from very poor backgrounds.

4.7.6.4 Training of a community rehabilitation facilitator

The principal explained that the school hoped that parent involvement strategies would be facilitated by the appointment of a community rehabilitation facilitator in the school. Funds were raised overseas for the training of the community rehabilitation facilitator who is a local woman. Her duties would be to establish parent groups in all communities serviced by the school. Two such group already exist in the communities within twenty kilometres from the school..

4.8 Residential schools: challenges and frustrations

Educational opportunities and access for children with physical disabilities in the rural areas are largely constrained by the long distances between homes and the few schools. The scarcity of schools in communities is compounded by infra-structural underdevelopment. Proper roads do not exist and consequently transport is very scarce. Physical fitness is crucial in order for the child to access school. A physical disability means that the child cannot attend school. Residential schooling becomes the answer for the children with physical disabilities under these circumstances.

From the tender age of five, the children leave home to learn while boarding in the school's residence. The move away from homes affects the parents and children economically, socially and religiously:

4.8.1 Economic Challenges

Compared to the other schools in the vicinity, the residential school is very costly. The school fees of four-hundred and fifty rand per annum or forty-five rand per month is considered to be very high to a person with no income at all.

The parents were aware that their children have to eat and wash at the school but they are frustrated by sheer poverty. Moreover parents had other financial responsibilities besides the children with disabilities. The siblings also needed clothes, food and schooling from

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the same parent. The parents had to pay for assistive devices that pupils used for locomotion. The cost of keeping the child with disabilities in the residential facility causes a lot of frustration to the parents. Without money, parents are bound to feel disempowered. The perception of self-worth dwindles, for example, a self-employed single mother commented:

> I don't feel acceptable to my community. I'm too poor. They
> undermine me. Women do not like poor women, so I feel small.

Distance was another major challenge for the parents who found it strenuous to travel to school. The mode of transport used by most parents, the mini-bus taxi, does not charge half-tickets for children. In fact the rule is that children over three years pay a full-fare. Parents found this very frustrating because their chances of fetching the children home on regular visits "as many times as possible" were considerably reduced. One mother said:

> It would be better if I had built my home next to this school.

Minibus taxis increase their fares at short notice. Some parents found it impossible to cope with the new fares. A parent who had to connect three taxis before she reached the school complained of the high cost of travelling to the school:

> The school is too far and the taxi fare is very high.

Distance is a challenge to the community. It is the communities that build schools in the rural areas. The parents of children with disabilities felt that the community should provide local schools for their children. Different reasons were mentioned:

There were children with disabilities who received social pension. The parents felt that if their children with disabilities attended at their local schools, they would retain the pension money that they had to lose when their children attended a residential special school. A mother explained:

> The parents do not want them to come to school here because
> they will forfeit the pension..

The learners raised the point of the provision of educational facilities at home vicinities. They pointed out that there were many schools for children who had no disabilities. They said:

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> The government should not discriminate when building schools.
> It should build as many schools for children with disabilities as it
> does for the other children without disabilities.

The children thought that the absence of special schools in their home areas limited educational access for other children with disabilities:

> who are sitting at home, who do not know where to school.(a
> senior learner)

4.8.2 Social challenges

Rural people believe in a close-knit family unit. The parents in the study claimed that to have one of the youngest members of the family to be forced by circumstances to live outside this unit was very frustrating for them. Both parents and learners pointed out that they missed each other. The most difficult time was, as one parent said, mealtimes in the evenings when the whole family was assembled together. They sorely missed the child. They simply:

> do not like being apart.

Teachers pointed out that the parents favoured the middle class standards of the school despite the huge dichotomy between the homes and the school's socio-economic levels. Parents felt challenged by the higher standards of the school rather positively. Parents found that the children had learnt personal hygiene and acquired social graces. Children were able to take care of themselves. Some parents tried to keep up with the schools standards of hygiene; they maintained their children well, kept them as clean and fresh as they possibly could. Others did not: teachers repeatedly pointed out that some learners, especially those from the lower socio-economic families, usually returned to school in an unacceptable state of health:

> The quality of life is not the same. When children return from the
> holidays, they are quite different. They have to be seen by the
> nursing sister first. They have ringworm. They say they do not
> know the cause.

One teacher maintained that the learners from the more traditional or lower socio-economic home brought to school a totally different culture which was rejected by the

schools' social way of life. In the residence the learners should use toilets, use spoons for eating, do not share plates of food and should bath and brush their teeth twice daily. They learn table manner. The new child has to adapt quickly to this new life-style. This, according to one of the teachers, may be a source of frustration. The teacher elaborated:

> The child finds a different lifestyle here. He compels himself to
> adopt it in order to fit in with everybody at school here. When he
> returns home, he has to revert to his old lifestyle. This you notice
> on their return from holidays; they are full of sores. When you ask
> why they did not wash at home, they tell you there was no soap
> or water at home. They come back with yellow teeth.

Socialisation is a challenge for a child who has to learn to live with a host of strangers. Learners complained about initiation among the boys. The learners mentioned that they had learnt to live in harmony with their peers as quarrels and fights among children were not tolerated at the school.

To some children, residential schooling was good because they had lots of friends to play with while to others the people in the residence were:

> A bunch of strangers who gossip about you in your presence.

therefore those learners preferred:

> to be in a familiar environment not with lots of strangers. It
> is better to be at home with your own people.

because

> human relations are better at home.

Children had to learn to use appropriate language that is generally acceptable. Ukuhlonipha (a term encompassing humility, tolerance, temperance, respect and brotherhood) is central to the school's social life philosophy. Politeness is encouraged. Some learners found that school was a continuation of home because:

> things that are forbidden at home are forbidden here as well, for
> instance, swearing and fighting.

The learners found the social life at the residential school quite frustrating because they were not treated like at home. They perceived themselves as isolated from the mainstream of social life through being incarcerated at the school. Some expressed concerns and said:

> We never venture outside the fence. At home you mix freely with
> the community. Here you cannot even go to the old school to
> pick up lemons or to the spaza shop to buy amagwinya (a snack).

This situation was far removed from the usual social life they experienced in their communities where:

> if you want to go for a walk at home you do, and if you want to
> watch television you switch it on, nobody stops you.

The children are kept under perpetual supervision as a result there is less opportunity for the children to socialise. A teacher elaborated:

> They are subjected to a too rigorous programme here. They do
> not socialise well. When they are watching television, we are
> there; during playtime we are there; artwork is done under our
> direction ... no place for creativity.

and the learners moaned:

> here you are called to work in the garden and whilst you are there
> you are wanted for teatime. Should you be late for teatime ....

The school programme forces the learners to learn routine. The day is divided into separate time slots for meals, study, library, free play, chores, bath-time, church time and school time. Routine training is, according to one teacher, uncomfortable to the children who join the school when they are older. The young children who grew up in the school and got used to managing time and working independently.

4.8.3 Religious Challenges

Only about thirty-seven percent of the parents interviewed belonged to orthodox churches. Fifty percent of the parents were members of the independent Zionist churches. The learners were required to attend church services at the nearby church every Sunday. Evening prayer was compulsory at the residence. Learners were taught to sing and to pray.

Some families did not follow the Christian religion, others claimed to have no religious affiliations at all. Although it was challenging for them to send their children to a

Christian school, they all claimed that they were satisfied with the schools' teachings. Religions to which some parents belong, have problems with for instance, the cutting of hair which the school enforces as a rule. Hair is never cut according to these religions. According to other religions, eyes are kept open during prayer. Whenever a teacher in the school prepares children for prayer he/she normally tells the children to fold their arms, close their eyes and pray, for instance, by reciting the Lords' prayer or a psalm from the Bible. There are parents whose religion forbids the consumption of pork and pork products like bacon and polony. Such parents are frustrated by not knowing clearly the full content of their children's diet.

There are learners who have never been baptised. For a Christian school, this is a great challenge.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

It is evident from the data that parental involvement is still in its infancy at the school although involvement is regarded as highly desirable by the management board. In the minutes document of the management board (1992-1996) mention is made of the Parental Involvement Sub-committee which is convened by one of the board members. The researcher could not, however, locate any report from this committee. It was clear from the minute book that the committee had not been actively involved for the past four years since its inception. It was not clear from the data what factors had contributed to this situation. It might be possible that due to the isolation of the setting, the convenor had no model to guide the process. It was also possible that although the management board realised as far back as 1992 that they desired parental involvement, there had been no concrete plan explaining how the committee was to work.

A parent-teacher association was established in 1992. The principal expressed satisfaction with the activities of the PTA committee. He argued that under the prevailing circumstances in the setting, especially the distance and the transport problem, the PTA had done much, for instance, in determining the language policy of the school and in the issue of the school uniform.

It is thus clear from the data that the school has made visible efforts to put mechanisms in place to initiate and facilitate parental involvement. The purchase of a 4x4 vehicle and the provision of a training facility for a community rehabilitation facilitator is proof of the determination by the school to put into effect its three-faceted method of delivery of educational services to all children with disabilities.

5.1.1 Aim of parental involvement in the setting

One is tempted to argue from the data that the aim of parental involvement in the school corresponded with what Beattie (1985) refers to as ' personal development'. By the term 'personal development' is meant that the total moral and intellectual development of each individual may be achieved by being given some responsibility for matters that affect them. By interacting with the school personnel, the parents do improve their personal knowledge of children with disabilities. The interaction normally occurs at the start of the holidays when the parent is given a programme to follow at home by the professional. The parent learns something new and acquires a new skill which enables him/her to take responsibility for a part of the child's education.

In practice, the teachers encountered difficulties with this aim because they claimed that there was a reluctance among the parents who belonged to the lower socio-economic class to carry out programmes at home. Teachers pointed out that they had found that the learners were neglected during the holidays in some of the homes. The reluctance among parents to carry out programmes seemed to affirm that these parents were still unable to appreciate the need for a joint effort in the education of the children with disabilities. It could also be that contextual factors such as distance from the school, work commitments and other family responsibilities contributed as well. Inability to consider all these factors could lead to apportioning blame. Parents may in this way be further alienated. It can be said that such parents are alienated from the school because the staff are unable to deal with contextual factors that impact on the school. Beattie's fourth aim for involving parents which he calls 'overcoming alienation' that seeks to enable parents to understand the value of collaboration appeared to be lacking in the setting.

Wood's (1988) assertion that in special education , the aim of parental involvement is based on "the need for the professionals to extend their philosophies on disability to the parent" is clearly demonstrated in the issue of the home programme for the holiday periiod. It was not clear from what the teachers said, when the parent was involved in the planning and in the compilation of the holiday programme. The programmes given to parents seemed to be imposed on the parents as orders from the

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professionals which the parents had to carry out. The parents as Wood (1988) suggests were expected to co-operate and appreciate what the professional offered. One is led to conclude that in this setting the aim of parental involvement is informed by the medical model of service delivery which is based on the assumption that the professional knows best.

5.1.2.The style of parental involvement in the setting

The style or type of parental participation at the school corresponded with two of the dimensions of parental involvement propounded by Pugh cited in Wood, (1988). There was firstly, evidence of the dimension termed 'external support' of the school by parents. Both the principal and the learners emphasised that the parents contributed to the school fund and to the general welfare of the learners at the school by giving the learners pocket money , providing toiletries, clothes, and school uniform. The second dimension 'participation' was also noticeable at the school although to a lesser extent. Teachers mentioned that the Parent-Teacher-Association met twice a year because parents lived far from each and could not collaborate. Therefore, it was not easy to organise them to meet frequently. The meetings were, therefore, planned and directed by the staff at the school.

On the other hand, one may point out that it was the conditions in the setting that imposed the style of parental participation on the school. The high illiteracy level of the parents channelled the school staff to this type of participation as a starting point.

Partnership, the fourth dimension of parental involvement mentioned in Wood (1988), was still lacking in the school. Partnership involves the sharing of power, resources, knowledge and decision-making between the home and the school. The claim made by some parents that curriculum change for their children was done by the professionals without any input from the parents pointed to the absence of sharing of decision-making between the home and the school. There was no evidence from the data collected that there was any form of power- sharing between the parents and the school.

The last of Wood's dimensions, control, involves responsibility and accountability where parents not only make decisions but implement them and assume full responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. It could not be established from the data that the parents were involved in the activities described.

Although some dimensions are still lacking in the setting, one feels that it would be premature for a person to expect the school to have attained the level of partnership and control within four years of the initiation of parental involvement. One tends to believe that implementing a parental involvement programme is not an event, but rather a process which involves many challenges such as the problem of illiteracy, distance from the school, resource personnel to implement the programmes, parent education and training, and transport issues that need to be addressed beforehand. Bean and Thornburn (1995) concluded from their study of parent movements for children with disabilities in Jamaica that responsiveness to the parents needed conscious parent training programmes. The school had taken the first step towards initiating a programme for parent training by employing and training a community rehabilitation facilitator.

5.1.3 Parents' views on their involvement

In this study, parents were found to be realistic and practical about the areas where they thought they could be actively involved in the school. Parents identified skills that they could transfer to the pupils, some of which, like amacansi (the making of a type of woven grass mats), are a lucrative informal business in the area. Parents felt that it was the duty of the school to lead and to help them initiate group meetings for parents of children with disabilities in their areas. Parents also pointed out that they would support activities on disability issues in their communities once the school had initiated the activities. Parents expressed an eagerness to organise venues in their communities, in local churches and schools and to organise other parents. It seemed that parents were willing to support the teachers.

Similarities can be drawn between the parents views and Hornby's model (1991). According to the model, parent support is one of the major strengths of the parents which should be exploited by professionals in implementing parental involvement. He

claims that parent support could be solicited because parents are generally willing to participate in programme planning or in therapy activities thus giving support to the professional. In the present study, parents felt that their support had not been sought by the school, some maintained that they would be willing to participate because they felt they had the time to support the school. Hornby's model did also add that some parents did have the time and that parents could be used as a further resource for training other parents or in helping the professional in a given task.

5.1.4 The ethos of the school

Enthusiasm to tackle the task of education for learners with special needs permeates the whole school community: the members of the management board, the parents and the staff. This augurs well for future programmes once the community rehabilitation facilitator service is in place. The attitude of all people connected with the school is a positive indicator that communities in this area could in the near future, own the rehabilitation and the education of their children with disabilities.

The enthusiasm is constrained by problems such as the absence of a common language for communication between parents and the management board, and also between the parents and some of the professionals at the school. According to one head of department, the vastness of the area from which the parents of the school came made it difficult to organise all parents to meet at the school at a time. A further constraint was the fact that there was no evidence of a practical plan of action.

In a study of a practical way to sustain parent participation in the education of children with mild mental handicaps in western Australia, Twine (1990) established that although professionals did talk about parental involvement, very little was done in a systematic way to ensure that parents did participate. She claimed that it was well documented that parents are usually willing to be part of the education system but felt frustrated when no guidance was given to them by professionals on how to participate. Twine's findings appeared to apply in the setting documented in this study. It suggests that enthusiasm alone was not enough to effect parental involvement; practical methods, such as detailed plans of action, had to be employed.

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Enthusiasm has been identified as a characteristic of all new projects. McConkey and O'Toole (1995) warn that enthusiasm has been found to wane with time. Once the interest in the project diminishes, the few people who remain working on the project are overburdened with work and eventually the project collapses. They base their views on the evidence of different experiences documented in their studies of community-based rehabilitation programmes in developing countries such as Tanzania and Guyana. In this area, the parents are experienced in working collaboratively with teachers in building community schools. The parents are conversant with school committees. It becomes imperative that the parents be included in the school's programmes to safeguard the sustenability of the project.

5.1.5 Staff development for parental involvement

The personnel of the school is isolated from institutions of higher learning and libraries that it is difficult for them to improve their knowledge of disability issues. Among teachers, it is only the headmaster who has a qualification in special education. The houseparents and the teacher assistants have had no relevant qualification and, therefore, no in-depth understanding of special educational issues. There is therefore a great need for ongoing consultation with other professionals in special education.

Lack of information could eventually undermine the determination to involve parents in the school activities because the school staff would be unable to lead the activities. One can conclude that a teacher or a care-giver who does not have sufficient information on the problems and solutions in disability issues would scarcely have the confidence to interact with the parents in a purposive manner. It would thus be difficult for staff members if they felt that they were underskilled to act as resources for the parents.

In this study learners argued that the level of knowledge on disability issues influenced the practice and the behaviour of all the school staff: the teachers, the teacher aides and the care-givers in the school residence They claimed that staff members who had no understanding of the learners' physical disabilities treated children in a manner that was unacceptable and that was considered to be abusive by the learners. This claim by

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the pupils has implications for the home-school relationship. The dissatisfaction of learners could possibly result in a communication barrier and create 'an adversarial relationship' (Penney and Wilgosh, 1995) between the home and the school. According to Wood (1988) a facilitative relationship between the school and the home is crucial in promoting constructive parental involvement. Wood holds that a sound working relationship is necessary to promote parent-professional communication.

5.1.6 The role of the school in initiating parent participation: Teachers' views

There was no consensus found among the teaching staff on whether the school did give clear direction to the parents to guide and include them in the school activities. One teacher mentioned that parents were invited but the other teachers said that the school had not yet made efforts to invite and direct parents on areas of participation. Several parents did mention that they would willingly participate on condition that the school invites them. There is correspondence between this finding and the literature in Penney and Wilgosh's (1995) study of the parent -teacher relationship in parenting a child with special abilities in Canada from which it is concluded that the schools did not provide direction for participation and even when given, the direction was not specific enough to be useful; and that this was due to the lack of literature giving direction for parental involvement.

In examining the aspect of the role of the parent in teaching and learning, it was found that although the teachers were aware of the parents predicament of illiteracy, the teachers still expected parents to comment on the reports of the children, sign and return the reports to school. There appeared to be high expectations of the parents and the families of the learners among the teaching staff. One control staff member felt that the parents should take time to discuss their children's reports with the teachers. Although the teachers seemed dissatisfied with the responses of the parents to the school reports, none of them mentioned what the teachers were doing to guide the parents.

It is not clear from the data that the school was actively trying to meet the needs of the parents because the side of the parents had not been heard according to the

teachers. One teacher argued that the school cannot be said to be meeting the parents needs if the school does not organise meetings on days that were suitable for parents. Sometimes, parents could not co-operate with the school simply because the timing was not right, for instance, the meetings were sometimes called by the school during weekdays when parents were working.

5.1.7 The emerging model for parental involvement in the setting

It appeared that parental involvement in the school was assuming a pattern of its own which was unique to the rural setting and to the special socio-economic environment that the school found itself. The principal of the school mentioned that the parents of the children at the school were the link with the community; thus the parents of registered pupils were the main target population for parent involvement programmes. The interview with the principal affirmed that the school viewed the parents as members of families within communities. The parent, according to the principal, was a link through which inroads into the community to which the parent belonged could be made.

The school is now embarking on a new approach to parent participation. A full time community rehabilitation worker has been appointed. Parental involvement programmes would be conducted both in the school and in the home; through meetings at the school and home visits by the community rehabilitation facilitator worker who was already undergoing training and had a 4x4 vehicle for that purpose. The meetings and the home visits would be used to educate parents by means of talks and demonstrations to support the parents in the acquisition of child-rearing skills as well as the development of coping strategies for the rearing of children with disabilities (Minutes of the community outreach committee, March, 1996). Support of the parent in issues like further placement of the child with disabilities either in a secondary school or a work situation forms part of parent education.

The aim of this model could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, as Bean and Thornburn found in the literature study of parent movements in Jamaica, (1995) that without parental involvement, the intervention programmes became ineffective. Bean and Thornburns' finding corresponds to the experiences of the staff of the school

under study, especially the teachers, who claimed that some children returned from home during holidays with contractures of the limbs and in a generally unhealthy condition. As a result, the teachers said, the school began its therapy interventions all over again after each holiday. The teachers claimed that a similar situation was found with the schoolwork. The younger learners forgot all that had been done and the teacher had to start afresh. The aim of this model would be to sustain and to maintain continuity of the intervention programmes between the home and the school for maximum benefit by the learner.

Secondly, there is a need to move away from the medical model of service delivery where the professional and the services rendered are regarded as a charity. The comments in the school's assessment book suggested that the school followed the medical model of service delivery where the child and parents were seen as having a problem, a deficiency that the school was in a position to remedy.The new approach that the school envisages can be termed as a "social model" (Kisanji, 1993). Parents, the school and the community would be partners. The aim would be to educate the child for citizenship in that country.

Regarding the school as a charity could prove to be a burden to the school because it encourages an attitude of dependency which would make all the intervention programmes ineffective because the families of the children with disabilities would do nothing to sustain the programmes (McConkey,1995). By getting parents of the school on board, the model might be aiming at programmes that relate to the values and the normative system of the communities in order to ensure acceptability of the school services and the ongoing support from the parents and their families.

Problems such as poverty and illiteracy will continue to challenge the effectiveness of intervention models as McConkey (1995) asserts in his study of early intervention strategies in developing countries such as Tanzania.. In the school further challenges include the scarcity of professionals such as psychologists who are conversant with the language and the culture of the parents in the school.

5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of findings, certain recommendations will be made in this section that might contribute to facilitating parental involvement in the school. Cognisance will be taken of parent concerns, staff development issues, learner concerns, and issues on governance and management of the school.

5.2.1 Parents workshops

Parent workshops that have been initiated at the school and are run twice annually. These could be extended to smaller group workshops for parents of registered children who come from further away in the outlying communities, on days that are suitable for the parents in a venue agreed upon by the parents, for instance, one of the parent's homes. Parents could be grouped according to the areas where they live. The school's community rehabilitation facilitator would visit each group of parents on a rotation basis. It is in such workshops that the relationship between nutrition, health and disability could be highlighted. Issues such as cultural beliefs and attitudes would be critical. Participation in workshops for parents of the children in the school and the meeting of fellow parents and professionals in informal settings would be "a useful source of building family confidence and giving support to one another ". (cf. McConkey and O'Toole).

The role of the school's community rehabilitation facilitator would be to co-ordinate the workshops and to collaborate with the associations for people with disabilities as well as special education teachers, physiotherapists, agricultural advisers and interested agencies like non-governmental organisations and the private sector.

Issues such as funding of the workshops; continuous evaluation of the workshops; relevance and sustainability need to be explored.

5.2.2 Parental rights in decision-making

Parents need to participate in decision-making that involves, for example, discipline, the curriculum especially curriculum change and future employment of their children. This is critical if the school has to achieve the ultimate goal of citizenship for its students.

5.2.3 Parent-To-Parent Approach

Strategies to empower parents that could be employed by the school include the parent-to-parent approach using parents whose children have been at the school for a longer period. The new parents at the school will be identified and targeted according to the localities from which they come. Old parents would be assigned new parents and encouraged to visit the new parents in their own localities to forge links. In a district further north of the school, there is a vibrant community based rehabilitation programme led by an adult with a disability in conjunction with health services, parent-to-parent communication forms part of the process. A parent in the study claimed that a mother of a Grade 3 learner at the school is a member of the parent-to-parent approach strategy.

The aim of the parent-to-parent communication would be to create a network for parents whereby they can communuicate and support each other with skills for coping with the rearing of children with disabilities. The parent network will be a positive step towards parent organisations which would eventually act as advocacy groups. A strong parent organisation has been thought to be a basis for parental involvement in the school because as one teacher claimed: "parents need to know each other in order for them to work together." Parent networks would also facilitate the flow of information between the parents themselves, the community and the school and vice versa..

5.2.4 Capacity-building for residence staff

There is a connection between disability and basic health care. It is surprising, therefore, that the care-givers in the residences have no qualification in basic health care. The care-givers in the residence need to have access to modules in basic health care such as those offered by technical colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. Houseparents need to be knowledgeable

on nutrition, child development, child psychology, elementary physiology, and childcare to be able to execute their task efficiently. It should be borne in mind, that the present care-givers are members of the community. As members of the communities, they subscribe to the same beliefs, attitudes to disability and misconceptions that are prevalent in the rural areas. They also need to revisit and rethink their own beliefs and attitudes on disability.

Whenever new care-givers positions become available to the school, the school board should strive to recruit a few qualified care-givers. Qualified houseparents would be a great asset as a resource in the school's outreach programmes. Once employed, the care-givers could be further developed through courses in physiotherapy and occupational therapy to become qualified therapy assistants.

Care-givers drawn from different communities and districts would contribute much in the efforts to demystify the school and its activities to the parents of learners with disabilities. It is necessary for the residence staff to be representative of the districts from which the school draws its clientele. The researcher has experienced that people find it easier to talk about disability to a person they know and trust given that most people still think that giving birth to a child with disabilities is a disgrace.

5.2.5 Staff development for professionals

The school under study, was in the fortunate position of having an excellently planned weekly programme which allows time for staff development in a multi-professional team forum.. This programme needs further development. The time could be used by professionals to reflect on their practice and collaborate with one another to promote the best learning context for children. Suggested topics for discussion could include problem-solving skills, interviewing skills to enable the staff to establish the needs of parents, and counselling skills to deal with the emotional challenges of some of the learners identified in the documents as having been abandoned by their parents; traumatised through the death of one or both parents; victims of violence as well as car accident victims. The school has to be constantly aware that staff devvelopment should be conducted in ways that encourage collaboration between colleagues and between parents and the community. It also has to occur in the context of the particular school.Therefore it should aim at helping participants understand and deal

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with challenges that they meet, for example, the issue of parents as partners. Problems that occur at the school will be seen as opportunities for learning and development.

5.2.6 Enhancement of capacity of governing bodies

Parents and all the other elected members of the school governing body should be given hands-on training on the governace of the school. The costs of the capacity building interventions would be the concern of the provincial departments. The aim would be to provide introductory training for newly elected governing bodies to enable them to perform their functions; and to provide continuing training to governing bodies to promote the effective performance of their functions or to enable them to assume additional functions. This issue is included as a recommendation in the South African Schools Act, 1996. The capacity building for governing bodies in which parents are fully represented would be an invaluable strategy for the enhancement of parental involvement in the school because the South African Schools Act (1996) mandates that parents should comprise the majority of membership of governing bodies. Parents would thus be real partners involved in all major decisions in the school. Problems such as distance from the school and transport difficulties for parents would have to be solved jointly with the parents.

5.2.7 Communicating within the social context of the parents

The school has to explore creative ways of communicate more frequently with the parents. The school report should form part of a continuous communication process and not be the only means of communicating with the parents on their children's scholastic progress. The school report could be formatted in a way that is common to the region to enable the families to understand the content of school reports more clearly. Communication must be in the language most understood by the parent.

5.2.8 Development of the management board

The board of management needs to examine the philosophy that underlies parent involvement in the school. The governing body need to understand issues such as the current legislation with regard to parental involvement; the rights of learners; parents' rights; the significance of community-based special education; the value of inter-

agency collaboration for community-based special education; and how to ensure sustainability of projects. Parents of children with disabilities and communities remain the key factor in the success of education of the child with disabilities in the rural areas. The governing board has to ensure that there should be a clearly stated mission statement; a vision as well as aims of parental involvevment in the school. In order to review and monitor its progress, the governing body will have to recommend an evaluation procedure for the PTA, the Parent Involvement subcommittee and the duties of the community rehabilitation facilitator.

5.2.9 Constitution of the governing body

The governing board has to extend its membership to include the following sectors of the community as determined by the provincial department: parents of learners at the school; educators at the school; members of staff at the school who are not educators; representatives of the sponsoring body; representatives of organisations of parents of learners with special education needs; representatives of organisations of disabled persons; disabled persons and experts in appropriate fields of special needs education (cf. South African Schools Act, 1996: section 24). The school will have to work to put these recommendations into effect.

5.2.10 The issue of residential schools

It was clear from the responses of the parents and the learners that they were not in favour of centralised residential facilities. They found the separation from members of their families both traumatic and financially taxing. There was evidently a feeling of despondency because of the seeming hopelessness of the situation. Both the parents and the learners claimed that it was the unavoidable circumstances that forced them to use the available residential services away from their homes.

The ideal situation would be for children to attend classes at the community schools near to their homes. However, community schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal are generally poorly resourced in terms of physical structures such as school buildings and teaching and learning facilities. It is suggested that certain schools, within a cluster of schools, would need to be made accessible to children with physical disabilities through the

construction of ramps, special toilets with running water, wider doorways, accessible grounds.

Given the above realities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, an alternate system for education provision would have to be explored. One system would be to do away with large residential schools that serve children from virtually the whole province in the case of the school under study. Furthermore schools should not be defined by catergories of disability. A suggestion is smaller schools nearer communities where children live, enrolling children across disabilities.

It is likely that for some children, residential facilities are needed because of inaccessible terrain that would make daily transport difficult. Smaller cottage type residences catering for up to ten children servicing a cluster of schools would be another alternative. The advantages would be that:

- Parents will live nearer these facilities and will have more frequent contact with schools and the residential homes.

- Societal attitudes towards disability would be positively affected when the information and knowledge about disability and rehabilitation becomes vested in the communities, and is shared openly among all the people of the community.

- Self-reliance will eventually replace dependence on a few professionals available at one school. Community-based rehabilitation models could be an alternative to address community needs with respect to children with disabilities (cf. McConkey, 1995).

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APPENDIX 1

PARENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PERSONAL DETAILS
Gender of parent ....
Relationship..
Home Language...
No of siblings..
Type of child's disability....................................
Gender of child..
Parent's marital status..
With whom does the child live............................
Where do you live? Township/country homestead.......................................

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS
What is your church denomination?...
Parent(s) highest education level...
Where do parents work?...
Is the total earnings per month..
        > R500   < R500   > R 1 000   < R I 000

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL
How many times do you visit the school per month?....................................
Why...
What do you do at the school on these visits...
What would you like to do at the school on these visits?...............................
How many times would you like to visit the school?....................................
Why?...
Why do you find it impossible to visit the school?......................................
What do you think you can help with at the school?....................................
What can you teach the children at the school?..
Would you like to work with the teachers?...
Where would you like to be involved?..
What do you see as the main problem in interacting with the school?
Any other remarks...

PARENT ORGANISATION AND SUPPORT

Do you belong to an organisation or group ?...

Why.?...

Would you like to belong to a group of other parents of children with disabilities?

Why..

What form of support would you like to get from the school?..........................

Would you support a group meeting in your area?...

PERCEPTION OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EFFECT

Do you like being apart from your child...

Why...

What do you think of the socialisation of your child.....................................

What do you consider to be the benefit of a residential school?.....................

To you..

To your child...

What do you consider to be the disadvantage of a residential school...............

To you..

To your child...

What do you think could be done about this disadvantage?............................

Any other remarks...

TEACHERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PERSONAL DETAILS
Gender of teacher...
Std taught...
Size of class   ....
Language of instruction...................................
Experience in regular education.......... ....yrs
Experience in special education.................yrs
Extra qualification in Spec Ed.........................
No. of pupils in class........Boys.....Girls..........
Average age..

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS
How often do you meet parents?.........................
Why?...
When do you meet the parents?............................
Why?...
Have you ever contacted a parent?......................
Explain...
If you have, how did you contact the parent?.........
What was the response of the parent?....................
What reasons can you give for this response?.........
If not , how would you contact a parent................
Why?...
Any other comments...

PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
What do you think the role of the parent should be in
Assessment?...
Teaching and learning ....
Sports...
Policy making..
Any other remarks..
In which way do you wish the parents could contribute in your class?.....................................
Reasons...
In which areas have parents been contributing in the education of your class?............................
What do you consider to be the strengths of the parents?...
What do you consider to be the weaknesses of the parents?...
Do you consider the parents as having the necessary and adequate coping skills to rear children
with disabilities?...
Why?..
What do you think could be done to empower the parents i.r.o. the shortcomings you have
observed?............ ....

What would consider to be the greatest barrier to parental involvement?..............................
How do you think parental involvement can be enhanced?...
Do you think the parent can be a partner in the education your learners?...........................
Any other remarks?...

PARENT ORGANISATION
Are you a member of the PTA?...
Why?...
What other special educational organisation do you belong to?...
Do parents of your class belong to an organisation?...
Do you think the parents need to belong to an organisation?.....................Why?.....................
In which way does the social life at the school differ from the children's homes?.........................
Would you agree that the residential school life alienates the child socially?.........................
Why?...
Any other remarks?...

APPENDIX 3

HEADS OF DEPARTMENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. PERSONAL DETAILS :

1.1 Gender :--
1.2 Home language:-----------------------------------
1.3 Section Headed :--------------------------------
1.4 No. of teachers :--------------------------------
1.5 Language of instruction in the Dept:----------
1.6 Experience in regular education:--------------
1.7 Experience in special education:--------------
1.8 Extra qualification in Special Education:---

2. INTERACTION WITH PARENTS
2.1 How often do you meet parents ? --
2.2 When?-- Why?--------------------------------
2.3 Have you ever contacted a parent?--
2.4 Why ?--- How? ----------------------------------
2.5 What was the response of the parent? --
2.6 What reasons can you give for this response ? ---
2.7 Any other remarks?--

3. PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
3.1 What do you think the role of the parent should be in:
      Assessment ?--
      Teaching and learning ?--
      Sports ?---
      Policy making ?--
3.2 In which areas have parents been participating in the education of their children?----
3.3 What would you consider to be the strengths of the parents?----------------------------
3.4 What do you consider to be the weaknesses of the parents ?----------------------------
3.5 What do you think could be done to empower the parents i.r.o. the shortcomings you
    have observed ?--
3.6 What would you consider to be the greatest barrier to parental involvement?---------
3.7 How do you think parental involvement can be enhanced? ----------------------------
3.8 Do you think the parent can be a partner in the education of your pupils ?Explain:
3.9 What is your impression of the parents ?---
3.10 Your comments on the parenting skills of the school's parents :---------------------

4. PARENT ORGANISATION
4.1 Are you a member of the PTA? Why ?--
4.2 What other special educational organisation do you belong to ?----------------------
4.3 To which organisation do parents belong ? ---
4.4 Do you think the parents need to belong to an organisation ?------------------------

Why?---

4.5 Any other remarks :---

5. PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTS OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLING

5.1 In which way does the social life at school differ from the children's homes ?-------

5.2 Would you agree that residential schooling alienates the child socially from his family?

5.3 Any other remarks :--

APPENDIX 4

PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1.PERSONAL DETAILS

    1.1 Gender...

    1.2 Home language...

    1.3 Total educational experience...........................

    1.4 Experience in Special Education...................

    1.5 Qualification in Special Ed...........................

    1.6 How long as principal of the school...............

2.BACKGROUND DETAILS

    2.1 Is the staff contingent :   growing ?................. falling ?.................static ?..................

        Why ?...

    2.2 Is the student enrolment: growing ? .... static...............................

        Why ? ....

    2.3 How would you describe the parents of your school ?...

        Give reasons for your answer.....................

    2.4 How would you rate employment opportunities in this locality..............................

    2.5 Any further remarks.............................

3. PARENT ORGANISATION

    3.1 Does the school have a PTA ?.......................

    3.2 What are the basic aims of the PTA ?..............

    3.3 On which days does the PTA meet?.................

    3.4 Who chairs the PTA ?....................................

    3.5 Any other remarks ?.....................................

4.PARENT INVOLVEMENT

    4.1 What is the policy regarding parents' visits to the school ?.....................................

    4.2 How is the parents' response ?.............................

    4.3 Why do you think parents respond in this way ?.....

    4.4 Do the parents seem eager to discuss the children's progress with the teachers?

    4.5 How are parents involved on the following school-based activities ?

        assessment ?................................ therapy ?...........................

        children's learning?.......................... child support?................................

        fund-raising ?................................. policy issues............................

    4.6 How many parents can be easily involved ?...

    4.7 How can parental involvement be enhanced ?....................................

    4.8 What barriers to parental involvement exist ?.....................................

5.PARENT EMPOWERMENT

    5.1 What are your comments on the child-rearing skills of the parents?............................

    5.2 What are your comments on the extended family system culture as you observe it in your   school?

    5.3 What strategies for parent empowerment are in place the school?...............................

    5.4 How can the strategies for empowerment be sustained?

APPENDIX 5

LEARNERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1.Niyafisa yini ukuba abazali benu beze njalo ukuzonivakashela lapha esikoleni?
.Do you wish your parents to visit you frequently here at school?

....

....Isizathu? Why?------------------

----

2. Bangaki lapha phakathi kwenu abavame ukuvakashela ekhaya?
   How many of you here visit home often? Show by raising your hand..

----

3. Nina eningavakashi njalo emakhaya yini enivimbayo?
   Those that do not visit home, what prevents you from visiting?

----

4. Abazali benu belekelela ngani lapha esikoleni?
   In which ways do your parents contribute in the school here?

----

5. Yikuphi okunye eningafisa ukuba abazali belekelele ngakho lapha esikoleni?
   In which other ways do you wish your parents could contribute further?

----

6. Kukhona yini enafika ningakwazi esenikufundile lapha ngaphandle kokufunda?
   Is there any other thing you have learnt here besides the school subjects?

----

7. Ngabe izimfundiso zasemakini ziyefana nezalapha esikoleni?
   Do you find a similarity between the teachings of the school and your homes?-------------

----

8. Impilo jikelele yasemakhaya ifana kanjani nalena yasesikoleni?In which way is life
   in general here at school similar to life at your homes?

----

9. Yehluke kanjani impilo yalapha kweyasemakhaya---
   How does school life differ from life at home?

----

10. Kumnandi yini ukufunda nihlala esikoleni?
    Is boarding enjoyable?

11. Yini eniyizuzayo?
    What do you think you gain by being in a boarding house?

----

12. Abazali bona basizakala kanjani uma ningekho emakhaya?
    In which way do your parents benefit through your absence from home?

----

13. Yini okubi ngokufunda uhlala esikoleni?
    What are the disadvantages of boarding school?

----

14. Ungakujabulela na ukufunda ngakini?
    Would you like to attend school in your own localities?

----

15. Uhulumeni angasiza kanjani emfundweni yenu?
    How can the government contribute in your education?

----

16. Isikole sona singasiza kanjani ekufundiseni abantwana abakhubazekile?
    How can this school contribute in the education of children with disabilities?

----

17. Ningafisa yini ukuba abazali benu banikhulumele:
    Would you wish your parents to advocate for you:

    Esikoleni---
    At the school

Kuhulumeni---
To the government

18. Kukhona yini okunye enifisa ukukuphawula ngokubambisana phakathi kwabazali
    nesikole?
    Any further remarks on the collaboration between the school and the parents?