Empowering parents for homework support

Jacques Jurgens Theron

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Empowering parents for homework support

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

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PRETORIA

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to
my loving parents, Renata and Anton,
as well as my grandparents
Johan (Boet) and Ester Theron and
Jan Adriaan and Irene' de Beer

I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank the following individuals:

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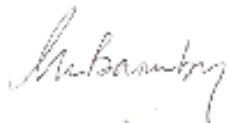alexabarnby@gmail.com
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To whom it may concern

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Empowering parents for homework support

which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by e for a degree at this or any other institutuion.

Jacques Jurgens Theron

April 2015

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ABSTRACT

Homework renders parents frustrated and disempowered. Parents often lack sufficient guidance in order to support their children with homework. Thus parents feel disconnected from the learning process. Subsequently, they seek control within their family-centred practices. Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment was used to identify key components of a child's learning and development and the implications for parent involvement in homework. These components highlight important aspects within the learning process—starting with Parenting supports; Child-learning opportunities; and Family and community supports and resources.

One family was selected to participate in this case study. The research was conducted at the participants' home. The methodology consisted of qualitative research relying on personal and official documents, photos, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, observations and a reflective journal for data collection. The experiences were documented and reported through narrative inquiry. The data analysis resulted in themes and categories.

The findings revealed that effective communication is essential to strengthening parenting support with homework. Parents' attitudes towards homework and other school requirements have a fundamental influence on how the child perceives school—this paves the way towards child-learning opportunities at home. For learning opportunities to be realised however, the child needs to develop intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the need for family and community supports and resources requires of parents to become involved in the learning process. They should work with the teachers in finding alternative ways to support their child. Incorporating additional support strengthen interactions with the school, thus, creating a social network which assists in making informed decisions regarding the child's learning and development.

Key words:

- Empowerment
- Parents
- Homework
- Support

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CHAPTER 1
EMPOWERING PARENTS FOR HOMEWORK SUPPORT

> *Alex Dunphy: I can't believe it. I got a "B" on my paper.*
>
> *Phil Dunphy: Good for you.*
>
> *Claire Dunphy: Yeah.*
>
> *Alex Dunphy: No, it would be good for you. It's terrible for me. Thanks to your mouldy encyclopedias, my take on mitosis was completely out of date. They don't even call it "protoplasm" anymore. It's "cytoplasm".*
>
> *Claire Dunphy: Well, you could have asked one of us.*
>
> *Alex Dunphy: Now you're making jokes?*
>
> *Claire Dunphy: I'm not making a joke.*
>
> *Alex Dunphy: Really? What's the difference between a gamete and a zygote?*
>
> *[Claire is at a loss for words]*
>
> *Phil Dunphy: Don't fall for it, Claire. She's just making up words.*

The above extract is a scene taken from the hit American TV show, *"Modern Family"*, (Season 2) on ABC. The scene was taken from an episode entitled "Unplugged" which was screened in 2010 with Alex Dunphy and her parents, Phil and Claire. The show highlights issues facing families – from relationships to schoolwork. Although the show is entirely fictional, it does portray a significant amount of truth about the "modern family" of today.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGB) is tasked with ensuring that the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, which stipulates community participation and decision-making in school governance, is implemented. In order to review progress, an evaluation of "capacitating sound public-school governance" and the improvement in parental involvement was conducted in 2012 (*Pretoria News*, 2012b:14).

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 stipulates that school governing bodies (SGBs) must include parents, teachers and non-teaching members of staff – with parents comprising the majority of governing body members (Anderson, Dodd & Roos, 2012:218). This highlights the fact that parents have a significant role to play in their children's learning. However, parents often experience challenges in this regard, including not possessing the requisite knowledge or the skills to carry out this role, while teachers often do not provide parents with sufficient effective guidance.

Despite the fact that this is viewed from the perspective of the school governing body, I deemed it necessary to break it down into smaller and, yet, equally important components of school governance. The partnership between parents and schools is aimed at creating positive and open communication (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2002:292). This partnership encompasses an interconnectedness of multiple systems, including the individual, the family and the community (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008:77). It is incumbent on these partners to ensure that learners are given the best education and that schools function optimally (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2001:19).

Commitment on the part of parents with regard to school and homework results in positive communication with the learners and leads to a better understanding of the home–school interaction perspective (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel & Green. 2004). Such improved interactions will mean parents will become better equipped to involve themselves in their children's learning.

However, Dietz and Whale (1997:26–28) suggest that the difficulty in involving parents often stems from (1) a lack of time on the part of parents to spend with their children as a result of frantic work schedules, (2) inadequate guidance with regard to helping with schoolwork, with parents often learning their parenting skills through "trial and error", and (3) the failure to meet basic needs, including financial and medical needs.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:87) maintain that home learning takes place through parental guidance and homework supervision. They view homework as a significant factor in a child's learning process. The establishment of a relationship between the home and the school helps to bring about shared interests in a child's learning and development (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:14). Moore (1992:132) refers to parental involvement as a "two-way street". Grant and Ray (2010:392) identify a home-school connection as an ongoing communication between the school and families about the educational needs of children.

Parents who become involved in their children's homework want to know how to help in order to enable their children to succeed. There is a growing concern among parents regarding homework, with parents often feeling overwhelmed when it comes to assisting with their children's learning. It would, thus, appear that the issue of homework is the cause of considerable anxiety for families. Parents want to help, "but find themselves baffled by new teaching styles and techniques" (*International Express,* 2012:8).

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2002:292) comment on the importance of communication between the teacher and parents concerning the parents' interaction with their children during learning activities at home. Epstein (1995:221) highlights five steps as guidelines for supporting parents in helping with their children's homework, namely, establishing an action team; obtaining a support system; identifying a starting point; developing a plan of action; and continuously planning and working to improve the plan.

Van Voorhis (2011:222) postulates that the three aspects pertaining to the cost and benefits of homework include time; homework design; and family involvement. The involvement of parents in homework allows for unambiguous communication between home and school with this connection enabling learners to share their work with their parents (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2002:289). However, if parents are to be involved in homework, it is essential that they receive guidance in the form of shared observations in terms of the child's progress; identifying and discussing a child's strengths and interests; clarification of the instructional programmes; the acknowledgement of emotional reactions to a situation; and the ability to organise together. All these factors will be contextualised and placed into the context of empowering parents for homework support (Student Guide, 2013).

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

An article in the *Pretoria News*, entitled "Teachers cannot do their job without parents' help" (2012a:13), quoted the Gauteng Provincial Premier, Nomvula Mokonyane, urging parents to become involved in their children's education and adding that "parents need to help teachers help their children." One of the aims of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (South Africa, 1996) is to establish a partnership between all the stakeholders that is in the best interests of the school, parents, learners, teachers, and members of the community (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2001:19). Oosthuizen, Rossouw and Smit (2009:281) maintain that parents may contribute to their children's academic success by involving themselves either formally or informally in various capacities which have a direct impact on the quality of the teaching and learning process. Teachers want the parents to support their children's learning (Epstein, 2011:521).

However, parents experience numerous challenges which include not possessing the knowledge or the skills required to assist their children while teachers often do not provide sufficient effective guidance to parents (Clarke, 2007:174). Professor John Ashton, president of the Faculty of Public Health in the United Kingdom, called for state-funded classes which would provide support to families by helping them combat, amongst other things, increasing levels of child obesity, mental distress and underachievement (Donnelly, 2015). In an interview with *The Daily Telegraph* (17 January 2015), Professor Ashton said that the aim of such "nanny state" interventions is to protect the most vulnerable families and also to instil radical changes in the lifestyles of Britons to promote healthier habits.

Professor Ashton maintained that it is not possible to attribute these burdens to a specific social class, adding that even the most affluent families require guidance and that parenting classes are needed to ensure the health and wellbeing of children. There is a growing need for help to parents and proper guidelines to assist them. For example, information on basic issues such as recommended bedtimes for different ages would help parents enormously. "We've sort of thrown the baby out with the bathwater," he added in an interview with the

Redi Thlabi Show on 702 Talk Radio and Cape Talk (09 February 2015). Ashton emphasised the need to introduce adequate structures in households. Ashton also discussed the possibility of introducing similar initiatives in South Africa. Talking on the show, The guest speaker highlighted parental tips which he and some of his esteemed colleagues had published in *The Daily Telegraph* (17 January 2015) in terms of which they had suggested establishing sound communication and urging parents to get to know their children. They highlighted the importance of spending quality time together, for example, by a proper dinner time. In other words, they recommended creating a family culture in order to build a healthy family lifestyle. Professor Ashton is adamant that there needs to be adequate time set aside in households across all economic, social and ethnic groups throughout the world. One of the major concerns he highlighted was modern technology, asserting that "Children are growing up in a world that is overloaded, there is never silence, there is always pressure, especially with the internet and video games". The author cautioned parents that this situation only gets worse as children grow up. Professor Ashton argued that parents are desperate for support, particularly during the teenage years. However, he pointed out that, by the time the child is a teenager, the challenges are already too great while numerous opportunities have already been missed. The article in *The Daily Telegraph* (17 January 2015) highlighted how essential it is that parents listen so that they know what is going on and also the importance of establishing sound communication channels between the relevant groups and individuals involved in the learning process. During his interview Professor Ashton remarked that the home and school need to work "hand in glove", supporting each other through good communication. Hosting events for parents in order to share knowledge and ideas helps to create an environment conducive to "good habits". In essence, parents need to be supported and helped. "Parenting is the most important thing you do, but people are simply left to their own devices," Professor John Ashton concluded.

The purpose of this study is to empower parents by guiding them so that they are able to support their children with their homework.

The research involved a case study of one family. I intended to empower the parents by guiding them through their child's learning process, thus equipping them with knowledge and skills which they could use as part of their family-centred practices (a concept that shall be explained later) and, as a result, feel more empowered as they assist the child with homework. I chose homework for the context of this study because homework is such a key issue, not only throughout a child's learning process, but also because it creates a "window" for parents, enabling them to see into what is taking place at school and also what is required of them and the child at home.

The participants in the study included a middle class family – a mother, a father, and their twelve year old son who was in Grade 6 at a school in Guateng. I am a learning support teacher and I provide my services on a private basis to this particular family. Clarke

(2007:174) highlights the important contributions parents may make to school activities, providing the parents are guided appropriately.

I encouraged the parents to take note of how we, as human beings, learn and I endeavoured to guide them in the process. The child and his parents were active participants in the study. They all admitted to feeling overwhelmed by what the school requires of the child as well as of them as parents. Their willingness to improve their involvement in their child's homework was evident as was their lack of adequate knowledge and skills to do so. As a result, the parents felt disempowered or "unplugged" throughout their child's learning process. I intended to develop a partnership with the participants (Van Voorhis, 2011:222) in order to guide them and, thus, to enable them to support the child with homework. In this context empowerment referred to the equal participation of every individual involved in the purpose of learning from each other (Moloi, 2005:78).

George W. Holden, a psychologist at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, commented on creating pathways or trajectories in terms of which parents guide and support their children. Holden highlighted factors such as the family's resources and the quality of the parent-child relationship, among others, suggesting that "effective parenting involves guiding children in such a way as to ensure that they are developing along positive trajectories" (Nauert, 2010).

It is these "paths" that I wished to take with the family who participated in my study and embark on a journey of empowering parents for homework support.

1.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated for the purpose of the study.

1.3.1   MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How can parents become empowered to support with homework?

1.3.2   SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

❖   **Secondary question 1**
What is the role of the learning support teacher in guiding the parents?

❖   **Secondary question 2**
How can parents' confidence be enhanced through guidance in homework support?

❖   **Secondary question 3**
What is the experience of the child who participated in the study of parental support with homework?

1.4   RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to investigate how parents may become empowered to support with homework.

Key words: Empowerment, Parents, Support, Homework

1.5   CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

It is imperative to note that "guidance" was not one of the key words highlighted in the statement of the purpose of the study. However, within the context of the study, the support and guidance given to the parents in order to enable them to assist with homework provide a sense of security during the child's learning and development, thus, guiding the parents towards a sense of empowerment as a result of the exploration of all the various "avenues" along the way. Guidance may be defined as an act of leadership that gives direction through advice on educational, vocational or psychological matters (Collins English Dictionary, 2009) while, at the same time, ensuring adequate management, conduct, supervision, control and governance (Random House Dictionary, 2014).

The key words are discussed as follows in the context of their use in the study.

1.5.1   EMPOWERMENT

Radebe (2007:135) defines empowerment as a dynamic process that develops over time. It includes acquiring resources, power, influence or a voice in decision-making. According to Radebe (2007:135), empowerment is a linkage with other individuals and is forged through participation. This interaction creates opportunities for decision-making (Epstein, 2011:493), shared leadership, and mutual influence among members (Zimmerman, 2000 in Radebe, 2007:142). Thus, it is essential that participation exist at all levels through encouragement, motivation, enthusiasm, support and co-ordination (Moloi, 2005:78). Therefore, empowerment emphasises control and instilling more confidence in a situation than may otherwise have been the case (Hornby 2010).

1.5.2   PARENTS

Parenting refers to the establishment of home environments that support a child's[ren's] social, cognitive, emotional and physical wellbeing (Cox-Petersen, 2011:287). The authority and responsibility of parents to decide on the nature and context of the education of their children arises *ex lege* by virtue of parentage (Spiro, 1985:43). Thus, parents possess "parental power" and are legally obligated to make decisions regarding the education of their child(ren) and which are in the best interests of the child(ren). Parents rely on various

parenting styles that are often subjective because of the parents' life experiences (Jacobson, 2008 in Goodman, 2008:101).

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to describe the concept of "parental Involvement", not as a key word but, rather, to highlight the role of the parents and their support throughout the learning process. Epstein (1996) refers to parental involvement as the integration of the school, family and community. Moles (1992 in Lim, 2003:135) states that parental involvement may take a variety of forms and that it entails activities that "empower parents in working on behalf of their children's learning and development".

Parents who are involved in the whole process contribute to providing information about the child in question. Through such collaboration, parents become "active partners" in preventing learning difficulties from developing in the future (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010:300). Parental involvement is a collaborative partnership that serves the best interests for the learner, either at school or at home with the purpose of improving the academic achievement of the learner (Epstein et al. 2002).

1.5.3   HOMEWORK

Homework is viewed as "a school requirement for successful child learning". This implies that parents must create an environment which is similar to that of the classroom in order to support the homework process (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong & Jones. 2001:202).

Homework is often the only source of interaction which parents have with the school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:16). Cosden, Morrison, Albanese and Macias (2001) describe the communication between parents and the school as a "bridge" between the home and the school. Homework gives the learner, parents and school the opportunity to share an interest in the child's progress (Epstein, Simon & Salinas 1997).

1.5.4   SUPPORT

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby 2010) defines support as the lending of help or encouragement. For the purpose of this study the teacher lends support to help and encourage parents to become involved in their child's homework and empower them so that they, in return, may acquire the knowledge and skills required to provide support to the child throughout the learning process (Agnew-Tally & Mott, 2010:38). This is in line with Moloi's (2005:78) assertion about the need for equal participation for effective empowerment. In this regard, the parents (the participants in this study) wanted to know how they could help with their child's homework. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) suggest that such "help" encompasses encouragement, motivation, monitoring of work, celebration of progress and conducting interactions that will help children to complete their homework and achieve

academically as a result of the mutual support arising from communication between the parents and the teacher (Swap 1993, in Decker & Decker, 2003:702003:71).

The key words discussed above are of conceptual as well as contextual significance to the following theoretical components.

1.6   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Carl Dunst viewed his body of work as fundamental to empowering families by identifying key components in a child's learning and development process and emphasising how these components interact throughout the learning process (Louw & Kail, 2007:27). Dunst's framework was selected for the purpose of this study and, thus, of understanding how parents may become empowered to support with homework. An explanation of the theoretical framework follows.
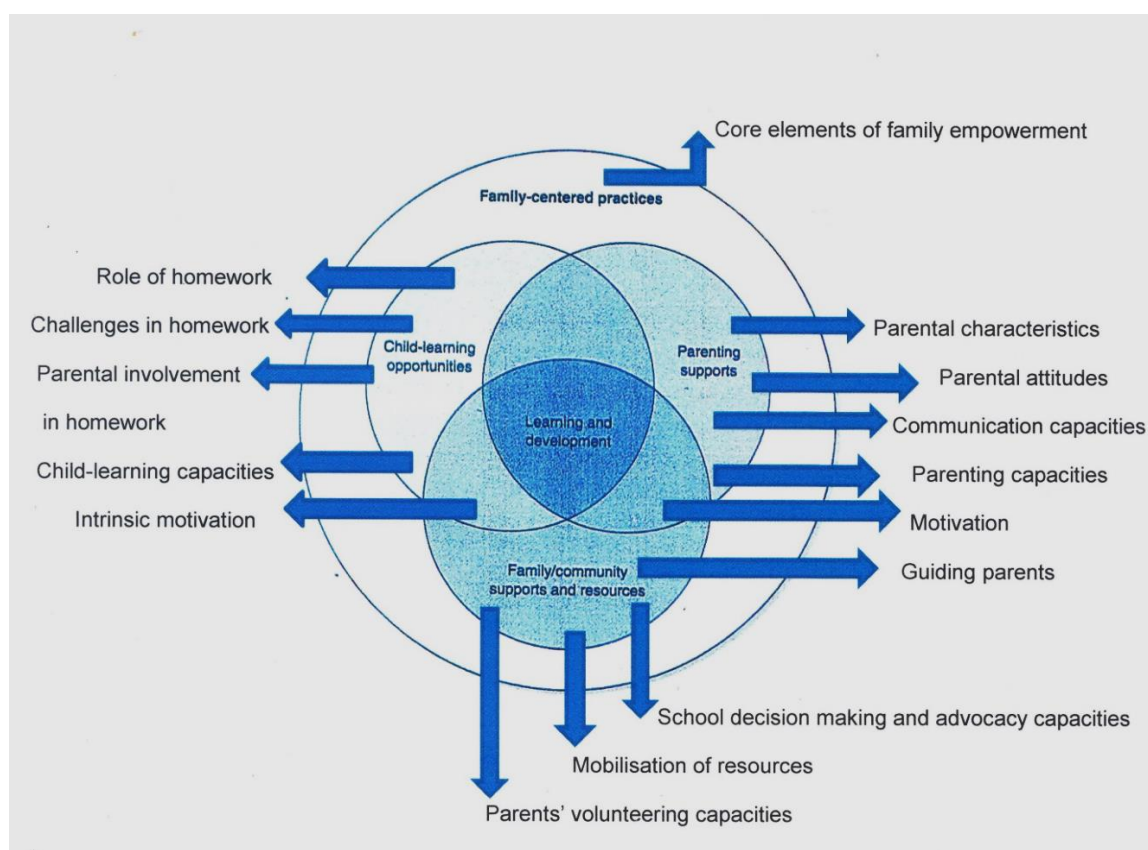
Figure 1.1:   Schematic layout of Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment (Carl Dunst, 2004)

The theoretical framework aims at empowering families by alluding to three individual components, namely, support for parents; child-learning opportunities; and family and community support and resources. These components all work together in the establishment of successful family-centred practices with the main focus on a child's learning and development (Pressley & McCormick, 2007:285).

According to Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment, each component encompasses attributes with various capacities which contribute significantly to the learning process and, thus, influence the dynamics of family-centred practices (Dunst, 2004:5). These components, together with their various capacities are described in the literature review based on the schematic layout presented in Figure 1.1. Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive depiction using an in-depth theoretical perspective on empowering parents for homework support (section 2.2). In addition, for the purpose of this study, the same schematic layout is adapted and incorporated to help to structure the data collected in a logical manner to facilitate the data analysis and the reporting of the research findings (Chapter 4 section 4.3).

An overview of the key aspects regarding a child's learning and development follows. This overview starts by discussing the concept of homework and emphasising the role of homework; challenges involved in homework; and parental involvement in homework (section 2.3). It is important to note that, although homework falls within the scope of child-learning opportunities, in the context of this study it is also viewed as a separate component as it forms part of the conceptual framework. In addition, for the purpose of this study, the support from parents is assigned to homework. The literature review highlights parenting supports (including parental characteristics; parental attitudes; communication capacities; and parenting capacities) (section 2.4). This is followed by a brief description of child-learning opportunities (including intrinsic motivation) (section 2.5) Family and community support and resources in relation to school decision-making and advocacy capacities; mobilisation of resources and the volunteering capacities of parents are then explained (section 2.6). Finally, the literature review indicates how the interactions of all these factors work together on various levels during the learning process and also play a significant role in strengthening family-centred practices (section 2.7).

1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review briefly discusses each individual component of the theoretical framework in the context of this study. A more in-depth discussion follows in the next chapter (section 2.2).

1.7.1 HOMEWORK

According to Van Voorhis (2011:224), homework fosters positive attitudes and skills; improves academic achievement and promotes family involvement during the learning process. In addition, homework encourages the development of self-regulated learning and self-belief while the child learns how to set goals; manage the time required to complete assignments; organise the learning environment and maintain concentration and self-efficacy (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011:196).

Challenges in respect to homework include maintaining the same rigorous consistency in terms of attitude towards homework and involvement on the part of the parents and their children throughout the learning process. It must also be borne in mind that the parents' perceptions about the content of the homework and its importance as well as their perceptions about their children's capacity to meet the homework requirements may cloud the parents' judgement and result in frustration and anxiety in the home (Van Voorhis, 2011:224). The level of parental involvement is vital in establishing the correct approach to homework. Barbour (2010:13) postulates that, in the main, the involvement of the parents during homework sessions leads to a significant improvement in the children's academic achievements.

In addition to the substance that homework brings to the learning process, it is important for parents to acknowledge the value of homework in respect of both learning and development. It is, thus, essential that parents develop a positive attitude towards homework and communicate such an attitude by motivating their children and, in this way, creating an environment that is conducive to learning and development (Cox-Petersen, 2011:111). Some of which, among others, are key aspects of the following components, namely, support for parents and child-learning opportunities.

1.7.2 PARENTING SUPPORTS

Parenting support encompasses the experiences that contribute to the knowledge and skills of parents and that increase the parents' confidence, thus enabling them to participate fully in their children's learning process (Agnew-Tally & Mott, 2010:38). The attitudes of parents toward homework and their understanding of the child's academic progress are significant factors influencing a child's learning and development (Shah, 2001:129).

Parents who communicate with the school and who involve themselves in various capacities in the school dynamics (Decker & Decker, 2003:59) may be said to be involved on a behavioural level, a personal level, and a cognitive or intellectual level (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:100). In addition, the characteristics of the parents (Eccles & Harold, 1993:570), and the roles they play are essential factors in determining a child's capacity to learn (Grant & Ray (2010:224).

In order to do so it is necessary to examine the aspect of motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:103), including the reasons why parents choose to become involved in the learning process, the parents' role construction; the parents' sense of efficacy; and the general invitations, demands and opportunities for parental involvement which emanate from the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997:3).

With these aspects in place, the parents are able to create a positive environment in which the child may work (Barbour, 2010:13). This mindset facilitates the development of a

relationship between the school and the parents (Lim, 2003:136) and, more significantly, it also strengthens the bond between parents and their children (Woolfolk, 2007:73), thus helping to ensure further learning opportunities for the children.

1.7.3   CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

It is imperative that children are intrinsically motivated and self-directed in order to find enjoyment in their schoolwork, become critical thinkers, develop the ability to retain knowledge, use creativity in their work, and reflect on their own academic progress (Stolk & Martello, 2013). Eggen and Kauchak (2012:49) are of opinion that experiences which present a child with a challenge help to create a goal towards which the child may strive to work. It is, however, important for a child to develop an interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006:114–115) that may lead to autonomy (Ames, 1992:267).

These interests are formed through various interactions and access to resources outside of the home environment – a fundamental aspect of family and community support and resources.

1.7.4   FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

This interaction allows for the exchange of information via the sharing of resources with the aim of working together to achieve specific goals. Such collaboration ensures an environment which is conducive to the optimal use of resources; teamwork; high quality outcomes; an integration of multiple perspectives; the strengthening of communication, the building of trust; organisational and individual learning; and the likelihood of important outcomes being achieved (Cox-Petersen, 2011:229).

The access to and the control over resources ensures that families feel empowered (Cochran & Dean, 1991:266). It is, therefore, necessary to mobilise the required resources (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette & Hamby, 1991 in the Center for Mental Health in School at UCLA, 2011:5) and establish support systems (Firestone, 1991 in Pressley & McCormick, 2007:287).

Parents who volunteer at schools or in various other capacities, for example, to help with homework or extracurricular activities, tend to feel valued (Decker & Decker, 2003:62). Their involvement in the child's learning and development may take place either directly or indirectly. However, whether direct or indirect, such involvement broadens the support system and strengthens the trust and relationships between all the role players responsible for making important decisions for the child throughout the learning process.

Finally, from a theoretical perspective, Carl Dunst's model highlights family empowerment. Thus, each circle in the framework represents factors which contribute to a child's learning

and development. In the context of this study, each circle is a component which includes factors that help strengthen the circles as a result of the interconnectedness between the systems, with the components influencing each other throughout the learning process. As the components are strengthened, the outer circle, namely, the family-centred practices, grow stronger with the parents becoming empowered (Pressley & McCormick, 2007:285).

1.7.5 FAMILY-CENTRED PRACTICES

Family-centred practices include the following three main aspects: (1) the emphasis on strengths, not weaknesses; (2) the ability to make informed decisions and maintain control over sought after resources; and (3) the development of collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008:136). Family-centred practices focus on shared information between the parents and professionals, such as the teachers or learning support specialists, and are a significant factor in the decision-making process regarding the child's learning (Dunst, 2002:139). In addition, the parents' influence on a child's learning and development depends on both the type of learning environment which the parents create at home and also the way in which they communicate their attitude towards homework (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:95).

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design maps out the journey on which the researcher embarks. It indicates all the various stops made and the avenues taken by the researcher from the starting point to the final destination. These navigations pinpoint the general research assumptions of the researcher and are carried through on the path of the detailed methods used to conduct the study in question (Creswell, 2009:3). In addition, the research design highlights the decisions made during the research journey; emphasising the worldview in order to (1) place the particular study in context; (2) divulge the nature of the inquiry; and (3) present the methods of data collection and data analysis (all of which shall be discussed individually). Creswell (2009:3) maintains that the research design ought to focus on the research problem; reflect the researcher's personal experiences; and speak to the desired audience.

The following aspects shall be discussed below, namely, the research paradigm; qualitative research and the case study.

1.8.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm places in perspective the way in which the researcher views the world while also placing the phenomenon under investigation in context (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). In other words, the research paradigm highlights the ontological, as well as the epistemological, perspective. The ontology is concerned with the way in which a person views the world, whereas the epistemology focuses on how that person thinks a particular

phenomenon ought to be studied. This involves being placed in a particular situation – in the context of this study forming part of a child learning process. Then, as a result of that situation, a particular action needs to be taken (in the context of this study working towards empowering parents for homework support) and, finally, as a result of that action, there are certain consequences (Creswell, 2009:10).

According to Mouton (2001:138), *World 1* of the three worlds framework and different forms of knowledge pertain to the everyday life of ordinary people. In addition, *World 1* emphasises lay knowledge – the type of knowledge that people use to cope effectively with their everyday tasks. I intend to work from the perspective of constructivism. Constructivists view the same phenomenon from multiple realities (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). In the context of this study, the child's learning process is seen through the eyes of the parents, the child and the researcher as both researcher and learning support teacher. Furthermore, the sense of empowerment is also viewed in the context of this single case and is described from the vantage point of each individual concerned using the narrative inquiry (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). The following table briefly highlights the research components selected for the purpose of this study.

Table 1.1:   Summary of the methods used for the purpose of this study

Research component	Contextual significance
Ontology	The reality of the situation can be known only by the parents who personally experience the need to be empowered so that they are able to support their children with their homework.
Epistemology	These parents, who experience the learning and development, construct knowledge through self-conscious action throughout the learning process. Thus, it is essential that partnerships develop through interaction with the various components of the learning process. A holistic perspective is required to study the phenomenon under investigation in context.
Methodology	The use of narrative inquiry.
Data collection and analysis	• Personal and official documents • Semi- structured interviews • Informal conversations • Observations • Personal narrative and lived experiences in written text
Style of writing and reporting	The interviews together with the questions posed to the participants and the participants' personal accounts during the learning process are written in a narrative form.

1.8.2   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research involves assumptions; a worldview and a theoretical perspective which, for the purpose of this study, relies on Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family

Empowerment and an investigation of a phenomenon which requires specific research questions (Creswell, 2007:37).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:321–324), there are nine key characteristics of qualitative research, namely, a natural setting; context sensitivity; direct data collection; rich narrative description; process orientation; inductive data analysis; participant perspectives; emergent designs, and complexity of understanding and explanation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:321). Some of these characteristics are described in this chapter. There is an extended and more comprehensive discussion of these characteristics in the next on the research methodology used in the study.

1.8.3 CASE STUDY

In the context of this study, the concept of the case study corresponds with the view of Schram (2006:107) that "its strategic value lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from the single case". Kyburz-Graber (2004:7) alludes to the following five quality criteria pertaining to case studies, namely, a theoretical basis and case study protocol; crystallisation in methods and procedures; documentation of the case study research project and case study report; designing a chain of evidence; and the logic of generalisation. Although the context in which this study takes place is unique to the particular family's involvement with their child's learning process, it is nevertheless possible to make certain generalisations from a holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of the various components as seen from a theoretical basis. Accordingly, the factors which contribute to each component (whether the component forms part of parenting support, child-learning opportunities, family and community support and resources, or family-centred practices) may differ, depending on the needs of each individual child. However, the need for empowerment (irrespective of the context) applies to all 'modern families'.

The focus of this study is one entity, namely, the one family selected to participate in the study. A case study examines a situation over time and in detail. Stake (in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:345) comments that a case is selected on the basis of a unique time, place and context. As a result of my homework sessions with the child and in view of the purpose of the study, this notion of the selection of a case on the basis of a unique time, place and context was, therefore, most appropriate. The objective of the study was to investigate this single bounded system, including the school, parents and the home environment, in a respectful way (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:25). Bell (2010:8) suggests that the case study provides the individual researcher with the opportunity to study one aspect of a problem in depth and, thus, the case study was deemed particularly appropriate to an investigation of the way in which parents may be empowered to support their children with homework. In addition, a case study is a choice of what to study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320) with an investigation into how parents may be empowered to support

with homework meeting this criterion. The significance of the criteria mentioned above is described in light of the following research methods.

1.9   RESEARCH METHODS

Welman et al. (2005:193) define research methods as approaches to the investigation of a group or individuals within a particular context. The following methods were chosen specifically to investigate this case study.

1.9.1   THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the study comprised a middle class family – a mother, a father, and their twelve year old son who was in Grade 6 at a school in Gauteng. For the purpose of the study, my participants and I agreed verbally to the use of pseudonyms throughout the study in order to protect and adhere to the participants' right to both confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, I also clearly stipulated and explained the terms in the letter of consent which they signed in good faith. The table below presents the participants, the pseudonyms selected and the participants' actual status for the purpose of establishing the context of the study. These pseudonyms were used during the interviews which were conducted for the purpose of the data gathering and data analysis processes.

Participant	Character name	Status
Mother	Megan	Stay at home mom
Farther	Philip	Medical practitioner
Child	Bryan	Grade 6 learner

1.9.2   THE RESEARCH SITE

The research site was the family's residence. My learning support sessions take place at the family's home as the parents and I had observed that the child was more comfortable in this familiar setting. We had our own workspace which we had named *'The Homework-zone'.* The learning support sessions were structured in such a way so as to accommodate the learner and his parents and they took place on a daily basis.

1.9.3   MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

At the time of the study I had been Bryan's learning support teacher for more than a year, working with Bryan after school in several capacities but assisting him primarily with his homework and examination preparation. Since the start of the sessions he had shown significant academic improvement. However, his parents required additional help and "just some guidance" (as they expressed it) in order to support their son academically. Both parents were intrigued with my research topic and felt that could benefit from participating in the study.

Thus, my role was to participate in the learning process in a learning support capacity and to guide these parents so as to enable them to provide homework support and, thus, to give them a sense of empowerment.

1.10   DATA COLLECTION

The following table presents the data collections methods used in the study:

Table 1.2:   The data collection process

Data collection technique	Documentation method	Data source
1. Documents: personal and official documents	Verbatim transcription	The child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, class tests and examination papers, and report cards
2. Semi-structured interviews	Verbatim transcription and the compilation of a reflective journal	Reflective journal
3. Informal conversations	Verbatim transcription	The use of excerpts from my personal journal in the form of a narrative
4. Reflective journal	The researcher compiled a reflective diary	Personal experiences during and after the homework sessions

1.10.1   CLARIFICATION OF DATA SIGNIFICANCE

The documents which I had obtained were used as examples of the communication between the school and the parents and, in addition, they also highlighted the parental attitudes towards the school. For example, the examination papers provided feedback on the child's academic progress. The semi-structured interviews consisted of predetermined or set questions which I had formulated according to the theoretical perspective of Carl Dunst's integrated framework. These semi-structured questions related to the key components of family empowerment, for example, support for parents; child-learning opportunities; family and community support and resources; and family-centred practices respectively.

It was hoped that the informal conversations would help to create an unprompted relationship albeit a relationship of trust between the participants and myself. This prompted additional questions and created an opportunity for some light to be shed on new issues and topics relating to the child's learning process within the context of the study. I also incorporated my own comments throughout this process in the form of reflective excerpts taken from my personal journal which were written in the narrative form. In addition to these methods, I also included photographs taken of the child and of aspects relating to his learning and

development. An in-depth discussion has been included later on the measures taken to safeguard the child's well-being (see ethical measures).

1.10.2   THE NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Qualitative researchers often use stories in order to analyse what they are studying through a description of a series of events. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007:4) emphasise that stories are fundamental units that account for human experience. Within the framework of narratives, this study uses sociolinguistic analysis such as reflective notes and interviews in order to construct a generic narrative that reflects a particular child's learning process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007:5).

I used the transcripts, conversations and interviews that I had conducted with the participants in the study in order to create fictional characters that portrayed and told their stories and perspectives on the child's learning process. The purpose of this approach was to illustrate the real-life events as the participants and I had experienced them throughout the learning sessions.

1.11   DATA ANALYSIS

Within the context of this study the notion of the "Unplugged" versus the "Connected" family is reiterated. The data collection plan is explained using my 'CLICK' concept. This 'CLICK' concept is unique to the study and has multiple implications. Firstly, it relates to a technological device and emphasising a connection similar to that of the interconnected components portrayed in Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment. Secondly, it encompasses the data collection techniques used in the study.

I also referred to the 'CLICK' as it represents the social 'clicks' which parents develop throughout the learning process. 'CLICK' represents communication, learning, interpreting, and collaborating knowledge. An explanation of this concept is presented in the table.

Table 1.3:   Data analysis using the CLICK

Phase	Planned technique	Description
1	Communication	Communicate key aspects of the learning process
2	Learn	I (the researcher) learn from the experience and formulate an understanding of the data
3	Interpretation	Interpret the data in order to draw conclusions and answer the research questions
4	Collaborating knowledge and insight	Subsequent to supporting their child with homework, the parents reflect on their progress and collaboratively share their thoughts and ideas with the researcher. These thoughts and ideas are portrayed in the form of the narrative inquiry

1.11.1 THEMES AND CATEGORIES

Once the data had been collected, I grouped the content into themes and categories. I then displayed these according to the layout used to describe the key components of empowerment as depicted in Figure 1.1. Thus, the data was divided into three main themes, namely, parenting support; child-learning opportunities; family and community support and resources; and family-centred practices. The categories pertaining to the theme of parenting support included parenting capacities and communication capacities while the child-learning opportunities included the role of homework and intrinsic motivation. Family and community support and resources included volunteering capacities as well as school decision-making and advocacy capacities and, lastly, family-centred practices included elements of family empowerment. In addition, aspects relating to the leaning and development of the child emerged from the data and are presented in a logical manner. The narrative inquiry was used to tell a story of the family in the context of this study and gave meaning to the phenomenon (Bell, 2010:18).

1.11.2 THE USE OF CRYSTALLISATION

This research study used crystallisation in its investigation into how parents may become empowered to support their child with homework. This required a comprehensive understanding of the role of the teacher in the learning process; how the parents' confidence could be enhanced to support their child with homework; and how the child experienced the support of his parents during homework. Thus, the study emphasised human understanding, and constructed multiple realities from the various insights and perspectives of the parents as well as from my insights and perspectives as the learning support teacher regarding the child's learning and development.

This reflects the uniqueness of the study and represents the identities of the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:81). Nieuwenhuis (2007:81) further states that an investigation is an emerging process, similar to the aim of empowering the parents for homework support. Crystallisation has no fixed points but, instead, it relies on multiple data collection, as well as a variety of approaches, insights, perspectives and interpretations. The use of multiple data collection allows for patterns to emerge. These patterns may then be placed in themes and categories which then bring clarity and meaning to the data (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008) and this makes interpretation possible in order to draw conclusions.

1.12 ETHICAL MEASURES

I adhered to *bona fide* ethical measures throughout the study and also applied the correct steps according to the standards set by the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria in order to ensure ethical clearance for the study. Accordingly, my focus was on the meticulous nature of the criteria pending ethical clearance. This included, inter alia, ensuring

the voluntary participation of the purposefully selected participants; their freedom to discontinue participation in the study at any time; the informed consent of the parents, the informed assent of the child; safe participation; the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants; dissemination of the research findings; and the data collection and storage. A brief overview of these measures is provided below.

1.12.1 ENSURING VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

In line with the captive audience clause, I ensured that I did not, at any point during the study, abuse my position of authority as the researcher over the participants. In addition, the participation of the parents and their child in the study was strictly voluntary. Moreover, the terms and conditions of the research were verbally explained to them prior to the submission of this research proposal during an informal symposium. Subsequently, in the interests in due diligence, these terms and conditions were clearly stipulated in the letter of consent issued to the participant.

1.12.2 FREEDOM TO DISCONTINUE

In line with their voluntary participation in the study, should the participants have felt violated in any capacity, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point throughout the research period. This right was pointed out to them in the letter of consent.

1.12.3 INFORMED CONSENT

I issued the appropriate documentation indicating my aims with the study as well as the significance of the family's participation in the research process. I also agreed to abide by the strict guidelines regarding my personal declaration of responsibility, and to act in good faith on behalf of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria. In addition, the letter of consent contained information pertaining to, *inter alia,* the translation of the interviews from the participants' home language, namely, Afrikaans, into English. The following aspects were all included in the letter of consent.

1.12.4 SAFE PARTICIPATION

The issues that were of particular importance here are discussed in the following sections:

1.12.4.1 The potential risk and harm to the participants in the study

The letter of consent contained, *inter alia,* a brief description of the purpose of the study and clearly highlighted the fact that the participants' well-being would be safeguarded as would the protection of their true identities.

1.12.4.2 Safety measures taken to minimise risk

I undertook to conduct the research study in good faith. Thus, should any unforeseen incidents have occurred, I would have taken the appropriate steps under the advisement of my supervisor as well as the Department of Early Childhood Development.

1.12.4.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

I ensured the full confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. In order to do this I focused on the following aims: (1) No secret or clandestine research; (2) An obligation to ensure the free and open dissemination of the research results as well as the participants' right to privacy, including the right to refuse to participate in the research study; and (3) The participants' right to anonymity and confidentiality (Mouton, 2001:244). In addition, there was amicable communication between the participants and myself and in terms of which they had full access to the research study at all times and could contribute to the study by offering suggestions, opinions, insight and comments which would, hopefully, ensure the transparency of the data, specifically with regard to the interviews. The privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were respected and safeguarded at all times by, for example, not showing the child's face in any photograph taken for the data collection purposes. The anonymity of the data collected, including the transcriptions of statements made during the interviews, was ensured. Thus, the safety and confidentiality of the participants' true identities were ensured in accordance with the personal declaration of responsibility agreement as stipulated by the Research Ethics Committee. In addition, pseudonyms were given to the participants and were used throughout the study.

1.12.5   DISSEMINATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

I intend to share the findings of my research study with academia and the broader community in the form of published articles.

1.12.6   DATA ACCESS AND STORAGE

Documents, including copies of personal and official documents relating to the child's workbooks, letters written by the school and/or the class teacher, class tests and examination papers, and report cards were kept in my possession. I shared the data I had collected with my supervisor during our contact sessions. I also kept additional raw material in a personal file for further use. I was aware and understood that the data collected in the course of the research shall become the institutional property of the University of Pretoria and I undertook to ensure the transfer of all raw data and documents related to the study for safekeeping as required by the Faculty of Education.

1.13 CHAPTER DIVISION

The following table contains an overview of the chapters contained in the study.

Table 1.4: **Synopsis of the study and the forthcoming chapters**

Chapter	Title	Description
Chapter 1	Empowering parents for homework support	Orientation, background and introduction to the study
Chapter 2	A theoretical perspective on empowering parents for homework support	A literature review with a detailed discussion on the topic of interest
Chapter 3	The research methodology	Explaining the methods used in conducting the study
Chapter 4	Data analysis and interpretation	An analysis of the data in order to create meaning of the data
Chapter 5	Summary, research conclusions, recommendations and reflections	An integrated summary of the literature review findings as well as the empirical findings. A discussion of the conclusions drawn from the data. The recommendation of practical steps for parents during the learning process. Personal reflections on the study from the researcher's point of view

1.14 FINAL COMMENTS

This research study aims at investigating how parents may become empowered to support with homework through examining important aspects of a child's learning process. This process required a holistic perspective of all the significant factors which may have a profound impact on the learning and development of a child. Empowerment was, therefore, contextualised with the suggestion that it embodies a sense of control and, in terms of this study, control over those factors which depict family-centred practices. This chapter discussed the research proposal while the following chapters explain the theoretical perspective on empowering parents for homework support; present the research methodology chosen for the purposes of the study; discuss the data analysis process, report on the research findings; and, finally, discuss the conclusions drawn, comments, recommendations and reflect on the study from a personal standpoint.

There is a strong emphasis placed on the key components of family empowerment throughout the study. For the purposes of the study, empowerment is defined as mutual influence of members and shared capacity. Accordingly, no component (including the parents) is accorded more power than another component, nor do I suggest that any component should dominate another. The aim is to give the parents the appropriate amount of power to enable them support their child(ren) with homework and to take part in the learning process on an equal footing.

CHAPTER 2

A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON
EMPOWERING PARENTS FOR HOMEWORK SUPPORT

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Gladwell, a well-respected author and staff writer for *The New Yorker,* makes controversial, yet compelling statements in his book entitled *David and Goliath: Underdogs, misfits, and the art of battling giants* (2013:99) in which he highlights desirable difficulties. The author asserts succinctly that the challenges facing a child, including barriers to learning, may constitute an advantage, depending on the child's support system and level of motivation.

In an interview with CNN's Fareed Zakaria on the programme, GPS (October 2013), Gladwell explained that the notion of learning suggests that, if one were to make a child's task easier, the child would learn more. However, Gladwell is of opinion that there are "exceptions" where the task is slightly more difficult as the child may also learn better because, when the task poses a challenge of some degree, the child may be motivated to concentrate more intensely and, perhaps, put in a bigger effort. Gladwell (2013:99) examined the concept of desirable difficulties. In his book, he refers to numerous successful entrepreneurs, business people, and entertainers who, despite the academic difficulties they experienced, were motivated to prevail. The author's research identified parental involvement as fundamental precondition to prompting learning in children. His research findings also revealed that all of the individuals who have grown up in adversity have had at least one parent who believed in and supported them (Gladwell, 2013:113).

The topic of interest in this study is empowering parents for homework support and, thus, empowerment is extremely significant in the context of the study. Empowerment means to "enable or permit" (The American Heritage, 2009) and, thus, parents will be enabled to support with homework once they feel empowered. Empowerment may also refer to the ability of people and communities to manage or control their lives (Radebe, 2007:140). Rappaport (1987:121) defines empowerment as the mastery which people gain over their affairs. It is clear that the term 'empowerment' has many implications and; therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to place empowerment in the context of parents' search for control of their children's learning and development. Trivette and Dunst (2009) are of opinion that family support manifests from two opposite world views. The first paradigm suggests a traditional perspective – viewing parents as weak and in need of professional assistance to rectify mistakes in the child's learning process. On the other hand, the second paradigm is a capacity-building paradigm that acknowledges the strengths and assets which both parents

and their children possess. The latter paradigm is the focus of this study as the purpose of the study is to ensure competence in parents so that they are able to lend their children support in their homework. A discussion on the aspect of parental capacities follows later in this chapter.

Radebe (2007:141) identifies key principles of empowerment. These key principles form part of the theoretical framework used in this study. The principles include people having more control over their lives from an interpersonal perspective (as seen in the parenting support component – section 2.4); developing the capacity to achieve goals (exhibited in the child's-learning opportunities – sections 2.5 and 2.5.5); having access to resources (an aspect of family/community support and resources – section 2.6) and the process of development that contributes to empowerment and which is not an end product of an intervention, but an ever developing aspect. Thus, in the context of this study, the process of empowering parents ought to equip them with the necessary resources, power and influence in their decision-making (Radebe, 2007:142) throughout the child's learning process and, finally, form part of a social process that ensures change and enables family-centred practices to develop and be strengthened. All these aspects are explained in light of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment.

The diagram below is a schematic layout of the key aspects of a child's learning process. The Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment has been used to compartmentalise all the aspects within each individual component (or inner circle), namely, parenting support; child-learning opportunities; family and community supports and resources; and the family-centred practices respectively. In addition, these aspects are viewed in the context of empowering parents for homework support.
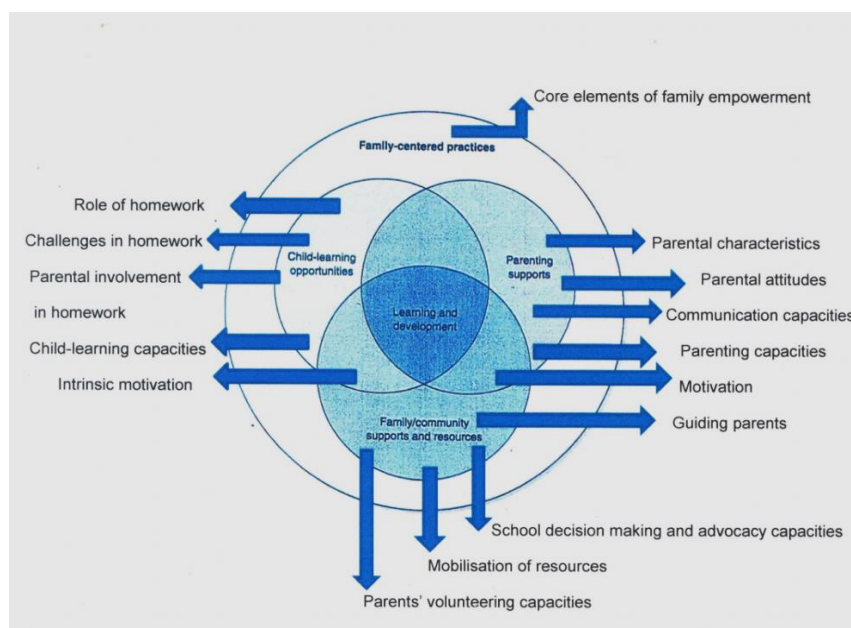
Figure 2.1: Schematic layout adapted from Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework of Family Empowerment

This figure, as was seen in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1), depicts each component with its individual factors. These individual factors all interact and have a profound impact on the learning and development of a child. A compressive discussion of these components and their significance to homework support follows.

2.2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING HOMEWORK SUPPORT

This chapter discusses the fact that support for children in homework is strengthened by empowering parents throughout the learning process. The three inner circles depicted in the theoretical framework presented above may be regarded as the building blocks that contribute to a family-centred approach to empowerment and which is a result of the various factors which interact throughout a child's learning and development (Pressley & McCormick, 2007:285). The family-centred practices exist only once parenting support; child's learning opportunities; and family and community supports and resources have been identified and strengthened. Each circle in the figure acts as a component which makes up the family-centred unit and, in this way, empowers the parents. These integrated components all have their own roles in the child's learning process (Louw & Kail, 2007:27). In addition, each component includes its own factors and these factors, in return, strengthen the specific component. This interaction between the components happens in accordance with the principle of systems. Although systems theory is not incorporated in this study, the concept of the interconnectedness of the parts of a system in a non-linear way (Visser, 2007:23) helps to explain the inner workings of the components that are integrated and, therefore, portrays a system which means "to place together" parts of a larger system (Capra, 1997:27). The circles depicted in the figure above interact with one another at various stages throughout the child's learning and development in a way that is similar to Hanson's (1995:27) explanation of a system. Thus, when one component changes during the learning process, this affects another component. Accordingly, all three of the components integrate to form a full system, exemplified by the family-centred practices that arise from the relationships between the parts (Capra, 1997:27).

The theoretical framework depicts the child as a significant focal point in the centre. The interactions between the various factors in a child's life all impact on the child's academic progress at different stages (Swart & Pettipher, 2005:11) and, thus, therefore, the three main components of the framework all support one another and interlock at the core. Dunst (2004:3) maintains that this framework functions as a social system, highlighting learning and development as a process in terms of which children and parents influence each another in their different relations and in different settings.

This chapter discusses these aspects in order to come to a more comprehensive understanding of their contribution to a child's learning and development. The chapter also reassembles the inner circles which appear in Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family

Empowerment and explains them in such a way that they form guidelines for parents to empower them in supporting the homework process and placed back in the context of family-centred practices. Family-centred practices encompass all three of the components of the framework and it is, thus, necessary to ensure that the factors making up parenting support; family and community support and resources as well as child-learning opportunities, are present. The chapter offers practical suggestions for the formation of organisational skills during the learning process for each component in order to guide parents and help to strengthen the family-centred practices.

As previously stated, each component is discussed separately. However, it is important to note that, although homework is discussed as a separate unit, it forms part of the child-learning opportunities. For the purposes of this study, homework is also is a key component to the independent within the learning process. The chapter discusses the following, namely, homework; parenting support; child-learning opportunities and family and community supports and resources and, finally, how these components all shape the family-centred practices.

2.3   HOMEWORK

Cooper (1989:7) defines homework as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours". Cooper subsequently modified this definition, stating that homework involves the completion of tasks during "non-instructional time" (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011:197).

Hong, Wan and Peng (2011: 282) describe homework as a "pervasive pedagogical strategy in schools". However, they are of opinion that the intrinsic value of homework declines as the child grows up and, thus, motivation from parents is important (for more on intrinsic motivation, see section 2.4.3 of the child-learning opportunities).

Homework ensures the following three aspects of a child's learning and development, namely, the encouragement of positive attitudes and skills; improvement in academic achievement and family involvement during the learning process (Van Voorhis, 2011:224).

2.3.1   THE ROLE OF HOMEWORK

Homework promotes the development of self-regulated learning and self-belief, including the ability to set goals (an aspect of intrinsic motivation which is discussed in section 2.4.5 on child-learning opportunities under the heading of the value in setting goals and the practical implications); time management; managing the learning environment; maintaining concentration and self-efficacy (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011:196). It would appear that parents nowadays are required to invest a considerable amount of time and effort in homework (Van Voorhis, 2011:220). Dawson (2010:1) emphasises that parental involvement

in homework plays a significantly more important role in a child's academic achievement as compared to a family's social status or the parents' level of education and that such involvement depends solely on parents' willingness to help the child.

Van Voorhis (2011:222) discusses an interactive homework process which is based on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence involving parents, teachers and other professionals within the community and all working together to guide and support learning and development in children. The teachers ought to be aware of a child's level of competency in the completion of homework as well as a child's attitude towards homework. These attitudes influence the parents' perceptions of their children's learning capacities (Hong et al., 2011: 282). Epstein (2001:37) highlights the following reasons why teachers assign homework, placing particular emphasis on parent-child relations and parent-teacher communications. Firstly, homework encourages parents and their children to communicate about the importance of learning; share information; discuss attitudes and expectations regarding school; and reveal how aspects of school apply to real-life situations. Secondly, Epstein (2001:37) implies that homework enables teachers to communicate with parents, to involve them in the learning process and to inform them about their children's progress.

2.3.2   CHALLENGES PARENTS FACE DURING HOMEWORK

In the main the parents of young children have a "fair sense" of what is required of them as well as what their and their children's responsibilities are with regard to homework. However, such awareness tends to deteriorate the older the children become. In addition, parents often underestimate the workload and overestimate their children's learning capacities (Van Voorhis, 2011:223). Parents may also find homework challenging when the teacher has not properly explained the homework assignment to the child in class or when the child simply did not listen to the instructions and, as a result, the child is unsure of how to complete the assignment (Van Voorhis, 2011:224). Van Voorhis (2011:224) also reveals that parents may sometimes provide poor and often inappropriate support and that this may result in their feeling unprepared in providing help in certain learning areas.

2.3.3   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK

Barbour (2010:13) comments on "the main force" which the family constitutes in a child's education and maintains that initiatives that support families at home have the potential to "magnify" academic achievement. Barbour (2010:13) furthermore remarks that parental involvement results in better academic performance as well as fewer behavioural problems in children than would otherwise be the case. Family and parental involvement also often results in the children's language growth and development; improved reading skills; increased motivation on the part of the achieve and diligence in both homework and schoolwork (Barbour, 2010:13).

Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011:214) echo that parental involvement in homework may promote the development of cognitive skills and behavioural strategies such as goal setting, planning, time management, attentiveness, and responsibility – all key requirements for homework completion. Parents ought to create an environment which is conducive for learning and, at the same time, communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations of success (Barbour, 2010:13).

In addition, Dawson (2010:1) articulates that parents may help their children to succeed in homework through communicating the importance of homework as part of learning and development. According to Dawson (2010:1), there are three key messages which parents need to communicate to their children and which form part of the parents' sense of control over the situation and, thus, their feeling of empowerment (Rappaport, 1987:121):

❖ **Homework plays a critical role in the learning process**

Homework teaches children accountability and time management skills.

❖ **Support will be provided when needed**

Children who are overwhelmed by homework find it comforting to know that there is someone available to lend a helping hand.

❖ **Parents will not do the work for their children**

It is essential that parents do not allow their children to become dependent on their involvement although the children do need to know that their parents are available to help and encourage them so that they develop the requisite skills throughout the learning process. Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011:196) are of the opinion that self-regulated learning promotes selecting appropriate learning strategies, maintaining motivation, and monitoring and evaluating academic progress.

2.4   PARENTING SUPPORTS

According to Dunst (2004:6), this component reinforces existing parenting abilities while also creating opportunities for parents to acquire the new knowledge and skills that will enhance both their confidence and their competence through the sharing of information, advice and guidance. Parenting support provides parents with the opportunity to become involved in the learning process, thereby providing them with the information and resources required to strengthen their role (Agnew-Tally & Mott, 2010:38). In addition, this "levels the playing field" between the teacher and the parents and this promotes the empowerment of the parents (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002:1).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997:3) conducted a research study aimed at understanding the reasons why parents become involved in their children's education. According to them, there are three major constructs which are pertinent to parents' decisions as to their

involvement in the learning process, namely, (1) parents' role construction with this highlighting the parents' understanding of what they are required to do during the learning process and what they perceive as important for their children, (2) parents' sense of efficacy in helping their children succeed in school, and (3) the general invitations, demands and opportunities emanating from the school in respect of parental involvement. In addition, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997:4) focus on the levels of the constructs as derived from the model of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995:327) and indicating both the parents' initial choice to become involved and also the effect of their involvement on a child's academic achievement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997:6) also highlighted the implicit and explicit decisions which parents make in order to fulfil their need for affiliation and power.

2.4.1　THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TOWARD HOMEWORK

Homework is an extension of schoolwork. Shah (2001: 130) notes that homework is the "main medium" through which parents may see their child's work. In addition, she comments on the importance of providing a channel of communication between the teacher and the parents, for example, by means of a home-school diary in which to share information regarding the child's progress during homework in different learning areas (this concept is discussed further later in the chapter).

Homework plays an important role in promoting academic achievement. Shah (2001:129) regards homework as a contributory factor to the parents' understanding of their child and of the child's progress at school. Problems pertaining to homework require that the parents collaborate with school professionals and help their children to succeed academically (Gilbertson in Gimpel Peacock & Collet, 2010:160).

Parents often comment on the amount of homework their children receive from the school. It is important for parents to communicate with their child's teachers regarding the homework expectations, including what the teacher expects the child to do, the role of the parent in supporting the child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997:10) and the amount of time that should be spent on completing homework (Gilbertson in Gimpel Peacock & Collet, 2010:160-161).

Rathvon (1999:143) echoes these sentiments and comments that homework enhances academic achievement, arguing the importance of parents receiving regular feedback on their child's progress. Two-way communication between the parents and the teacher is a significant way in which parents may share information about their child's needs and, at the same time, the teacher may provide information about the child's academic progress (Hornby, 2000:20). Furthermore, Rathvon (1999:143) postulates that homework increases collaboration between the parents and school, stating that "interventions that increase collaboration between teachers and parents have the potential to enhance homework quality

and completion rates." Nevertheless, homework is time consuming and many parents find it difficult to participate in activities which require in involvement with their child's homework. Homework often causes anxiety on the part both parents and their children (Jacobson, 2008 in Goodman 2008:104) and, therefore, it is important for parents and teachers to work together in order to ensure that the parent-teacher partnership is characterised by unambiguous understanding and mutual trust during the child's learning process (Grant & Ray, 2010:392).

Hornby (2000:142) is of opinion that parents will always find it difficult to remain objective about their children's education. He comments that parents may act in the best interests of their children but that this does not necessarily make them experts from an educational perspective. Hornby (2000:148) highlights the common problem when the parents' expectations of their child do not reflect what the child is capable of achieving. Parents who have set high standards for themselves and have achieved these standards relatively well often find it difficult to accept that their children are unable to do the same.

Parents' subjective perspectives in this regard are accentuated when a child has a learning barrier. It is essential that such a situation be addressed in an assertive way. According to Hornby (2000:150), it is incumbent on the teacher to remain objective about the child's level of achievement and to offer realistic suggestions that will not tarnish the relationship with the parents. Grant and Ray (2010:223) state that parents often have concerns regarding the amount of time that needs to be spent on homework while parents are also often uncertain about their assistance with homework and what to do when they are unable to help or do not understand what is required.

There are several ways in which parents may become involved in their children's education. The following section discusses the different capacities of parental involvement as well as the implications of parental involvement throughout the learning process.

2.4.2   THREE TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WHICH MOTIVATE A CHILD TO LEARN

Children who receive support through parental involvement tend to feel competent and in control of their learning (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:101). Successful role construction on the part of parents instils a sense of efficiency as well as a belief in their own ability to support their children throughout the learning process (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005:107). In addition, parental role construction indicates a sense of personal or shared responsibility for the child's educational development.

The feeling of efficiency in helping the child succeed stems from the parents' involvement as the learning process develops. There are three types of parental involvement that may foster this development, namely:

- Behavioural involvement which emphasises the engagement in behaviours with regard to the child's education (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:100). Behavioural involvement includes the interaction between parents and teachers (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:27) as well as parents and their children participating in or volunteering for school events, for example, parent evenings (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris, 1997:541).

- Personal involvement which highlights the importance of parents talking to their children about school while displaying a positive attitude towards the school and instilling the same attitude in their children (Grant & Ray, 2010:224). Anderman and Anderman (2010:100) suggest that parents should ask their children about school, how their day was and what they learned that day as this conveys an interest in the children's experiences. In addition, this type of involvement provides parents with insights into the child's progress at school and helps to contribute to their academic achievement (Swap, 1993 in Decker & Decker, 2003:70).

- Cognitive or intellectual involvement which is concerned with the parental interaction at home with regard to the level of support and the use of effective resources that help to stimulate the child (De Carvalho, 2001:123).

2.4.3 PARENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Eccles and Harold (1993:570) allude to parental characteristics as a significant factor in parental involvement. Such parental characteristics include the parents' level of education, marital status, age and sex, number of children and work status. According to Eccles and Harold (1993:570), the following factors strengthen parental involvement:

- Social and psychological resources available to the parents: This indicates the demands placed on the parents with regard to their time (Dietz & Whale, 1997:26-28), mental capacity and coping strategies (*International express,* Thursday, February 28, 2012:8).

- Parents' beliefs in their efficacy: This indicates the parents' level of confidence in their own ability to help their children with their schoolwork (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:16).

- Parents' perceptions of their children: This refers to the parents' perceptions of their child as well as their expectations and aspirations regarding the child (Cox-Petersen, 2011:111).

- Parents' assumptions of their role in their child's education (Eccles & Harold, 1993:571): This aspect relates to the role the parents wish to play throughout the learning process (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2002:292).

- Parents' attitude toward the school: this emphasises the role the parents believe the school wants them to play (Eccles & Harold, 1993:571) and how they experience

the school's attitude towards their involvement in their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997:27).

- Parents' general socialisation practices: this pertains to the parents' ability to deal with discipline and maintain control (Grant & Ray, 2010:224).

- The history (and level) of parental involvement in the child's education: This includes all forms of involvement with the school throughout the child's school career.

2.4.4 THE CAPACITIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Decker and Decker (2003:59) emphasise the types of parental involvement as based on the works of Epstein. For the purpose of this study, the types of parental involvement are referred to as the capacities in terms of which parents contribute to their child's learning and development. Moreover, as indicated in the diagram in Figure 2.1, these capacities are subdivided into key aspects within the theoretical framework of Dunst's family empowerment. Thus, the communication capacities and the parenting capacities come under parenting support, whereas the child's learning capacities contribute to the child's learning opportunities, and the volunteering capacities and school decision-making and advocacy capacities strengthen the family and community support and resources respectively. These aspects are discussed later in this chapter.

2.4.4.1 Communication capacities

The communication between the home and the school is a "two-way street". Parents and teachers are encouraged to establish positive communication channels between them so that problems may be discussed and possibly solved. Decker and Decker (2003:59) are of the opinion that it is advisable to create opportunities whereby "pertinent information" is shared, including information on the child's strengths and learning preferences.

Thus, information regarding the child's progress is a significant drive-force in establishing open, positive communication. This will ensure that parents feel included in their children's learning and also that they feel confident when they are involved during the learning process (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:16). Gilberson (2010:182) shares the opinion of Decker and Decker (2003) and suggests that it is incumbent on parents to assess and comment on their children's school and homework on a regular basis.

Joubert and Prinsloo (2001:41) echo these sentiments by suggesting that the benefits to parent–teacher relationships include the following:

- A positive school atmosphere.

- Parents may contribute their personal and professional knowledge and insight in situations in which the teachers may lack the experience.

- The creation of a "teamwork-dynamic" in terms of which certain activities and responsibilities may be delegated among the parents and teachers.
- Successful communication between home and school leads to more effective education programmes.

2.4.4.2 Parenting capacities

Decker and Decker (2003:60) highlight the significance of recognising parental roles and responsibilities as well as identifying the extent of the support that parents require and how to meet such needs. A positive parent–child relationship is clearly important. Parents rely on access to information and resources in order to improve their confidence when participating in their children's learning process (Agnew-Tally & Mott, 2010:38). In addition, the parents' feeling of efficiency in helping their children succeed is based on the parents' power of self-regulation and/or their thoughts about their roles and the influence they wield as a result of the choices they make in particular situations and that determine whether they have control over such situations (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997:17).

2.4.5 MOTIVATION BEHIND PARENTAL EMPOWERMENT

For the purposes of this study motivation is regarded as a significant factor in family-centred practices as it plays a fundamental role in all areas of a child's learning and development. Woolfolk (2007:73) maintains that motivation encourages parents and children to work together provided that parents are guided in terms of the support they lend (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:14).

It is, therefore, important to view motivation firstly as a general aspect of a child's learning process and then, secondly, within the context of each component which strengthens the family-centred practices, thus helping parents to feel more empowered and better equipped to support the child with homework. Empowerment in this context is considered to be a process during which parents are guided in their involvement on various levels with the child. Parenting, the identification and development of family strengths, the children's preparation for future education and learning, the provision of information about community resources, the modelling of appropriate learning opportunities for children at home, and the establishment of interpersonal relationships between professionals and families all contribute significantly to the empowerment of the parents (Coleman & Churchill, 1997 in Couchenour & Chrisman 2011:180). However, appropriate guidance in respect of motivation is required to ensure that this and other "building blocks" are shaped and put in place throughout the learning process.

Brooks (2008:314) is of opinion that a child's level of motivation is not dependent on the parents' financial income or economic status (although it does help in terms of providing adequate resources) but, rather, that the focus ought to be on the parents' general beliefs

and behaviours regarding their children and their academic progress. Brooks (2008:314) emphasises the importance of creating an emotional climate in the home that influences a child's achievements and stating that "by structure, and providing appropriate adult models for learning, parents help their children develop competence and motivation to achieve."

The interaction between the components provides to each component throughout the learning process and ensures that the focus is on the child's learning and development the entire time. The next section shifts away from the discussion on guiding parents on how to become involved and focuses on how their involvement ensures learning opportunities and motivates the child to acquiring autonomy (section 2.4.6). This structure becomes another critical aspect of the strengthening of ties within a broader system and acquiring additional support for a child's learning and development.

2.4.6   PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO STRENGTHEN PARENTING SUPPORT

The following suggestions provide practical steps parents may take throughout the learning process and which may strengthen the capacity of parenting support and contribute to home support provided by parents.

2.4.6.1   Routine checks

Dawson (2010:2) suggests that parents ought to hold daily conversations with their children about school-related issues. For example, parents could ask what happened at school that day; how their friends are doing; and what homework has been given. This will enable the children to share their experiences and help to keep parents up to date with what is happening in their children's lives at schools. Professor John Ashton (in Donnelly, 2015) endorses this view and argues that this type of "family culture" would keep parents informed and promote healthy family dynamics.

2.4.6.2   Maintain a constant homework routine

It is easier to manage and complete homework assignments when there is a strict homework routine. The benefits of a daily homework routine are twofold: Firstly, such a routine enables the homework and learning process to continue, while secondly it teaches the child order and daily structure throughout the learning and development process. Dawson (2010:2) highlights the following steps which should be followed to establish a homework routine:

- Identify a preferred location for homework.
- Ensure that the child has the necessary materials required to complete homework assignments, for example, stationary, paper, dictionary etc.
- Establish the most appropriate time for homework when the child feels comfortable and not tired or overwhelmed.

- Design a timeframe for each homework assignment so that parents and children are aware of how long the assignment may take and how much effort is required to complete the assignment.

2.4.6.3 Supervise homework but avoid interfering too much

According to Dawson (2010:2), parents should lend an appropriate amount of support but refrain from becoming overbearing and constantly hovering over their children, especially when their children have reached the age where independence is critical to their development.

2.5 CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Child-learning opportunities make provision for a child to learn and develop by creating opportunities which a child finds interesting (an aspect of intrinsic motivation) and engaging and which allow the child to master the competency required (an aspect of autonomy – section 2.5.6) (Dunst, 2004:5).

2.5.1 THE CHILD'S LEARNING CAPACITIES

Parental involvement in decision-making has a profound effect on learner achievement (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:14). Walker et al. (2004) suggest that parents who are actively involved contribute to positive communication between the home and school and this leads to a better understanding of what is required of the child as well as the parents than may otherwise have been the case (Gilbertson in Gimpel Peacock & Collet, 2010:160–161). Children require the support of their parents and their teachers if they are to participate in the learning process (Beveridge, 2005:81).

2.5.2 MOTIVATION AND LEARNING

Eggen and Kauchak (2012:47) note that motivated children

- process information well and master learning activities, either in the classroom or at home
- persist in difficult tasks and cause fewer management problems
- perceive school as a positive experience (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:14).

A child's learning opportunities are shaped and therefore contribute to his or her interests and competencies (interests shall be discussed as part of a motivational factor for learning) (Agnew-Tally & Mott in Grant & Ray, 2010:38). Children feel more motivated and confident when they are in control of their learning processes (Beveridge, 2005:80). Children need to:

- understand the purpose of the learning assignment

- be motivated to learn

- develop effective learning strategies

- identify potential challenges they might face throughout their learning process, and apply appropriate problem-solving learning strategies (Wolfendale, 2005:80).

Dresel and Hall (2013, in Hall & Goetz, 2013:59) define motivation as "the processes underlining the initiation, control, maintenance, and evaluation of goal-oriented behaviours". They highlight the role of high levels of motivation in learning and achievement and allude to the following challenges:

- Initiation of actions for accomplishing learning or achievement goals.

- Planning appropriate learning activities and setting additional realistic goals.

- Creating favourable conditions and acquiring appropriate resources in support of learning activities, for example, seeking help.

- Selecting challenging levels of difficulty that ensure optimal learning progress.

- Lower tendency to procrastinate.

- Sufficient amount of effort, for example, good time management.

- Endurance, particularly in the face of difficulty (persistence).

- High quality of effort pertaining to applying effective learning strategies and appropriate forms of self-regulation (monitoring and adjusting strategies in the event of difficulties).

- Limited thoughts that are irrelevant to one's course of action, for example, worrying.

- Experiencing emotions that are conductive to one's course of action, for example, the satisfaction and enjoyment of learning.

- Learning progress and high-quality performance.

2.5.3 INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Extrinsic motivation focuses on the willingness to execute an action based on the reward (incentive) that would be given subsequent to the execution of the action, for example, completing an assignment. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation would add deeper meaning and spur the child on to investigate further in search of a greater understanding of a specific topic of interest (Dresel & Hall, 2013 in Hall & Goetz, 2013:66).

Eggen and Kauchak (2012:49) indicate that children are intrinsically motivated by experiences that:

- present a challenge. The goals are relatively difficult and success is not guaranteed.

- encourage feelings of autonomy. It is essential that a child experiences a sense of independence when doing homework.

- evoke curiosity (Brooks, 2008:315)

- involve fantasy

- provide a personal investment. Children should be able relate to the content being taught on some level so as to enable them to form a personal attachment or form link based on prior knowledge of a particular subject matter and, in this manner, develop an interest in what is being taught.

2.5.4 THE INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED CHILD

Children who are intrinsically motivated display various beneficial outcomes. According to Stolk and Martello (2013), they

- tend to enjoy schoolwork

- think more critically about a task that they have to complete

- show a greater retention of knowledge

- tend to show more creativity

- tend to think about their own learning process in a reflective manner, and

- tend to be more self-directed.

2.5.5 DEVELOPING AN INTEREST

If a child to develop an interest in a learning activity or a subject, it is imperative that both cognitive and emotional factors are taken into account. Children will develop a personal interest in a learning activity or subject only when they regard such a learning activity or subject as valuable them (Garcia & Pintrich, 1994:127) and if the activity or subject creates a positive experience (Dresel & Hall, 2013 in Hall & Goetz, 2013:95). Hidi and Renninger (2006:114-115) refer to a four-phase model of interest development which describes the pattern of a learner's personal interests and indicates the differentiation of these interests over time. The four phases highlight the following:

2.5.5.1 The triggered situational interest

This phase triggers the interest which is a product of the child's learning environment. The factors that prompt a child's interest in such a situation include interesting features in the learning environment such as proper lighting and a comfortable work space. Another such factor may be the person or persons with whom the child works or the use of digital media, for example, an iPad. However, these features often need to be provided by the parents or teachers who act as external supports in order to maintain the required level of interest.

2.5.5.2 Maintained situational interest

This phase pertains to the child's involvement and is dependent of external support from teachers or parents.

2.5.5.3 Emerging personal (individual) interest

The emerging interest phase is developed through positive emotions, prior knowledge and the value that a particular activity has for the child on completion of the assignment. Garcia and Pintrich (1994:127) comment that learners understand and master activities or assignments through the use of various cognitive resources, (including prior knowledge obtained from teachers, parents or peers) and tools such as cognitive and regulatory learning strategies. This emerging interest prompts the acquisition of further knowledge and requires self-directed learning methods which develop curiosity and lead to questions relating to the topic of interest.

Hidi and Renninger (2006:115) further suggest that individual interests are often self-generated but rely on the external support and guidance of teachers or parents to ensure a better understanding of the content. In addition, a child may need encouragement when confronted with a challenge in his or her pursuit of mastering an activity or in his or her attempt to answer the question(s) posed. The instructional conditions or learning environment are a significant factor in the development of individual interests.

2.5.5.4 Well-developed individual interests

The well-developed interest phase emphasises further positive emotions, greater knowledge and significant value with regard to the specific content. The child may be confronted with an opportunity and yet be limited by challenges in his/her endeavour to realise his or her goals or objectives. Nevertheless, this may encourage the child to become more resourceful in his/her attempts to solve the problem and, in the process, learn various means of realising his or her objectives through self-regulated learning.

It is essential that a child is intrinsically motivated. Stolk and Martello (2013) describe intrinsic motivation as "a drive to do something that comes from a place of joy or fun, or passion, or intrinsic interest". Such intrinsic motivation drives a person to engage in activities, initiate something new and to be a part of something.

2.5.5.5 The value in setting goals and the practical implications of such goal setting

It is vital to set goals in order to achieve desired outcomes. Dresel and Hall (2013, in Hall & Goetz, 2013:76) postulate that goals are future, desirable outcomes of actions and relate to functions in the psychological domain:

- Goals encourage an individual to work with a purpose in mind.

- Goals bridge the gap between knowledge, abilities and skills in the pursuit of the desired outcomes.

- Goals set a particular standard relating to a work ethos and spur an individual on to and Hall (in Hall & Goetz, 2013:77) comment on the practical implications to achieving goals and suggest the following:

- Goals should be specific and they must reflect a realistic, measurable standard to determine whether or not the goal has been attained.

- Goals should be planned, for example, there must be a timeframe or schedule within to work in order to attain a specific goal. For example, when learning for an examination, instead of covering the entire content at once, the learner could focus on setting 'sub-goals' by learning smaller amounts of the work within the scheduled timeframes so as to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

- Goals should encourage challenges which ought to be realistic and obtainable but not be so difficult as to cause premature disengagement.

2.5.6   WORKING TOWARDS ACHIEVING AUTONOMY

Ames (1992:267) highlights how particular instructional strategies influence motivation. The table below indicates the classroom structure and instructional strategies which support the realisation of goals. The same structure may also apply for parents at home:

Table 2.1:   Classroom structure and instructional strategies

Structure	Strategies	Motivational pattern
Task	Focus on the value of the learning activity. Ensure a form of uniqueness in the learning content. Aim at linking the content to the child's interests. Allow the child to be realistically challenged by the activity. Help learners to establish their own short term and long term goals.	Focus on the child's efforts. High level of intrinsic interest in the learning activity.
	Implement appropriate learning strategies to promote learning and development.	
Authority	Encourage learners to participate in decision-making. Provide "real" choices with the decisions being based on effort and not on ability evaluations. Provide opportunities for developing responsibility and independence.	Use of effective learning strategies. Active management.

Structure	Strategies	Motivational pattern
	Develop self-management and self-monitoring skills	
Evaluation/ Recognition	Highlight the child's improvement, progress and achievements.	Positive affect on high effort tasks Feeling of belonging "Failure-tolerance"

Motives are synonymous with needs which differ between individuals, their behaviour, as well as the incentives associated with these behaviours. Dresel and Hall (in Hall & Goetz, 2013:71) suggest that motives may, in fact, be regarded as components of an individual's personality. A child's motivation to complete a homework assignment may depend on the child's needs.

Dresel and Hall (2013, in Hall & Goetz, 2013:104) postulate that self-determination is a precondition for the development of intrinsic motivation. They are also of the opinion that interests are formed through fulfilling the need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Dresel and Hall (2013, in Hall & Goetz, 2013:105) emphasised support in terms of the following:

The need for autonomy:

- Learners must be included in decision-making regarding their learning goals.
- Activities ought to provide the learner with opportunities to incorporate various skills and engage in self-regulated learning.
- Learners should make use of self-assessment.
- Learners must be encouraged to regulate their behaviour.

The need for competence:

- Learners should receive continuous, positive feedback throughout their learning process.
- Clear, structured, and comprehensive instructions are required to ensure an unequivocal understanding of what is expected of the learner. This requires high levels of effort, concentration, and persistence (Meece, 1994:25).
- Assignments ought to be adjusted according to the learners' levels of ability.
- The learning activity or assignment should require and encourage the development of multiple skills.

The need for relatedness:

- Cooperative learning should be encouraged in order to meet this need.

- The development of a partnership between teachers, learners and parents is significant throughout the learning process.

2.5.7 ENCOURAGING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Stolk and Martello (2013) commented on techniques that help to shift learners towards becoming intrinsically motivated with the emphasis on acquiring competence. This will ensure that the learners feel that they becoming more skilled as the activity progresses and this should result in the learners feeling excited and motivated to continue with the activity and, thus, they will feel more connected to the team or group. The learners will, thus, be driven to engage further in the activity. Stolk and Martello (2013) are of the opinion this sense of relatedness extends beyond the classroom or home environment to the extent that the learner feels there is value in completing the task or activity and the knowledge and skills gained from a particular assignment could, perhaps, be applied in other learning areas.

Stolk and Martello (2013) highlight the aspect of autonomy as an important characteristic of intrinsic learning. In circumstances in which autonomy is encouraged, the child is given a certain control over the learning process (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems & Holbein, 2005:110). However, this may also constitute a challenge because parents are not sure when to assist, or when to hand responsibility over to the child. Stolk and Martello (2013) suggest that parents should never give up complete control during the learning process but that they may, for example, allow the child to choose the homework environment.

2.5.8 PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO STRENGTHEN CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The following suggestions include practical steps parents may follow throughout the learning process and which may strengthen the capacity of the child-learning opportunities and, therefore, encourage a child's participation in his/her own learning and development.

2.5.8.1 Help the child establish and maintain organisational systems

The emphasis should be on structure in order to keep track of the homework assignments and the management of such assignments. It is, therefore, essential to keep the homework area neat and organised. Dawson (2010:2) suggests the following:

- Place the homework in a separate, appropriate folder or notebook.
- Clear the desk so that the next homework session may begin in an orderly manner.

2.5.8.2 Incorporate an incentive system

An incentive system may be either simple or elaborate. Children who lack motivation benefit from this type of encouragement. Parents may apply a simple incentive system which includes

- giving the child something to look forward to once the homework has been completed

- creating study breaks in between assignments or in between sections when the child is studying for exams

- allowing the child to choose which assignment activity to compete first.

Parents may also make use of an elaborate incentive system which requires more planning as compared to the simple incentive system. The parents and child may work together. Dawson (2010:2) maintains that this form of incentive grants the child more control over the learning process while also enabling the child to take ownership of the process. Such an incentive system includes:

- Setting goals; for example, the child has to complete the homework within a specific timeframe and this creates a challenge.

- Deciding on a possible reward or penalty; for example, allowing the child to play his or her favourite videogame as a reward once the homework has been completed.

2.6   FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Cochran and Dean (1991:266) are of opinion that empowerment is an intentional, on-going process which is based on mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation and with the aim of gaining access to, and control over, resources.

Dunst, Johanson, Trivette and Hamby (1991 in the Center for Mental Health in School at UCLA, 2011:5) maintain that family orientated homes foster the shared values and common needs that promote interdependence. Support systems are established through the mobilisation of resources and assist families to fulfil their parental responsibilities. The sharing of responsibilities between parents and teachers, including shared ideas and skills, build and strengthen the collaboration between the teachers and parents (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2013:17). The empowerment of parents implies the capacity and competence to mobilise resources and fulfil parental responsibilities. Collaboration between the teachers and parents benefits the parent–teacher relationship as a result of the parental involvement in school activities (Comer & Haynes, 1991:276).

According to Wright and Stegelin (2003:301), teachers will communicate and collaborate effectively with parents when they

- explain the terminology that is relevant

- acknowledge the parents' needs and feelings

- listen to parents and validate their ideas

- adapt communication and planning to the specific situation

- keep parents informed and include them in planning

- are accountable on an ongoing basis

- recognise cultural diversity in parent relations

- involve parents in all aspects of the learning process

- allow parents to assume important roles

- keep records and documents relating to the collaborative attempts.

Studies have investigated inner city schools in the United States and identified characteristics that promote intellectual competence. Although not all of these characteristics are relevant to a South African context there are, nevertheless, striking similarities (Firestone, 1991 in Pressley & McCormick, 2007:287). These characteristics may also be considered of importance at home, and the following suggestions may be of help to parents at home in the same way as they would in the classroom environment. The suggestions include the following:

- Strong administrative leadership on the part of parents. Parents and their children must work together to structure and organise the homework area (Beveridge, 2005:80).

- A safe, orderly, but rigid environment.

- Continuous monitoring of the child's progress (Grant & Ray, 2010:224). This will enable the parents) to identify if the child is making repeated mistakes. It is also important to notice nonverbal behaviours such as confused looks when the child engages with the learning content. This may be monitored by asking certain questions such as "Do you understand the instruction?" (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012:73).

- A shared sense of academic purpose on the part of parents, teachers and children (Gilberson in Gimpel Peacock & Collet, 2010:182).

- Recognition of the child's accomplishments (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:88).

- High degree of involvement on the part of parents.

2.6.1 VOLUNTEERING CAPACITIES

The support and assistance of the parents are required throughout a child's learning process. However, the parents also need to feel appreciated and valued (Decker & Decker, 2003:62). Parents who volunteer to help will gain an understanding of the school and the teacher while they will also develop the self-confidence and acquire the new skills that enhance their participation (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:27). Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:70) also comment that volunteering acts as "an extra pair of hands" for the teaching staff in various areas of school life.

2.6.2   SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING AND ADVOCACY CAPACITIES

According to Decker and Decker (2003:62), the parents are "full partners" in the decisions that affect their children. However, parents and teachers rely on shared authority when it comes to decision-making in the hope of building trust, confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping children succeed.

Decision-making means that parents act as representatives on school governing bodies, school improvement teams, and class and grade committees with the aim of ensuring that the parents' voices are heard in school decisions (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:98).

2.6.3   GUIDING PARENTS TOWARD INCREASING THEIR INVOLVEMENT

Kriegler and Farman (1996:46) highlight the significant impact of parental involvement on a child's growth, cognitive development, literacy development and general learning capacity. They go on to say that the aim of such involvement is not to transform the parents into 'educational experts' but simply to empower them with new skills and to apply existing skills. Thus, parents require the basic information that may lead to empowerment (Grant & Ray, 2010:48). Lim (2003:153) emphasises that parents require continuous guidance, training sessions and pertinent information on how to become actively involved in their children's learning while Trahan and Lawler-Prince (1999:65) insist that parents need to be instructed on how to help their children at home with directions as to the appropriate roles they should play (Shah, 2001:131).

Anderman and Anderman (2010:103) postulate that parents should implement the following strategies to help to motivate their children throughout the learning process:

❖ **Parents should offer encouragement to their children**

Such encouragement takes place in the home (Moloi, 2005:78) and should focus on the child's accomplishments (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2002:289). Parents may encourage their children by sitting down with their children and completing a homework assignment together (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:103).

❖ **Parents should provide cognitively engaging materials in the home**

Teachers may provide parents with useful resources that the parents may use at home. Anderman and Anderman (2010:103) suggest that parents may either purchase these resources or merely borrow them from the school (Radebe, 2007:135).

❖ **Parents should engage in activities at home with their children**

Parents who engage in homework activities with their children indicate that they value education and, thus, they create and instil a positive attitude towards school (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2002:292).

❖ **Parents should help children to attribute failures and successes effort or lack thereof**

It is essential that parents focus on the way in which they offer feedback and encouragement to their children while they should ensure that they use supportive, motivationally appropriate language (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:104).

❖ **Parents should be encouraged to have high expectations of their children**

Parents need to help their children to set realistic, appropriate goals (Anderman & Anderman, 2010:104) and also motivate their children to achieve these goals (Dresel & Hall, 2013, in Hall & Goetz, 2013:76-77). When children do attain these goals, parents should provide them with positive reinforcement. Meece (1994:25) argues that this may result to a child feeling competent.

❖ **Parents should encourage their children to set mastery goals**

Children who set goals and strive towards achieving these goals are motivated to acquire the required knowledge and skills through planning and structuring their work (Dresel & Hall, 2013 in Hall & Goetz, 2013:76). This provides the children with an opportunity to achieve autonomy (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012:49). Anderman and Anderman (2010:105) highlight the importance of parents talking to their children at home about mastering the task at hand and focusing on learning and understanding the content, rather than simply concentrating on the marks which the child receives.

❖ **Parents should not rely on extrinsic motivation**

The reward system should not control the child's achievements, nor should it be the determining factor as to whether or not the child will learn specific content because he/she will receive an incentive if he/she masters such content. The child ought to find personal value in that which is learned as this should trigger an interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006:115) that will ensure further learning (Stolk & Martello, 2013). Anderman and Anderman (2010:106) suggest that the child may perhaps indicate an interest in and true understanding of a topic by engaging in an insightful conversation or debate with the parents on the topic of interest. Only then should the child be rewarded.

❖ **Parents should be encouraged to form partnerships and work with teachers**

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2002:292) emphasise the importance of a positive relationship between parents and teachers. Regular, positive communication between the home and the school will help to establish and maintain a relationship of trust (Grant & Ray, 2010:392) with such a relationship having a significant impact on a child's academic achievements (Jacobson, 2008 in Goodman, 2008:104).

❖ **Parents should make sure that their children complete their homework**

It is essential that parents must create a homework environment in which their children may work. In addition, they should contact the child's teachers on a regular basis should they be uncertain about the homework requirements (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:88). Parents should also monitor their child's homework progress (Bembenutty, 2011:344).

2.6.4 Practical suggestions to strengthen family and community support and resources

The following suggestions are practical steps parents may follow throughout the learning process in order to ensure support from various groups or individuals and to establish relationships which may be beneficial to themselves and their children on a social level.

2.6.4.1 Seek additional support

Parents are advised to include family members who may have had more experience than the parents in raising children and who may lend additional support (Dawson, 2010:2). Professor John Ashton endorsed this sentiment on the Redi Thlabi show on 702 talk radio and Cape (09 February 2015) when he suggested that parents need to find mentors, whether they are professionals or simply someone whom they trust and with whom they feel sufficiently comfortable with to express any concerns they may have. Professor Ashton also stated that parents should be encouraged to talk about their children and, in this way, develop a support network so that they "are kept in the loop and not remain in the dark".

2.6.4.2 Create a contact list

Parents may use various methods such as social media to form contact groups on their smartphone devices or they may simply print out a list of the parents' contact details from the children's classroom and keep the list in a convenient, accessible place at home, for example, on a pin-up board or the refrigerator. This will enable them to consult other parents when they need information about homework or should they have any other school related enquiry.

2.7 FAMILY-CENTRED PRACTICES

Family centredness suggests the sharing of information to enable parents and families to facilitate informed decisions; family choices on any aspect of an intervention during the child's learning process; parent-professional collaborations and partnerships and the mobilisation of resources conducive to optimal child, parent and family outcomes (Dunst, 2002:139).

According to Espe-Sherwindt (2008:136), family-centred practices include three main aspects: (1) the emphasis on strengths, not weaknesses; (2) the ability to make informed decisions and maintain control over sought after resources; and (3) the development of collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals.

Dunst (2002:139) suggests that family-centred practices involve the sharing of information that is pertinent to informed decision-making regarding the child's learning while Dunst and Trivette (1996 in Dunst, 2002:139) highlight that these family-centred practices consist of both relational and participatory components. The relational components emphasise the interpersonal skills obtained throughout the partnership whereas the participatory components support the individual concerns and priorities of the family and provide the family with opportunities for involvement. These opportunities enable parents to have a profound effect on the child's learning and development.

According to Anderman and Anderman (2010:95), parents shape their children's academic performance in the following ways:

❖ **The way in which parents communicate specific messages regarding school and learning**

The parents may feel that they communicate the importance of doing homework on a daily basis. However, it is also essential that parents take the responsibility of monitoring the child's homework on a regular basis to check whether or not the homework has been completed

❖ **The way in which parents influence the child's academic achievements based on their own behaviours**

The parents' level of commitment with regard to their involvement in their child's learning process, including the time spent with the child during homework; their volunteering at school events and how they engage in various school activities such as parent-teacher evenings, communicates to the child the value which the parents attach to school and education in general.

❖ **The way in which parents influence academic achievements through the atmosphere set at home**
Parenting styles have a profound effect on the developmental of a child.

Espe-Sherwindt (2008:137) highlights the core elements of family-centred practices as published by the Association for the Care of Children's Health (ACCH). Although the pertinence of these elements may be limited to one particular situation (or family) the implication of these core elements cannot be overlooked as they contribute significantly to the empowerment of the family. These core elements include

- the recognition that the family is the constant in a child's life

- the facilitation of a parent-professional collaboration at all levels (including the individual family)

- honouring the racial, ethnical, cultural and socio- economic diversity of families

- the recognition of family strengths, individuality, and different methods of coping

- continually sharing complete and unbiased information with parents in supportive ways

- the encouragement of family-support networks – creating systems that encompass the needs of children and their families

- the implementation of programmes that provide emotional support to families

- designing accessible service systems that are flexible, culturally competent, and responsive to family needs which have been identified.

2.8   CONCLUSION

The interconnectedness of the components highlights the way in which these components support one another equally throughout the learning process. As one area in a child's learning grows so, too, does another. It emerged from the discussion of the separate components in the chapter that there are various factors that complement different aspects to a child's leaning and development, thus contributing to the strengthening of the family-centred practices and the empowerment of the parents.

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CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The word *methodology* has its origins in the Greek words *meta* – along, *hodos* – the path, and *logos* – knowledge (Bezuidenhout, 2011:42). This chapter describes the research *journey* I took. The chapter starts by discussing the research design, including the research paradigm the qualitative research approach and the case study. This is followed by a description of the research methods used, the participants in the study; my role as researcher and the data collection techniques, including the use of crystallisation and the narrative inquiry. Finally, the chapter discusses the data analysis process and the trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data.

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Creswell (2009:3), research designs are "plans and procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis." It is essential that decisions made focus on the research design which is best suited to the study in question. These decisions will be based on the worldview of the researcher holds; the procedures to be followed in the inquiry; and the methods of data collection and data analysis. These aspects will be discussed later. Creswell (2009:3) strongly emphasises that a research design centres on the nature of the research problem, the researcher's personal experiences, and the audience to whom the study is directed.

Van Maanen (2005:188) refers to a research design as an "umbrella phrase", stating that it includes multiple interpretive techniques with the aim of describing, coding, and translating the meaning of a naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world. In essence, this is a descriptive form of research (Welman et al., 2005:188).

The following sections focus on constructionism as the research paradigm as well as on qualitative research and the case study.

3.2.1   RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is based on the principle that the researcher ought to examine the foundations of his or her thinking (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:310). Thus, each foundational question may be answered differently, depending on the researcher's ontology (worldview) and epistemology (how the researcher thinks the particular phenomenon ought to be studied). This study relied on constructivism in the sense that meaning is socially constructed

through the involvement of the participants in the child's learning and development. Thus, the study focused on emphasising their personal experiences as parents during the learning process while employing the narrative inquiry to convey their personal perspectives. Creswell (2009:10) argues that a paradigm arises out of situations, actions and consequences.

Fouché and Schurink (2011:310) suggest that constructionists believe in an ever-continuous, changing narrative. Thus, reality is constructed socially and personally though the active involvement of the participants in the study. In the study reality was constructed through the involvement of the parents throughout the child's learning and development process. Fouché and Schurink (2011:310) postulate that reality is the result of constructive processes and highlight that the narrative inquiry is a related paradigm (discussed later in this chapter in the section on data collection).

The table below is adapted from Schurink (1998:246-24 in Fouché & Schurink, (2011:311) and highlights the research perspective that was deemed relevant to this particular study.

Table 3.1:   Summary of the methods used for the purpose of the study

Research component	Contextual significance
Ontology	The reality of the situation may be known only by the parents who personally experience the need to be empowered so that they may support their children with homework.
Epistemology	These parents, who experience the learning and development, construct knowledge through self-conscious action during the learning process. Thus, it is essential that a partnership develops through the interaction between the various components within the learning process. A holistic view is required in order to place the phenomenon under study in context.
Methodology	The use of narrative inquiry.
Data collection and analysis	• Personal and official documents • Semi- structured interviews • Informal conversations • Observations • Personal narrative and lived experiences in written text
Style of writing and reporting	The interviews, as well as the questions posed to the participants and their personal accounts during the learning process, are recorded in a narrative form.

3.2.2   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

According to Creswell (2007:37), qualitative research entails assumptions; a worldview; a theoretical perspective (this study used Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment, and the study of research problems.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 321-324) identify nine key characteristics of qualitative research, and are of opinion that these nine key characteristics are pertinent to any qualitative study, although not all have to be applied. The nine key characteristics include natural setting; context sensitivity; direct data collection; rich narrative description; process orientation; inductive data analysis; participant perspectives; emergent designs, and complexity of understanding and explanation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 321).

A comprehensive description of these characteristics is provided in the context of this study.

3.2.2.1 Natural setting

In qualitative research behaviour within the natural setting is studied without manipulation. In this study, the setting was the child's homework room (The Homework Zone) where I conducted my fieldwork. The natural setting allows for intimate and open-ended activities (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011:395).

3.2.2.2 Context sensitivity

Context sensitivity refers to the situational context in which actions and behaviours take place. It was, therefore, important to view the parents' need for guidance to enable them to support their child with homework as unique within their specific situation and to take into account their "frustrations" and "anxieties" regarding the demands imposed on them to participate in their child's learning process and lend their support (Jacobson, 2008 in Goodman, 2008:101), and to focus on how they could work towards improving this situation through involvement in their child's learning process (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:87).

3.2.2.3 Direct data collection

I made use of the participant as observer technique and, thus, I became part of the child's learning process, as well as the parents' empowerment process, and worked with the participants to develop strategies the parents could use to better support their child during homework (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:85). This in turn enabled me to obtain pertinent information directly from the source as a result of my spending a considerable amount of time in direct interaction with the participants in their home (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 322).

3.2.2.4 Rich narrative descriptions

The concept of rich narrative descriptions emphasises that no information is trivial. Accordingly, everything that was recorded in this study contributed significantly to the understanding of the research phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 322). In the context of this study, I made use of transcripts, conversations and the interviews I had conducted with the participants during the study.

3.2.2.5   Process orientation

In relation to qualitative research, process orientation seeks to find out how and why a specific phenomenon occurs. In the context of this study, the main aim of the study was to investigate how parents may become empowered for homework support. In seeking answers to the secondary research questions, I aimed to understand the role of the teacher in guiding parents to support children with homework; how the parents' confidence may be enhanced to support their children with homework and how children experience parental support with homework. These aims all emphasised the empowerment of parents in terms of their involvement throughout the child's learning process and enabled me to draw conclusions that explained the reasons behind the research results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 323).

3.2.2.6   Inductive data analysis

In terms of inductive data analysis the data is first collected, and then analysed inductively in order to allow for certain generalisations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 323). I discussed this aspect in the previous chapters, stating that, although I worked with a single case, the need to feel empowered is common to parents and families, irrespective of their circumstances. Thus, although the modus operandi may differ slightly for other families, the key concepts would remain the same. The data analysis I conducted for the purposes of this study led me to new ways of understanding the research phenomenon by constructing meaning using all the information at my disposal (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 323).

3.2.2.7   Participant perspectives

The qualitative approach helped me to reconstruct reality from the parents' perspectives regarding their empowerment process. The aim was to understand the situation from their point of view and to listen to their voices (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 323). Their "voices" have, however, been altered while the participants themselves have taken on the forms of fictional characters. Nevertheless; the comments made by the participants are bona fide and were cited in the previous chapter.

3.2.2.8   Emergent designs

McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 323) argue that the qualitative researcher enters into an investigation. The aim of the investigation in this study was to find out how parents may be guided and, subsequently, empowered to support their children with homework. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007:54), prior to embarking on a study the researcher's knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation is usually limited. Thus, during the course of the study, the researcher learns more about the setting, the people and other sources of information and, therefore, he/she comes to a greater understanding of the research topic than was previously the case (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 323). I consulted a variety of

sources pertaining to parental involvement; support; homework, guidance and empowerment in order to improve my existing knowledge and understanding about supporting parents.

3.2.2.9   Complex understanding and explanation

In the context of this study the notion of complex understanding and explanation emphasises that empowering parents through adequate guidance is a result of multiple factors. In addition, this requires multiple perspectives, thus suggesting that it was not possible to account for all of the complexities of this situation under investigation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:324).

3.2.3   CASE STUDY

This study focused on a single case, involving one family. The aim of the study was to investigate how parents may become empowered for homework support through adequate guidance. In the case I took on the role of the child's learner support teacher as well as that of the researcher (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:85). In addition, I became part of the child's learning process, as well as the parents' learning process, and I guided them through these learning processes. Stake (in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:345) emphasises that a case is determined by the unique time, place and context of the case in question while Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:25) argue that the objective of the case study is to investigate this single bounded system as part of a larger system (Dunst, 2004:3). The use of the case study provided me with the opportunity of investigating the parents' need to become empowered so that they could support their child with homework in an in depth manner (Bell, 2010:8).

Gay et al. (2011:446–448) identify the following five significant components of a case study, namely, the research questions; the case under investigation; the role of theory development; the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study; and the appropriateness of the type of case. These components will now be discussed in the context of this study.

3.2.3.1   The research questions

The research questions determine the appropriateness of the research method selected. They identify the *who, what, how*, and *why* of the research study. The purpose of the study was to *investigate how parents may become empowered to support with homework.* Therefore, the main research question (section 1.3.1) was: **How can parents become empowered to support with homework?** The "who" signified the parents, the support was the "what" that was being investigated while "how" it would be done was through guidance (Clarke, 2007:174), and the reason "why" was so that the parents could assist with homework.

The secondary research questions (section 1.3.2) included the following:

What is the role of the learning support teacher in guiding the parents? It is important to emphasise again that, for the purposes of this study, the teacher and the researcher were the same person. In terms of this question the teacher was the person who was under investigation as I intended to investigate my role throughout the learning process. I did this through the use of the narrative approach while my reason for asking this question was to determine my role as the learner support teacher and my impact throughout the learning process.

The second question asks: **How can the parents' confidence become enhanced through guidance in homework support?** In terms of this question, I focused on the parents' confidence when they provided support during homework. I did this through observations, semi-structured and informal conversations. The reason behind this question was that parents ought to feel confident in their ability to provide the necessary support. Confidence is synonymous with empowerment (Radebe, 2007:135).

The third question asks: **What is the experience of the child who participated in the study of parental support with homework?** I conducted informal conversations and I scrutinised documentation pertaining to the child's academic progress (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:356). The reason for this question was that I intended to obtain an in-depth account the phenomenon under investigation from the child's standpoint (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87).

3.2.3.2 The case under investigation

The researcher defines the variables under investigation and indicates what the unit of analysis is. For the purposes of this study I intended to use documents; photographs; semi structured interviews; informal conversations and observations (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87).

3.2.3.3 The role of existing theory

The researcher explicitly indicates the theoretical framework to be used to support the case. I made use of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment which highlights key components of the empowerment process (Agnew-Tally & Mott, 2010:38). In this study no new theory was developed. However, I did make explicit use of the existing theory which portrays the interconnectedness between the home and the school and to which I referred to throughout the study. I also made subtle reference to the systems theory and the significant overlapping qualities that contribute to a child's learning and development (Dunst, 2004:3). Thus, instead of developing a theory, I drew attention to these shared theoretical principles.

3.2.3.4 The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

The theoretical and conceptual framework of the study derived from my disciplinary orientations which informed what I was studying and how I was studying it. Thus, in the study I had gone about investigating parental empowerment from an educational perspective. This investigation was determined by existing literature on parents, empowerment, support, and homework.

3.2.3.5 The appropriateness of the type of case

The appropriateness of the type of case refers to the perspectives of the participants, whether their perspectives are credible and dependable and whether they are able to provide a 'complete picture' so that the researcher is able to understand the research phenomenon (Gay et al., 2011:448). For the purpose of this study I investigated one single family. The participants included the parents and the child.

3.3 THE RESEARCH METHODS

This section discusses the participants in the study; my role as the researcher; the data collection; the use of crystallisation; the narrative inquiry; the steps taken in the data analysis and the trustworthiness of the study.

3.3.1 THE PARTICIPANTS

I have stated previously that the participants consisted of a middle class family – a mother, a father, and their twelve year old son in Grade 6 at a school in Gauteng. For the purpose of the study, the participants and I agreed that pseudonyms would be used throughout the study, in order to protect their right to both confidentiality and anonymity (Mouton, 2001:244). Their rights were clearly stipulated and explained in the letter of consent issued to them (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:42).

3.3.2 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

At the time of the study I had been Bryan's learning support teacher for more than a year, working with Bryan after school, helping him primarily with homework, including examination preparation. In the time I had worked with him he had shown significant academic improvement. His parents had required my services because they were (and still are) uncertain as to how to help Bryan with his homework and, in particular, how to help him to study for exams. As Megan remarked, 'The workload is so much already, the school is very demanding – it's overwhelming. For all of us. I dread to think what's going to happen when Bryan goes to high school. I can't motivate Bryan to work anymore – he's at that age where it's really uncool for your mom to help…'

While working with this family I had explained my research topic (Empowering parents for homework support) to them. They had been interested and had agreed to participate in the study under the terms and conditions we had discussed and agreed upon.

As I have stated previously, my role was to guide these parents with homework support in order to give them a sense of empowerment. Thus, in line with the thinking of Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:42), I intended to "empower" my participants and to "enter into a collaborative partnership" with them in order to collect and analyse the data required for a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of my research topic (Gay et al., 2011:381).

3.3.3 DATA COLLECTION

3.3.3.1 Personal and official documents

For the purpose of the study the use of documents formed part of the written communication that shed light on the relationship between the school and the parents (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:82). I gathered data from the child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, tests, examination papers, and report cards that indicated the feedback from the school on the learner's academic progress. I used data from both personal and official documents. The personal documents related to anecdotal records, including journals, notes on lesson plans, etc. while the official documents pertained to external communication such as school newsletters and reports (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:356).

3.3.3.2 Photographs

I had taken photographs during the homework sessions to indicate Bryan's academic progress. These photographs were incorporated into the data collection with the purpose of illustrating various aspects of the homework sessions, such as the participants engaging in the homework activities.

3.3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews corresponded with the purpose of the study as such interviews "corroborate data emerging from other data sources". The researcher sets the pace and defines the line of enquiry through a set of predetermined questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87). The aim of these interviews was to gain a detailed account of the parents' perceptions of their support with homework. In addition, such interviews allowed both me and the participants a degree of flexibility. In addition, this study was a personal study and this corresponded with the semi–structured interview format (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2011:351). I also incorporated my own reflective thoughts and opinions throughout the interview process.

3.3.3.4 Informal conversations

The interviews conducted during this study took the form of conversations which were aimed at investigating how the parents perceived their child's homework, and academic progress. In line with Nieuwenhuis's (2007:87) suggestions, my interviews with the participants took place over an extended period of time and consisted of a series of informal meetings. The child had agreed to and, subsequently, participated in unstructured and informal conversations.

3.3.3.5 Observations

I used the participant as observer technique in the study and, thus, I became part of the child's learning process, as well as guiding the parents through their own learning process, and working with the participants to develop strategies the parents could use to provide better support to their child during homework. Nieuwenhuis (2007:85) suggests the researcher becomes a participant in the situation "and may intervene in the dynamics of the situation". Thus, I was able to guide the parents so that they could support their child with homework. In other words, I had engaged in this particular context to gain a perspective on why, and to what extent, the parents needed guidance. I also relied on running records as extended, detailed and continuous accounts of my observations, describing the parents' empowerment during the child's learning process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:85).

3.3.3.6 Narrative

Narrative research is defined as a study of people's experiences through storytelling (Gay et al., 2011:400). Narrative research involves the use of a methodology that includes the collection of data about the lives of the participants in a particular study with data collection contributing to the making of sense and also giving meaning to the study under investigation (Bell, 2010:18). Gray (1998:12 in Bell, 2010:19) suggests that, in narrative research, both the researcher and the participants are given a "voice" with this adding a powerful and significant dimension to the research.

According to Creswell (2012), the narrative approach has five key characteristics. These characteristic will be discussed in the context of this study. The characteristics identified include (1) who authorises the account: In this study, the participants told their side of the story. However, the fact that I, as the researcher, was also a participant throughout the child's learning process, gave me authorisation, (2) the scope of the narrative: This research study comprised "a series of episodes" in the lives of Bryan and his parents, (3) who provides the story: In this case, the participants and I told our side of the story in the form of a reflective journal (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:102). Throughout the study everyone involved (the child, his parents, and I) gave their perspectives on the learning process, (4) the type of theoretical and contextual framework: The use of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment not only allowed for interaction, but also enabled the participants to

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reflect on the individual roles they played in the learning process and this contributed to their understanding of the research phenomenon and helped strengthen the parents' sense of empowerment (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 321), and (5) the inclusion of all these aspects that formed part of the narrative approach.

Narrative research is personal and, thus, it requires sensitivity on the part of the researcher. In addition, according to Gay et al. (2011:402), it is essential that the participants are assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity

In this study the narrative depicted personal experiences and made use of a variety of procedures for the purpose of interpretation. I used functional analysis to enable me to look at what my participants were telling me about their involvement in the learning process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:103). The data I collected told a story and was subsequently integrated with the relevant literature, and analysed. The narrative in this study was conveyed at an interpretive level, and was conversational. In addition, I analysed the data and identified a series of important texts. Themes and subthemes then emerged from the texts (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:103).

"Equality of voice is especially critical in the researcher-participant relationship because the participant must feel empowered to tell the story" (Gay et al., 2011:403). Storytelling was deemed to be the type of narrative that was best suited to this particular study as it creates opportunities for the participants to convey their stories on a personal level. Gay et al. (2011:406) further state that, when storytelling is employed, the researcher is able to add his/her understanding of a "day in the life" of the participants. In this case study this enabled me to engage in helping parents with homework support through guidance. As indicated in the discussion on the data collection techniques, I made use of field notes derived from both personal documents and verbatim accounts of stories as these field notes provided insights into the lives of my participants as well as their perceptions of their involvement in the learning process and the parents' need for support.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves a reflective process. According to Gay et al. (2011:465), this reflective process may include field notes from observations and interviews. The use of pictures and interview transcripts in this study also gave rise to the richness of the data collected as well as an in-depth perspective and understanding of the participants. This process emphasised how important it was for me as both the researcher and the learner support teacher to know and understand the data (Gay et al., 2011:466).

The analysis of the data commenced from my first interaction with the participants. In order to sort the significant data from the trivial data, I collected the data, examined it, compared prior data to recent data and used field notes (Gay et al., 2011:466). Throughout this stage

the data collection and the data analysis were intertwined. I also followed the suggestions of Gay et al. (2011:466) and paid close attention to the way in which my participants responded throughout the learning process, how this contributed to the significance of the study and whether I required additional insight into their attitudes, particularly towards their child's homework and their sense of empowerment when they provided their support during the child's learning process.

I tried identifying new concepts as I collected the data in order to establish whether or not a new concept had, indeed, emerged at that point. Applying the principle advocated by Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994:155), I kept in mind that it was imperative that I still be able to answer my primary research question and also whether, in fact, it was worth answering. My data collection techniques provided me with the credible and reliable data I needed for my study.

3.4.1 STEPS IN THE DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The following steps were used to analyse the data collected, namely, reading; describing and classifying (Gay et al., 2011:468). Each step is discussed in the context of this study.

3.4.1.1 Reading

It was necessary for me to write and read both field notes and interview transcripts in order to make sense of the data. This was an important aspect of the data analysis process as it highlighted what was significant to me and acted as a record of my initial thoughts, in addition to the "recurring themes or common threads" which emerged (Gay et al., 2011:468).

3.4.1.2 Describing

Describing in the context of the data analysis entails "thorough and comprehensive descriptions of the participants, the setting, and the phenomenon studied to convey the rich complexity of the research" (Gay et al., 2011:468). My collection of the data from documents, observations, photographs, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations created a narrative picture of the setting and the events and this provided a deeper understanding of the context of the study (Gay et al., 2011:468).

Gay et al. (2011:468) postulate that meaning relies on a thorough description of the context, actions and interactions of the participants. Thus, my study described a typical day in the life of my participants, focusing on their various perspectives of the child's learning process as well as the parents' empowerment process.

3.4.1.3   Classifying

This step involved identifying the pertinent units of analysis and, thus, I grouped the data into themes and categories. I presented the units of analysis in accordance with the layout used to describe the key components of empowerment in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1). Accordingly, the data was divided under the three main components, namely, parenting supports; child-learning opportunities; family and community supports and resources; and family-centred practices. The categories pertaining to the theme of parenting support included parenting capacities and communication capacities, the theme of child-learning opportunities included the role of homework and intrinsic motivation, the theme of family and community support and resources included volunteering capacities, school decision-making and advocacy capacities while the theme of family-centred practices emphasised elements of family empowerment.

A detailed description of these themes and categories is provided in the next chapter (section 4.3). By using Dunst's theoretical framework and then following the steps, I was able to ensure a 'click' and, thus, create a full picture from which I was able to draw conclusions and answer the research questions.

3.4.2   CRYSTALLISATION

Crystallisation is described as a process whereby the researcher reflects on the data analysis process in order to identify meaningful patterns, themes and categories that may be articulated and substantiated using the data which has been collected (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008). This research study investigated how parents may become empowered so that they are able to support their children with homework. This required a deeper understanding of the role of the teacher in the learning process; how the parents' confidence could be enhanced to improve the support they offered to their child with homework and how the child experienced the support from his parents during homework. Thus, the study emphasised the human understanding of the phenomenon in question and constructed multiple realities from the different insights and perspectives of the parents, as well as my perspectives as the learner support teacher regarding the child's learning process. In addition, it reflects the uniqueness of the study throughout as an emerging process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:81). Themes and categories were identified throughout the analysis process and were used to add weight to the research findings.

3.5   TRUSTWORTHINESS

I ensured the trustworthiness of my data analysis, research findings and conclusions. In addition, I also ensured the credibility, conformability, transformability, dependability confidentiality and anonymity, and limitations of my study.

The table below illustrates the four criteria that were met and the techniques that used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. These criteria and techniques were proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and are discussed in the context of the study. They were implemented in the form of a checklist of the standards I applied throughout the research process.

Table 3.2: Checklist of the standards applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the study

The strategy	The techniques implemented
Credibility	• Prolonged engagement • Persistent observations • Peer debriefing • Member-checks
Transferability	• Thick descriptions
Dependability	• Inquiry audit
Confirmability	• Audit trial • Reflectivity

3.5.1   CREDIBILITY

According to Shenton (2004:64), credibility means that the study reveals what it intended to reveal and, thus, it refers to how congruent the findings are with reality. I used the following techniques to ensure the credibility of the study.

❖ **Prolonged engagement**

Prolonged engagement refers to adequate time being spent in the social setting in which the research phenomenon occurs (Krefting, 1991:217). Throughout the research period I spent ample time with the child and his parents in their home, where I had engaged in the child's learning process. I formed a relationship with the participants that allowed me to build trust and share information pertaining to the child and his progress (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

❖ **Persistent observations**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:304), persistent observation identifies characteristics and elements that emphasise the issue or problem under investigation. In this study, where the prolonged engagement supplied a "scope" of the child's learning process and how the parents were guided towards empowerment in homework support, persistent observation focused on the parents' need for in depth empowerment and enabled me to observe the situation in detail.

❖ **Peer debriefing**

Lincoln and Guba (1985:308) explain this technique as "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might, otherwise, remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind." Accordingly, I consulted my peers for their comments and advice on aspects of the study, including my writing capacity, statements I made and reference techniques.

❖ **Member-checks**

This aspect of credibility tests the data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions using the participants from whom the data was gathered (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Credibility in this regard was safeguarded as a result of the informal conversations I held with the participants in the study. These informal conversations also provided the participants with access to the dissertation at any point throughout the research process, thus enabling them to supply additional information or confirm certain aspects of the data, including correcting misunderstandings that may have arisen during the transcribing of the interviews. I emphasised their right to view, comment on or change statements made during the interviews or as recorded in the transcripts in order to remain as close as possible to the intended meanings (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:113).

3.5.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability refers to the ability to use the findings of the study and apply them to the wider community where it may be applicable (Shenton, 2004:69). I ensured that it would be possible to make generalisations although I fully acknowledged the uniqueness of the context of the study. However, I noticed similarities between the family in my study and other families as well as similarities with other parents' need to support their children in homework. My research topic was "empowering parents for homework support" and, thus, the implications of a sense of empowerment apply to all parents and families with children who require guidance and support on some level during the learning and development process.

 In the context of the study, I ensured that I provided background data in order to establish the context of the study and, furthermore, I supplied a detailed description of the phenomenon in question to enable comparisons with similar studies on families and their children's learning and development.

3.5.3 DEPENDABILITY

The purpose of this strategy is to indicate that, if the same study were to be conducted in the same context, using the same methods and involving the same participants, similar results would be achieved (Shenton, 2004:71). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), an inquiry audit ensures that the credibility of the study supports the dependability of the study as an overlapping component of the trustworthiness of the methods implemented in the study and

applying to the research design to such an extent that they may be applied again in another study of a similar nature and yield similar results. Thus, studies relating to family and parental involvement in a child's learning process would be able to employ the same methodology as that used in this study in order to obtain data and achieve results congruent with the results of this study.

3.5.4   CONFIRMABILITY

The audit trail in a study ensures that proper and transparent steps were taken from the point at which the research process commenced, through the unfolding of the process and up to the reporting of the findings of the research process (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The information on which I reported included the raw data pertaining to my field notes and other documents such as the child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, as well as tests, examination papers and report cards that indicated feedback from the school on the learner's academic progress; data reduction and data analysis outcomes such as summaries of events and certain experiences throughout the research period; data reconstruction including themes, definitions and relationships, findings and conclusions that related to exiting literature on the research topic; process notes on the methodological steps taken; the intentions and dispositions as contained in my personal notes in the form of a reflective journal and, finally, developmental information where I had indicated preliminary schedules. Nieuwenhuis (2007:114) contends that it is important record any changes made to the research design and, thus, I indicated any amendments during the research process and which pertained specifically to additional data sources I had consulted, as well as modifications in terms of the data collection. These changes were documented in the form of a personal journal in which I indicated what I had observed while engaging with the text to ensure that my interpretations of the data were understood.

3.5.5   MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Mouton (2001:244) highlights obligations to maintain confidentiality and anonymity and that I took into account throughout the study. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these obligations include (1) No secret or clandestine research; (2) An obligation to ensure the free and open dissemination of the research results as well as the right to the participants' privacy (including the right to refuse to participate in a research study); and (3) The right to anonymity and confidentiality. I explained the aims of the study to the participants and guaranteed the participants continuous information regarding the process of the study.

In addition, I obtained the informed consent of the parents of the child, provided that I act *bona fide* and upheld to their right to anonymity. I explained the purpose of my research study to all of the participants (including the child) in written format as well as verbally. I also received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria. To conduct the study. I ensured that I adhered to the ethical codes of conduct and procedures as stipulated by the University

of Pretoria to ensure ethical publishing practices and the rejection of any form of plagiarism (Mouton, 2001:241).

3.5.6   STATING THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For the purposes of the study I worked with one family only and, thus, the nature of my relationship with the participants was often intense. In addition, the data collection was not always consistent for numerous reasons, for example, the child was absent or had other engagements such as extracurricular activities, and this prolonged the duration of my study.

The data collection was heavily dependent on the continuity of the learner support sessions with the child. From a longevity perspective, and from a personal point of view, my intention to support and guide the parents to enable them to assist their child with homework ought to have extended further than just the research period. Although there was evident progress in terms of "empowering" the participants, it is difficult to determine whether this family-centred dynamic will be maintained throughout the child's learning process and into his high school years.

3.6   ETHICAL MEASURES

I took the correct and most appropriate steps to ensure that I upheld ethical standards while conducting the study. Accordingly, I adhered to the ethical standards set by the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. In addition, I received ethical clearance subsequent to a review by the ethical committee and was given the following reference number: **EC 13/08/02**. The criteria that I met relating to upholding ethical standards included, inter alia, ensuring the voluntary participation of the participants; ensuring their freedom to discontinue to participate in the study at any time; obtaining the informed consent of the parents and informed assent of the child; ensuring their safety, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity; dissemination of the research findings and data collection and storage.

3.6.1   ENSURING VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Based on the captive audience clause which indicates that participants may, potentially, be obligated to participate in a study as a result of the researcher's position of authority (power) in relation to the participants it is possible that the participation in the study may, in fact, not have been voluntary while this may also have compromised the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. However, I ensured that I did not abuse my power of authority at any stage throughout the research period.

The participants' right to voluntary participation in the study was communicated and explained to them verbally and also made available in written format prior to the commencement of the research process. In addition, no incentives were either used or

offered to manipulate the performance of the participants or to alter the proceedings in any way. The participants were also given the opportunity to comment on drafts such as transcripts of the interviews. The participants' contributions to the research process were both valued and encouraged. They also had access to the dissertation at all times as their roles had represented and supported the study.

The participants' right to view, comment on or change statements made during the interviews, if they so desired was unambiguously communicated to them prior to the study, both verbally as well as in written format.

3.6.2 FREEDOM TO DISCONTINUE AT ANY TIME

The participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time with this right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process, if they so wished, being unambiguously communicated to them prior to the study, both verbally as well as in written format.

3.6.3 INFORMED CONSENT FROM THE PARENTS AND INFORMED ASSENT FROM THE MINOR

I provided the parents with an appropriate documentation indicating the aims of the study and the significance of their participation throughout the research process. In addition, I both referred to and adhered to the strict guidelines stipulated in this documentation under the terms and condition of my personal declaration of responsibility while I also acted *bona fide* on behalf of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria. In addition, I presented the parents of the child with a letter of consent containing the relevant details of the study.

In terms of the language medium used, the research study was conducted in the participants' mother tongue of Afrikaans. However, the participants provided informed consent to translate the transcripts of the interviews into English. Although the participants were Afrikaans speaking they were fully competent in English. I communicated (verbally and in written format) that I would translate the interviews into English as this would be more convenient for me with regard to writing up this research. This was clearly stipulated in the letter of consent which was drafted in English prior to the commencement of the research process.

3.6.4 SAFETY OF THE PARTICIPANTS

I took into account the possible benefits and consequences that the participants may have expected as a result of their participating in the study. I ensured that I acted in the best interests of the participants in guiding them to enable them to support their child throughout the learning process (Gilberson in Gimpel Peacock & Collet, 2010:182) and, therefore to feel empowered and to feel connected to the school instead of "unplugged".

❖ **The potential risk and harm to the participants in this study**

The nature of the study ensured that the participants were not subjected to any potential risk or harm during the study, nor were their identities compromised.

❖ **The safety measures taken to minimise such risks**

I conducted the research study in accordance with the standards of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria. In the event of any unforeseen incidents occurring, I made provision to consult the Department of Early Childhood Development for further guidance.

❖ **Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

I ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants during the selection of the sample. The research sample included the learner and his parents. A detailed description of my intentions had been communicated to them in a letter of consent.

I based my modus operandi on the work of Mouton (2001:244), and ensured the following: (1) No secret or clandestine research; (2) An obligation to the free and open dissemination of the research results as well as the right to privacy of the participants, including their right to refuse to participate in the research; and (3) Their right to anonymity and confidentiality.

The privacy of the participants was protected although they had agreed to forego the confidentiality requirements based on a full disclosure of possible intended and unintended consequences and risks related to their participation. In addition, I took practical steps to safeguard their confidentiality and anonymity during the data collection phase of the study, for example, I ensured that the child's face was not visible in any photograph taken for the data collection purposes. The data collected, including the transcriptions of statements made during the interviews, was presented anonymously. The participants' true identities were also safeguarded in terms of the personal declaration of responsibility agreement as highlighted by the research ethics committee. Finally, the use of pseudonyms also protected their identities.

3.6.5 DISSEMINATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

As stated previously, I intend to share the findings of my research with both academia and the broader community in the form of published articles.

3.6.6 DATA ACCESS AND STORAGE

The participants had access to the research results as well as to any debriefing information subsequent to their participation. The participants shared insights, knowledge and opinions with me as the purpose of the study was that we would work together. The participants received full disclosure of all information prior to, during and subsequent to the study and they played an equal part throughout the research process.

With regard to the audit trail of the data from the data collection to the storage of the data, all documents, including personal and official documents of the child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, class tests, examinations papers and report cards were kept in my possession.

This data was shared with my supervisor and safely stored in a research file and in a computer file on my laptop. Copies were saved to an external hard drive which was also in my sole possession. I understand the conditions imposed by the research ethics committee and stipulated in the personal declaration of responsibility subsection 4. I upheld the terms and conditions stipulated in the clause which stated that the data collected in the course of research becomes the institutional property of the University of Pretoria. In addition, I undertook the transfer of all the raw data and the documents related to the study for safekeeping as required by the Faculty of Education.

3.7 CONCLUSION

A methodology may be regarded as a path that the researcher takes in order to find the best route to exploring a particular phenomenon. There are many ways of conducting research and arriving at a particular destination. This chapter highlighted the decisions I made throughout my research journey. The chapter discussed the research paradigm, the nature of inquiry and the methods used for both the data collection and the data analysis and which acted as a GPS system to help guide the research study.

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CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the data analysis process conducted in the study and to ensure a detailed account of the participants' contributions to the study by emphasising their perspectives on the research topic. This research study employed a qualitative approach with one family being selected to participate in a case study. The data collection techniques used in the study were highlighted and discussed in section 3.3.3). These data collection techniques included the use of documents and photographs; semi-structured interviews; informal conversations; and observations. The documents consisted of official documents, such as the child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, as well as tests, examination papers, and report cards that indicated the feedback from the school on the learner's academic progress. Professional documents were also incorporated in the study and included journals and personal notes. The purpose of collecting these documents was to obtain subjective records of the child's academic progress (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:356) and to view the data as seen through the eyes of the parents.

The raw material such as photographs and documents pertaining to the child's progress, including tests or examination papers, as well as school letters were integrated in order to add substance to the data collected and also played an integral role in the interpretation of the data. As stated in the previous chapter, although the photographs did not have as much significance for the data analysis process as the other forms of data, they did, however, indicate various aspects of the homework sessions, such as the participants engaging in the homework activities, while they also represented visual descriptions of events as well as the research site. The semi-structured interviews contributed to the subjective nature of the study (De Vos et al., 2011:351) while the way in which the interviews were conducted set the pace and tone of the line of enquiry through the set of predetermined questions which were asked during the interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87) as well as the secondary questions which emerged from the predetermined questions. The latter led to the establishment of an informal conversational pattern during the interview sessions with the informal conversations contributing to the conversational tone which had characterised the informal nature of the interviews with the participants, especially the child. The observations allowed for engagement with the participants and led to a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon than may otherwise have been the case. The personal records and field notes that formed part of the data analysis emerged from this process. This chapter also includes an interpretation of the data which shed light on the theoretical framework used in

the study, the literature review and my own personal experience and which gave meaning to the empirical nature of the study while also enabling me to draw conclusions on the study and answer the research questions.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

I ensured that the participants' right to anonymity was respected and safeguarded throughout the study. Accordingly, the participants in the study were given pseudonyms (section 3.3.1) (Mouton, 2001:244). The interviews, which told the story of the participants and explained their perspectives on the research topic, were transcribed respectfully and accurately. These transcripts formed the basis of the data analysis and, as indicated later in this chapter, revealed key themes and categories.

Table 4.1: The participants in the study

Participant	Pseudonyms	Status
Mother	Megan	Stay at home mom
Farther	Philip	Medical practitioner
Child	Bryan	Grade 6 learner

This family resides in an affluent area in Gauteng. Bryan attends a former model C school. His parents, Megan and Philip, are both well-educated although, as Megan admitted to me, 'when it comes to homework, no level of education can prepare you for the demands of a school'. Bryan is an only child and this contributes to the anxiety in the home as there is no frame of reference for Megan or Philip to use. 'It's like learning Grade 6 all over again … only now, it's so much harder, I'm overwhelmed … I cannot begin to imagine how Bryan must feel,' Philip remarked during one of our conversations. Bryan has difficulty in concentrating and takes prescribed doses of medication that is intended to induce concentration in children especially in the mornings before school and in the afternoons during homework sessions. As previously mentioned, I collaborated with Philip and Megan with the aim of collecting and analysing the data required for a comprehensive understanding of where Bryan's parents felt "unplugged" and the guidance they required to enable them to support Bryan with his homework. I am Bryan's learning support teacher and, thus, I focus predominantly on homework and examination preparation. My efforts have proved to be of significant value to Bryan and his parents, especially in view of Philip's strenuous working hours as he finds it difficult to be fully involved in Bryan's schoolwork and extra-curricular activities. Megan, on the other hand, was confronting "the teenage years" and she indicated in a conversation that, according to Bryan, it was no longer "cool" nor was it appropriate for his mother to help him with homework. In addition to my supporting Bryan, I also worked with his parents to establish the "roles" they fulfilled throughout the research period and which would, hopefully,

extend throughout the rest of Bryan's school years. This collaboration required the parents' involvement in the homework process, almost to the extent that their involvement became an investment in their child's learning process, enabling them to feel "connected" and, thus, empowered with the knowledge and skills they required to help Bryan with his homework.

4.3 THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The data collection and data analysis processes were spontaneous. I had formulated a set of semi-structured questions and I also wrote down a list of informal questions which I used during the interviews and conversations with the participants. The process was unprompted and the data analysis developed gradually throughout the data collection process, themes and categories emerged from the data in accordance with the same schematic layout as Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment (section 2.2).

The nature of my modus operandi was not to pre-empt my findings but to make it easier and more convenient to group, reflect on and interpret the data from a practical point of view. In addition, I was able to draw comparisons between the literature review and the data and, thus, I was able to place the information logically in the context of each component as indicated in section 2.2 in Chapter 2. This subsequently increased the validity of the data analysis and the research findings.

Table 4.2 below indicates how the themes (indicated in blue) and categories (indicated in purple) were used to analyse the interview transcripts after I had asked both the semi-structured questions (highlighted in yellow) and the informal questions (highlighted in green). It is important to note that the informal questions posed in this study stemmed from the informal conversations which took place between me and the participants. Accordingly, the informal conversations and the informal questions (as indicated in the green column) present the same. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and were transcribed for the purposes of the data analysis.

Table 4.2: Themes and categories that emerged from the data

Themes	Categories	Semi structured questions	Informal conversations
Parenting supports	Parental attitudes	How do you feel about what the school demands or expects from you as parents?	
	Communication capacities	How would you describe your relationship with the teachers?	Have you discussed the effects of the medication on Bryan's concentration in the home and classroom environment?

Themes	Categories	Semi structured questions	Informal conversations
Child-learning opportunities	The role of homework	How would you regard Bryan's attitude to homework?	How would you explain Bryan's feelings toward his school and teachers?
	Intrinsic motivation	How do you motivate Bryan?	How do you feel about school? (Directed at Bryan)
Family and community supports and resources	Volunteering capacities	Which aspect of your involvement with homework do you feel you need to address?	
	School decision-making and advocacy capacities		Have you considered all the possible options offered by the school that that may make it easier for Bryan, particularly during examinations?
Family-centred practices	Elements of family empowerment	How would you describe the nature of your relationship with Bryan during homework sessions?	

4.4 THEME 1: PARENTING SUPPORTS

4.4.1 CATEGORY: PARENTAL ATTITUDES

> **How do you feel about what the school demands or expects from you as parents?**

Megan: 'It depends, some teachers I get along fine with. There are teachers at the school who are more understanding than others.'

Megan's description of some teachers as "more understanding" led me to asking about the nature of the teachers' empathy towards her as a parent and towards Bryan's learning. Megan said that Bryan is quite busy at school and that the homework is rather hectic at times. She indicated that she often has to go to his teachers to ask for a postponement on his homework assignments.

Megan reminded me of one particular session I had had with Bryan. He had a bad day at school and had been extremely emotional (see the journal excerpts). She remarked 'On days like that, Bryan is reluctant to work. You've seen what a mission it was …' My focus remained on Megan as I had noticed that she was more involved with the teachers than

Philip and she was feeling overwhelmed in this regard. 'I would often go see them – like I did that day – and beg them …' she admitted.

I asked Bryan's parents whether they experienced the teachers as accommodating. They had the following to say:

'Some of them are extremely helpful, but then there are those who seem to be stubborn. I know I come across as this nagging mom, and I know they (the teachers) have a lot on their plates but sometimes I think they expect too much from Bryan, and we have to do the impossible trying to keep up at home.'

Philip responded, 'There are evenings where I come home, then he (Bryan) still has to complete something … And it's not like Bryan can work independently, which means Megan sits with him … Everyone is frustrated at that point'.

During this interview with Megan and Philip the interview took on a conversational tone regarding their opinions about the teachers. I was able to draw distinct inferences from what my participants had told me and from what I had obtained from the literature. In addition, my personal reflections highlighted the following:

I was able to sense a degree of "disconnection". However, this is a common problem in most homes and, although I could empathise with the "disconnection", I also knew that that the amount of homework was not the problem as all learners are given the same amount of homework. In addition, Bryan was in Grade 6. The fact that Bryan is an only child also made it difficult because there are no siblings with whom the parents could compare Bryan. In my opinion the problem was Bryan's lack of independence. He needed to learn how to take responsibility for his own work. I had pointed this out to Bryan's parents before but I also brought up a different matter, Bryan has significant barriers to learning. His parents did not want to disclose these learning barriers in the study and I had agreed to respect their wishes. However Megan had also not informed the school about Bryan's learning barriers I felt that, had she done so, the school and the teachers may have been more empathetic towards her and Bryan than was the case. I am aware that this is a sensitive matter, and Megan especially appeared reluctant to do so. It was almost as she were afraid to admit Bryan's situation. On the other hand, Philip seemed to be more open to my suggestion than Megan. However, I decided not to probe further but to bring up the matter systematically so that they could become accustomed to the idea.

The following excerpt is taken from my personal reflective journal. As indicated in the previous chapter (section 3.3.3.1), I had make explicit use of my personal journal in which I had documented certain scenarios and reflected on specific aspects which I felt emphasised key moments in the research process and that were extremely relevant. The journal helped to explain the research topic in the form of a narrative. Subsequently, I had given each

journal excerpt a title, similar to a chapter in a book. The following journal excerpt highlights the parental attitudes toward Bryan's learning process.

"Obstacles"

> My session with Bryan started off rough; Megan warned me as I entered their home that 'We (pointing at Bryan) are not feeling well. Good luck.' He had knocked his shin against the coffee table in their living room. Bryan has difficulty processing his emotions (so I have been told), which meant that it required a lot of encouragement for him to forget about his *"injury"*, and focus on the task at hand. Bryan kept saying 'I'm such an idiot,' (for bumping into the table) at which point I responded, 'It happens to everyone, it's no big deal,' In retrospect, I probably seemed a bit unsympathetic, however I only have an hour with him, and we still had to cover a significant amount of work.

This particular excerpt is relevant to several of the capacities indicated in Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment. However, the scenario also explains the emotional maturity of the child and this suggests the scenario would fit better within the context of the child's learning capacities (section 2.5.2). I meticulously placed this journal excerpt under parenting supports for the purpose of emphasising Megan's perceptions of Bryan and the "obstacle" she and Philip faced, not only from an academic perspective, but also from an emotional point of view at home. I am, thus, of the opinion that, if Bryan's parents were to communicate more with the teachers and, perhaps, explain Bryan's barriers to learning so as to enable the school to assist them, this may ease some of the frustrations and lighten the burden placed on the child and his parents (section 2.4.1).

"Armour"

> I made copies of the work in Bryan's Natural Science book he and I had to study the next day. I suggested I take the book with me, so that I can photocopy everything and prepare the content before explaining it (just to keep the pace, and not squander valuable time during our sessions).
>
> On arriving at their home around 19:00 pm, I met Philip (Bryan's dad) at the gate, and he invited me in. Philip had arrived home from work minutes earlier. I popped in to return the book only to find Megan and Bryan sitting in the "Homework –Zone" fighting against the dreaded Maths Bryan would write the next day.
>
> 'The exams are too long now' Philip said, as we went into their living room.
>
> I could tell that everyone at home is involved, but I could also tell it is blood, sweat and tears. 'I know his trying so hard, but it's such a battle for him. I wish there was just some way I could make it a little easier for him,' Philip added.

> I commented that the biggest fear Bryan has is when it comes to the actual writing of the exam — that is the first place I would start. Bryan has difficulty with comprehension, and distinguishing between what's important and what's trivial. In addition, I explained to Philip that Bryan's school welcomes the use of amanuenses — where learners have someone read them the exam paper, and help guide them through the questions. Philip listened intently, and liked the idea.
>
> I was surprised at the fact that Philip had only learnt about it then, after I had suggested it to Megan on a previous occasion. I realised that Megan was not at ease with something like that — as Philip said 'Megan doesn't want to "label" Bryan at school.'

The excerpt above highlights the "battle" the parents were facing at home and this is the reason why I had used the term "armour". However, instead of utilising their weapons to everyone's advantage and to support Bryan, they were shielding themselves from structures available at Bryan's school and which were there to benefit Bryan as well as his parents. I expressed my views on the importance of communication (section 2.4.4.1) and I encouraged Megan and Philip to talk to the school about possible options for their child. This scenario is a preamble to the next category which discusses communication capacities within the context of the study.

4.4.2   CATEGORY: COMMUNICATION CAPACITIES

> **How would you describe your relationship with the teachers?**

I have used the excerpt from my personal journal as quoted below and in which I had recorded my personal reflections on the subject matter in order to illustrate this question which emphasised the communication capacities between the parents and the teachers. I was able to make inferences as to the nature of their relationship.

The raw data is a test paper which Bryan had written. However, he had evidently not done as well as the mark indicated. His mother had scheduled an appointment with the teacher in order seeking advice on possible solutions to the situation. Megan explained to me that the teacher had courteously reviewed the paper and indicated to Megan what she (the teacher) considered as "key areas" where Bryan had lost marks. The teacher had further suggested to Megan that Bryan ought to pay attention to the mark allocation in order to answer the questions as comprehensively as possible. In addition, Bryan's teacher had given Megan the memorandum to this particular test (as seen below), recommending that someone sit with Bryan and go through the test with him, focusing on these "key areas". Hopefully this would help him at examination time when he would be tested on similar content. Megan was

pleased with the outcomes of this meeting and she commented on the value she perceived in receiving feedback of this nature.

The preceding discussion highlights the significance of communication between parents and teachers and emphasises the parent–teacher relationship which Dunst's integrated Framework for Family Empowerment advocates as an important factor in the child's learning process.

1

DATUM: VAK: NW en TEG
OPSTELLER: MODERATOR:
TYDSDUUR: 60 Minute   PUNTETOTAAL: 50

NAAM: GRAAD 6 .

$\frac{18?}{50}$

31

- *Voedselbewaring – Preservering*
- *Gasse, Vloeistowwe en Vastestowwe*
- *Ekosisteme / Habitatte - Ondersoeke en Gevallestudies*
- *Materiale: Oplossings en Oplosbaarheid*
- *Water - Besoedeling en Vleilande*

INSTRUKSIES: Elke vraag moet volledig beantwoord word – verskaf altyd 'n voorbeeld.
Terminologie wat gebruik word, moet deeglik <u>verklaar</u> word.

1. GROEPERING en ASSOSIASIE

Kies die korrekte letter uit B en skryf dit onder die vraag neer in die blokkies.

A

1.1 klein uitgedroogde vissies word so genoem

1.2 branderige oë, sinus, loop neus, allergië en hooikoors

1.3 maagkrampe, diaree, ontwatering en *cholera*

1.4 ontwaterde druiwe

1.5 proses van semi-gaarmaak met 'n houtvuur-geur

1.6 'n p<u>roduk</u> gekook teen hoë hitte - word daarna afgekoel

1.7 vleis geplaas in 'n plastiek-omhulsel – lug word uitgesuig

1.8 produkte word in gereinigde **tin**- blikke geplaas

1.9 jik, aluin, kalk en chloor

B

a) **lugbesoedeling**

b) **rosyntjies**

c) **saampersing**

d) **biltong**

e) **berook**

f) **botter**

g) **waterbesoedeling**

h) **geraasbesoedeling**

i) **inmaak**

j) **vakuum-verpak**

k) **melk**

l) **bokkoms**

m) **ontsmetting**

n) **fotosintese**

6.1 =
6.2 =
6.3 =
6.4 =
6.5 =
6.6 =
6.7 =
6.8 =
6.9 =

(9)

—74—

DATUM: **VAK: NW en TEG**

OPSTELLER: **MODERATOR:**

TYDSDUUR: 60 Minute   **PUNTETOTAAL: 50**

NAAM: … *Toets / Oefen-toets* ………… GRAAD 6 …….

(50)

- *Voedselbewaring – Preservering*
- *Gasse, Vloeistowwe en Vastestowwe*
- *Ekosisteme / Habitatte - Ondersoeke en Gevallestudies*
- *Materiale: Oplossings en Oplosbaarheid*
- *Water - Besoedeling en Vleilande*

INSTRUKSIES: *Elke vraag moet volledig beantwoord word – verskaf altyd 'n voorbeeld.*
Terminologie wat gebruik word, moet deeglik <u>verklaar</u> word.

1. GROEPERING en ASSOSIASIE

Kies die korrekte letter uit B en skryf dit onder die vraag neer in die blokkies.

A	B
1.1 klein uitgedroogde vissies word so genoem	a) **lugbesoedeling**
1.2 branderige oë, sinus, loop neus, allergië en hooikoors	b) **rosyntjies**
1.3 maagkrampe, diaree, ontwatering en *cholera*	c) **saampersing**
1.4 ontwaterde druiwe	d) **biltong**
1.5 proses van semi-gaarmaak met 'n houtvuur-geur	e) **berook**
1.6 'n p<u>rodu</u>k gekook teen hoë hitte - word daarna afgekoel	f) **botter**
1.7 vleis geplaas in 'n plastiek-omhulsel – lug word uitgesuig	g) **waterbesoedeling**
1.8 produkte word in gereinigde **tin**- blikke geplaas	h) **geraasbesoedeling**
1.9 jik, aluin , kalk en chloor	i) **inmaak**
	j) **vakuum-verpak**
	k) **melk**
	l) **bokkoms**
	m) **ontsmetting**
	n) **fotosintese**

6.1 =

6.2 =

6.3 =

6.4 =

6.5 =

6.6 =

6.7 =

6.8 =

6.9 =

(9)

The following journal excerpt highlights Megan's attitude towards the teacher and, simultaneously, how this teacher had responded to Megan's contribution as a parent (section 2.4.3). The scenario also illustrates a parent's involvement from a behavioural, personal as well as an intellectual perspective (section 2.4.2). Megan subsequently indicated a positive attitude as a result of this particular encounter with the teacher. In addition she had felt included and acknowledged as part of her son's learning process (section 2.4.4.1).

"Don't judge a book by its cover"

I went to see Bryan's English teacher this week to ask why Brian did so badly in that test.' Megan said. She shuffled through a stack of papers of school newsletters and study notes they keep on the table – she retrieved the exam paper and showed it to me. During the exam, Megan and I delegate the work load, as a result, Megan and Bryan studied for English. 'They asked Bryan parts of speech,' Megan continued, 'we did not study that – I did not even notice the summary in the front of his book." Megan confided in me that she was so frustrated, that she was seconds from crying in front of Bryan's teacher after she had shown Megan that the work was there all along. 'I felt so embarrassed thinking that it was somehow her incompetence,' Megan signed.

Megan has shown resentment towards this particular teacher in the past (in my opinion it is because Bryan is struggling in her class.)

'But she was very supportive though, she said I can come to see her anytime if I have a problem she even gave me a hug' Megan commented.

Have you discussed the effects of the medication on his concentration in the home and classroom environment?

Megan remarked: 'Well, the medication definitely works … but, for a few months now, I've been giving Bryan a lower dose than usual.'

I was curious about the effect the medication had on Bryan. His parents had said that it had very little effect on him and that they had noticed no changes to his demeanour. Philip and Megan divulged their hope that they would be able to take Bryan off the medication completely. However, much to their disappointment, this later proved to be a mistake. I asked them about the implications of taking him off the medication. Megan said: 'Bryan started receiving demerits from almost all his teachers … he was on the verge of having to go to detention for bad behaviour – they warned him – and it really affected him. Bryan is not used to detention …'

I wanted to know how the school had dealt with the situation. Megan had the following to say: 'Bryan's teacher requested I come to see her. We had never told any of Bryan's teachers that he takes medication to help with his concentration, I explained the situation and she basically begged me to put him back on it'. Megan added, laughing. 'Shame, she was really understanding about everything though. She said that the school would disregard all the previous demerits.'

Bryan was subsequently put back on his recommended dose. Megan and Philip admitted it was better for everyone. Megan also admitted to approaching the use of the medication in an incorrect manner. She explained that she had slackened off with her input during homework once Bryan had started taking the medication. 'I left him alone, only to realise that his concentration is one of many learning factors he has … I should have continued to support him.' She acknowledged that she had made a mistake.

4.4.3   SUMMARY OF THEME 1

Parenting support focuses on the opportunities available for parents to become involved in the learning process (section 2.4). As is evident in the case of Bryan and his parents, there are various reasons why parents feel the need to become involved. Megan and Philip's decision to become involved had stemmed from their role construction as they had realised what they ought to do in order to support Bryan. Homework creates a channel for communication between parents and teachers (section 2.4.1). For example, In the case of Megan and Bryan's teachers, the issue of homework had meant that Megan and Philip had had to involve themselves on various levels of the learning process, including communication with Bryan's teachers (section 2.4.2).

In addition, unambiguous communication between parents and teachers allow for issues to be discussed in an attempt to solve problems relating to homework through the sharing of pertinent information with parents such as Megan openly debating the child's homework situation with the teachers (section 2.4.4.1). It almost appeared as though there had been a breakthrough in parental support (section 2.4) with Philip and Megan realising the significance of their involvement in homework (section 2.3.3).

4.5   THEME 2: CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

4.5.1   CATEGORY: THE ROLE OF HOMEWORK

How would you describe your relationship with the teachers?

They both grunted in response to this question and it was almost as if I had asked a rhetorical question.

Megan responded: 'He sees it as a punishment, the anger and frustration he displays at the sheer mention of homework in the afternoons. Bryan thinks I am the one who forces this upon him. That is often when we fight …'

Philip interjected: 'the one evening when I came home, the tension was unmistakable – both Megan and Bryan were brought to tears. I asked them what had happened,' he continued disgruntledly, 'It came down to homework.'

I had noticed that Bryan did not seem to understand that the homework involved was his work and that his lack of a feeling of responsibility was a concern. Philip said that he had spoken to Bryan about the fact that no one was to blame for the amount of homework he was receiving. It was part of school and, instead of sulking about it; he simply had to do it…

Below are drawings taken from Bryan's examination pad. The examination pad was meant for study purposes. During one of our sessions during the examination period, we had desperately required clean sheets of paper but the entire pad had been filled with what Bryan's mother had eloquently referred to as "*crap*". This was a clear example of Bryan's immaturity. On further reviewing these drawings of Bryan, I had noticed several indications of frustration and, perhaps, anger in the first and the last drawings in the pad. Without jumping to conclusions, it was important that I take into consideration the context of the drawing. The figures portrayed in the sketches are reminiscent to the characters which I had seen in Bryan's videogames, and the main inference which I made was that of escapism into his cyber world of technology.
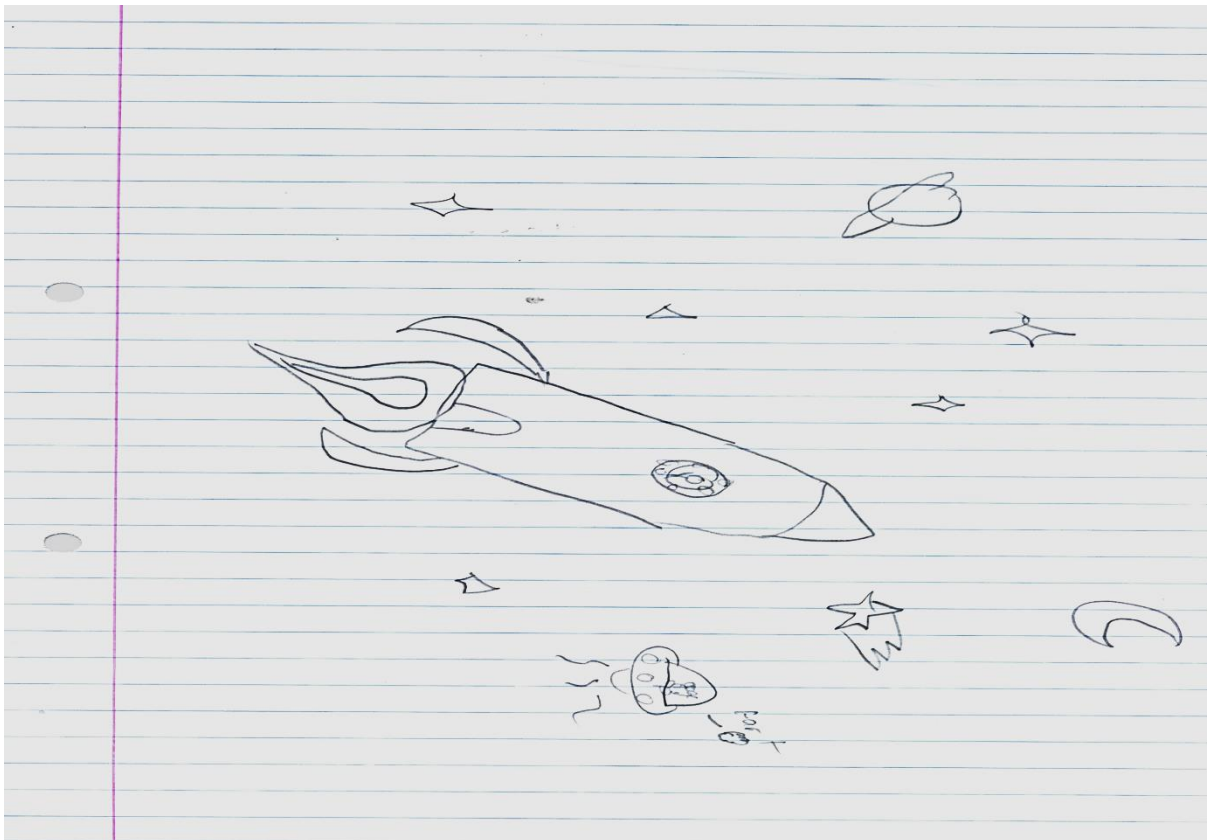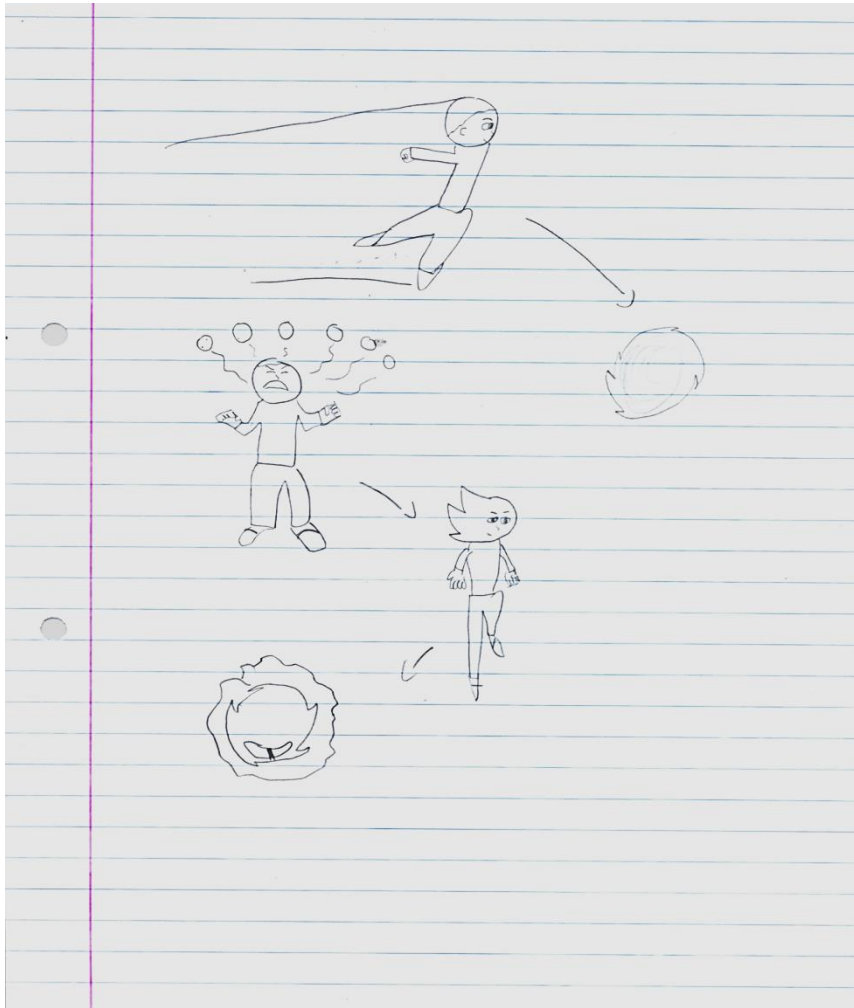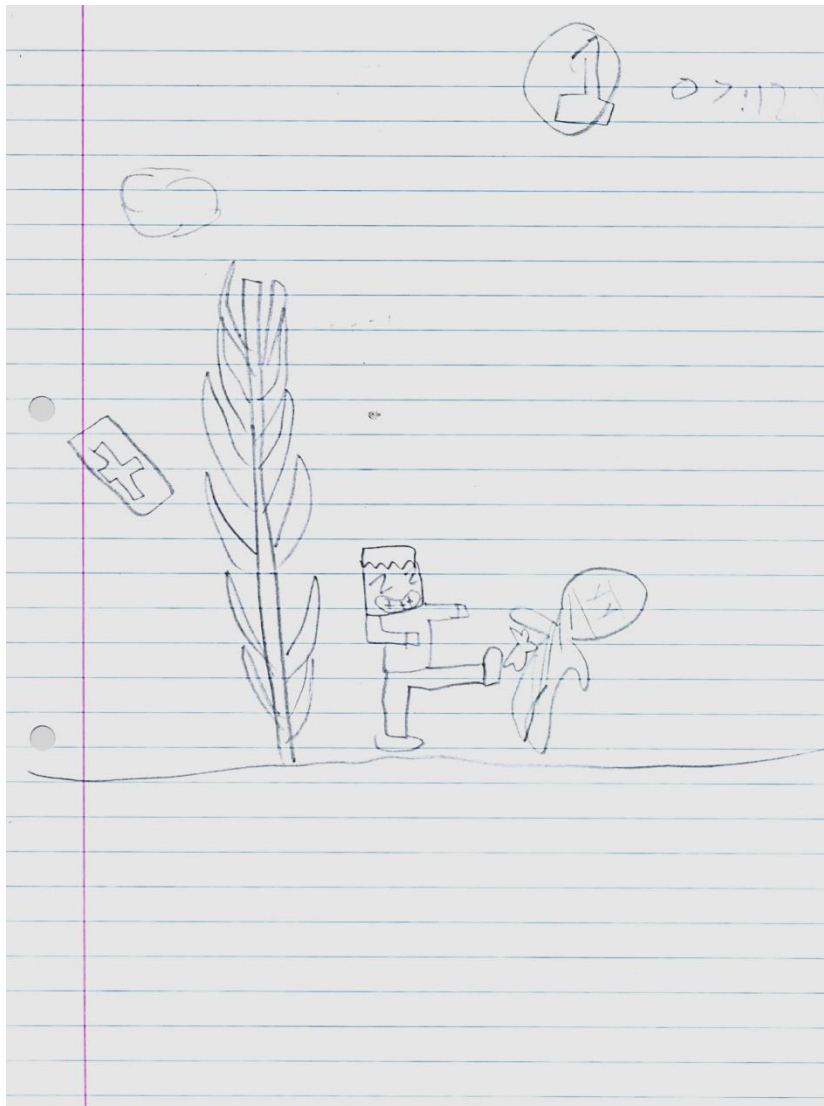
> **How would you explain Bryan's feelings towards his school and teachers?**

Megan: He is happy, he enjoys his school … he has many friends, and he gets along well with his teachers.

Philip: He always tells me what happened at school … funny stories. What this teacher said, and what that one did … So, ja, overall, I think he is happy.

I always see Bryan outside of school and I had often wondered how Bryan experienced the classroom context. I asked them how they would describe Bryan in that regard. Megan concurred with Philip that they were regularly updated on all the latest classroom shenanigans. She commented that, like me, they obviously did not have any experience of Bryan in the classroom context. However, they did have a fair sense of the nature of Bryan's

participation in the classroom. Megan had the following to say; 'I wouldn't say that he plays a big role in the classroom – I mean, he's not a class leader, nor is he one of the "golden boys" who perform exceptionally well, but he gets along well with all the children in the class and he participates when he has to …'

Philip insisted that there were some teachers whom Bryan liked more than others and he could tell that Bryan made a bigger effort to please the teachers he liked while he also tended to remember more what they said in class.

4.5.2   CATEGORY: INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

> **How do you motivate Bryan?**

Well, that's not easy …' Philip said. 'Megan and I struggle to really motivate him to the point that he actually wants to keep it up …

I explained to Bryan's parents that an important aspect of motivating a child is to help the child to develop an interest in a particular subject matter and linking such an interest to the motivational aspect of learning.

'His interests are limited,' Megan interjected. 'I've seen that personally when I work with him … it's often so frustrating ...'

'We made a deal with Bryan that, if he does well and tries his best, he can get a new Nintendo game … I know that's the wrong way to approach the situation, but that's what he wants …' Philip added.

Although I do not encourage an incentive system in terms of which children are motivated by means of rewards (section 2.5.3), I had realised, after working with Bryan that this approach seemed to work. Bryan was, after all, at an age where gaming and other forms of technology play a critical role. His parents confessed to "giving in". The photograph below provides an example of how Bryan was incentivised for positive behaviour and participation during the homework session.

Photograph of Bryan playing his videogame after completion of homework

How do you feel about school? (Directed at Bryan)

This question was asked informally and, although it is accurate, the interpretation of what Bryan had said was conducted in the same informal manner. Although the answer Bryan had given was vague, I had been able to draw inferences from a set of documented conversations and incidences which shed light on Bryan's attitude towards school. The following excerpts refer to an assignment which Bryan had had to complete and which made up a considerable percentage of his term mark. Bryan had revealed his indifference by filling in the answers with little thought. His mother and I had intervened after Megan had coincidentally spoken to another parent on the telephone and the parent had told Megan how difficult they were finding the assignment. This had come as a surprise to Megan and she had realised the significance of the assignment.

Beantwoord die volgende vrae.

1. ISBN van die boek.

ISBN: 978 - 0 - 14 - 353027 - 5.

2. Wie is die skrywer?

Jeff Kinney (vertaal deur Davina Diedericks - Klugo)

3. Wie is die hoofkarakter in die verhaal?

Greg Heffly .

4. Watter ander karakters kom in die verhaal voor?

5. Wie vertel die verhaal?

6. Is die verteller ook die hoofkarakter in die verhaal of vertel hy ander karakters se storie?

7. Waar speel die verhaal af?

~~Boek~~ Boekverslag

3. Die hoofkarakter ~~is~~ se naam is Gregory "Greg" Heffley.

4. Die ander belangrike karakters is Rowley Jefferson (Greg se maat, Rodrick Heffley (is Greg se oudste broer) en die antagonis in die verhaal, Frank Heffley (Greg se pa) wie (volgens Greg) nie Greg se duidelike videospeletjietalente kan waardeer nie, Susan Heffley (Greg se ma) wie Greg beskryf as 'n irriterende pyn en lastige. Manny Heffley, Greg, se jongste broetie wie baie onophoudelik bederf is

5. Greg Heffley is die storieverteller, hy praat in eerstepersoon Greg beskryf sy daaglikse ervarings in die vorm van 'n dagboek-inskrywing.

6. Greg is die hoofkarakter, die storie sluit al die karakters, wie alreeds bespreek is, en die met wie Greg daagliks in kontak kom. Ek dink omdat die storie 'n dagboekskryfstyl het het dit 'n baie persoonlike invloed op die hoofkarakter, dit impliseer dat Greg se denke en die interaksies wat hy het met die mense wie hy in aanraking kom kan nie gefake word nie - hulle vorm deel van Greg se lewe.

7/8. Daar is nie eeneskele (of spesifike) milieu nie, omdat dit 'n tienerverhaal is. speel die storie by stiefnee plekke af, soos Greg se huis, by maat Rowley se huis, die buurt waarin hul woon en die skool.

Hierdie verhaal het 'n moderne skryfstyl. Die verhaal beskryf tiener van vandag, met hul sterke en tekortkominge. Die doel van Jeff Kinney is nie net om vir tieners te skryf nie, maar ook soos tieners te skryf (sonder die slang...).

Megan was furious at her son's apparently reluctant attitude and she and I had forced Bryan to redo the assignment properly. Megan had had to consult Bryan's friend's mother about the requirements because Bryan had managed to lose the paper with the instructions and which he was supposed to have pasted in his language book (section 2.3.2). Megan found out that Bryan had to submit a handwritten first draft of his book report as well and paste it in his workbook. An example of his first draft is seen above. This extract provides an indication of Bryan's carelessness and lack of attention to detail. The excerpt was not intended to be read but it indicates Bryan's frame of mind and helps to illustrate his attitude towards his homework.

Instead of losing focus on the task at hand, Megan and I decided to take collective action. I helped with the structure of the book report and Megan cleared the study so that Bryan could type the assignment (section 2.5.2).

"Reflection"

> Bryan and I were busy writing his book report — we read the questions together. Then I gave Bryan a chance to respond. One of the questions asked, which character in the story can he best relate to, and why. I commented that I suspect Bryan would say Greg Heffley (the main character) because he too loves playing video games. Bryan said earnestly, 'Maybe, but the only difference between him and me is that he is a *gaming addict* — I'm not. I can stop anytime I want.' This was difficult to believe as he was practically playing on his Nintendo3DS as he said that.
>
> The assignment had surprisingly been therapeutic. In one of Bryan's answers, he wrote about the main character's shenanigans and flaws. The conversation soon catapulted from the character in the book, to Bryan's circumstances.
>
> 'It's almost like me,' he shrugged.
>
> —'How so?'
>
> 'Well, I'm also a teenager, and I don't always get along with my parents or friends.'
>
> The conversation continued, and I did the best I could to remain attentive and sympathetic. I realised that it must be equally difficult for Bryan as it is for his parents, being the only child and having to deal with demands from the school.
>
> 'There's this girl I like, she's in my class,' Bryan said embarrassed.
>
> I laughed, but at the same time I thought I should try and change the focus. Bryan said he also has a diary where he writes down his thoughts……
>
> It might have been cruel of me to think this, but all I could imagine that in there are cheat codes to more *Super Mario* games.
>
> '….But it's personal, so don't tell my mom,' Bryan added.
>
> 'Okay, I promise.'

The second scenario illustrates Bryan's emotional capacity and the fact that he experienced certain aspects of school as overwhelming. The journal excerpt is entitled "Call of Duty" in reference to the name of the popular videogame which Bryan and his friends played and the "mission" Bryan had been assigned at school. The following is a comprehensive description of what had happened:

"Call of Duty"

Bryan was extremely despondent; I could tell that something had happened at school that day. I alerted Megan after our session, she commented that she had noticed similar responses on their way home from school, but figured it had simply been a long day at school for Bryan— and that he would feel better, one he had received lunch and rested before I arrived. We were seated in the living room. Megan took it upon herself and called Bryan to join us. She asked Bryan what concerned him... Bryan was hesitant at first, but eventually confessed that he had (what he described as) "a bad day". He explained that he was supposed to have reported to a junior classroom in place of the teacher's absence— which he had been assigned as one of his duties as a school leader, but failed to find the particular classroom— as a result, it landed him in trouble with that teacher when she found out that Bryan never showed up.

Bryan sat sobbing as he told me the story. I asked him whether he had explained the situation to the teacher

'I tried,' Bryan said tearfully,' but she was too upset …'

I then asked why he thought the teacher had been upset. Bryan said that the class had not behaved and had made a noise. The teacher had blamed the class's mischief on Bryan. The fact that Bryan had not been able to find the classroom puzzled me. Bryan admitted that it was one of the Grade 4 classrooms on the level above his classroom but that he had forgotten nonetheless.

After talking to Bryan, his mother and I told him to wash his face and dry his tears. On my way out, Megan explained that two of his classmates had visited Bryan the day before and they had played videogames the entire afternoon. According to her, when Bryan plays too much, it is as if he's "out of it" and his concentration suffers. Megan also admitted to having given Bryan a lower dose of medication than usual at breakfast that morning and this had possibly exacerbated the situation.

4.5.3   SUMMARY OF THEME 2

The fact is that, as his parents pointed out, Bryan has "limited" interests. This makes it significantly more challenging for him to become intrinsically motivated from a learning perspective (section 2.5.2). Nevertheless, he had made progress in areas such as better time management; the use of an appropriate homework space; the setting of goals; a more positive approach to the workload and less procrastination. My biggest concern with Bryan was his lack of independent learning (section 2.5.3). It was, therefore, important for Megan and Philip to ensure that Bryan achieved autonomy (section 2.5.6).

4.6   THEME 3: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

4.6.1   VOLUNTEERING CAPACITIES

> **Which aspect of your involvement with homework do you feel you need to address?**

Philip and Megan had both taken a moment to respond to this question and I could tell they were thinking about their answers …

'I would say, probably, the way I involve myself in the homework,' Megan suggested, 'I think my overall approach can be a little less intense.'

Megan was aware that she tended to overreact at times when it came to Bryan's homework, 'But it's only because Bryan doesn't worry at all, so I worry for the both of us,' she remarked.

I wrote in my journal that I was also concerned about this particular aspect to which Megan had alluded. Bryan was aware that his mother not only worried about the work but also that she often ended up doing the work herself. This brought us back to the issue of Bryan learning how to take responsibility for his own work. I said to Philip and Megan that Bryan had to learn that, if, for example, he failed to write down his homework in class, we (his parents and I) could not help him, even if we wanted to.

Philip remarked that his involvement in Bryan's homework was extremely limited because of his work. He did, however, mention that he attended school functions and parent evenings on a regular basis (section 2.4.3). Philip confessed to feeling rather out of place the first time he had met Bryan's teachers. Bryan had already been a learner at the school for some time but it had taken Philip a long time to meet Bryan's teachers. I could tell his absence bothered him and it was almost as if he felt he was being judged or criticised. I explained to both parents that involvement in Bryan's learning and development included numerous components and, where Megan was able to provide support with the homework in the

afternoons, Philip's involvement may take place in a different, yet equally important, capacity (section 2.6.1). The following journal excerpt stresses the importance of parental involvement and also sheds light on the relationship between Bryan and his father and the significance of this relationship for Bryan's learning and development (section 2.4.2).

"The way to a man's heart …"

> Philip and Bryan had formulated their own father-son bonding day on a weekly basis, every Saturday morning (after our learning session). Philip and Bryan dine at the nearest Wimpy. This has proven to benefit all of us, I employ this initiative as a "bribe" in order to get Bran to work, Philip gets t o spend quality time with his son, and Megan has time for herself … Bryan and I had a learning session together once, where he divulged, 'we order anything we want … it's so cool, but don't tell my mom though, otherwise she might stop us from going.' I laughed, and said: 'don't worry, your secret is safe with me, although, I have to say, your mom knows you two have been going to the Wimpy, so I'm pretty sure she has an idea of what you guys order.'

4.6.2   CATEGORY: SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING AND ADVOCACY CAPACITIES

Have you considered all the possible options available at the school that might make it easier for Bryan, particularly during examinations?

'I make sure that Bryan brings home the scope of the exams early enough, so that I can plan how we'll go about studying for each subject. Some of the teachers provide extra classes after school.' Megan said.

Megan told me that the Mathematics teacher offered extra classes after school to any learners who wished to attend. However, Bryan did not attend those classes as he already had a mathematics tutor and Megan believed that was sufficient.

I was aware of Bryan's mathematics tutor. However, I was of the opinion that the additional classes which Bryan's teacher offered at school would have been of great value, especially in view of the fact that the extra classes covered work that would feature in the examination and these classes would have given Bryan an opportunity to review his work while his teacher was available.

I asked whether there were any other teachers at the school who also provided extra classes as preparation for the examinations.

'His English teacher …,' Megan responded half-heartedly. 'That really was pointless, because she had the class packed the afternoon before the test and she basically just rushed through the work. I made Bryan go through, but it took a lot of convincing …,' she added.

I could sense Megan's disapproval. However, I was also aware of the fact that Megan and this particular teacher had disagreed on various occasions. Nevertheless, I could see that Bryan's workbook reflected this particular teacher's diligence. In addition, the work had been prepared well by the teacher and appropriately summarised to facilitate working and studying from it. I was of the opinion that Megan resented the teacher because, as Megan had previously explained to me, this teacher had pointed out that Bryan had a learning barrier and had suggested he received additional attention. Although Megan had been in agreement with the teacher she did not want Bryan "being labelled" in the teacher's class.

Bryan had difficulty with reading with comprehension. However, I had realised, working with him, that when he is given some assistance and encouragement, his work improves. I was also aware that his school provided amanuenses to learners during the examinations and I explored this possibility for Bryan.

'The school wouldn't allow Bryan an amanuensis,' Megan told me. Apparently, a child needs to be assessed by a school therapist then, only on those recommendations, are they granted permission.'

The school did, however, agree to accommodate Bryan by allowing him to write his examinations in a separate room under the supervision of a teacher to give him the opportunity to read the questions aloud. Megan indicated that she had noticed that Bryan tended to conceptualise his thoughts and he read with greater comprehension when he did that. Obviously he would not be allowed to disturb the rest of the class so the school permitted Bran to write his examinations in what Bryan dubbed his "VIP room". He had found it amusing the first time he wrote separately from the others because they had him placed at a desk in the school tuck shop. However, the school had subsequently arranged for a classroom to be available for him. Both Megan and Bryan admitted that this initiative worked as it would appear that Bryan was answering the questions with slightly more confidence than had previously been the case.

4.6.3   SUMMARY OF THEME 3

It was extremely important for Bryan's parents to feel confident in their ability to help him throughout the learning process and, thus, it was vital that their involvement be encouraged and acknowledged. In the context of this study, Philip's role was viewed in a specific capacity which had contributed significantly to his son's learning and development as their father-son bonding experience had resulted in positive communication between them and had

subsequently provided Philip with the opportunity to ask Bryan about school. Thus, the nature of Philip's involvement offered both feedback on and insight into aspects pertaining to, inter alia, Bryan's academic progress (section 2.6.3). Moreover, the administrative competence of parents was indicative of effective school decision-making and advocacy. It was extremely important that both Megan and Philip ensure that they worked with the school to create an environment for Bryan which best accommodated him, especially when writing examinations (section 2.6).

4.7   THEME 4: FAMILY-CENTRED PRACTICES

4.7.1   ELEMENTS OF FAMILY EMPOWERMENT

> **How would you describe the nature of your relationship during homework?**

Megan chuckled: 'Sure, especially when mom does most of my assignments for me …'

I explored this remark further. Megan commented that it did not happen as often as it once had but she admitted to being guilty of lending more than just a helping hand. She went on to say that the only reason for this was that she wanted the work to be done correctly, at least, the assignments that should be completed at home. Megan believed that this was the only way to improve Bryan's marks as he tended to do badly in class assignments when he worked on his own.

Megan indicated that she sometimes found it difficult working with Bryan on certain assignments, commenting that the homework became challenging. It was often time consuming and it required considerable patience to have to think about the content, especially with regard to learning areas in which she lacked confidence. Her impatience often resulted in frustration and anger to the point that they almost wanted to tear each other apart physically.

Philip admitted to feeling guilty as he said that, because of his work schedule, he did not have as much opportunity to help with the homework as he probably should have done. 'When I do get a chance, I'm often too tired, or I basically have no idea how to help. The thing is, I hate the homework, probably as much as Bryan does, but for a different reason. When I have time to spend with my son, I don't want to spend it doing his homework …'

Nevertheless, both parents expressed their appreciation of the changes we had made such as the homework shelf which help to sort out the homework on a daily basis. Bryan was taught to take his books and files out of his schoolbag and arrange the homework shelf in order – from the most urgent homework to the least important.
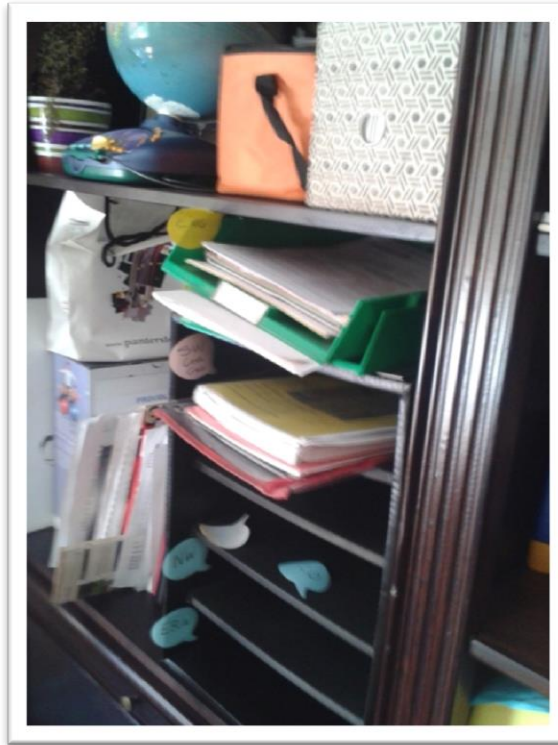
Photograph of the homework shelf illustrating improved organisation and structure

Another element which has been proved to work was the fact that we had delegated the work load among ourselves. I helped with the learning areas which required a significant amount of explaining about concepts, such as the social sciences, whereas Megan agreed to tackle the languages. This arrangement, together with the assistance of Bryan's mathematics tutor, helped to establish a well-structured balance and reduced much of the anxiety and frustration in the parent-child relationship.

This excerpt below is an example of how Megan and I delegated the study workload. The to-do list shows the date and the pages which had to be covered during the examinations. This provided the planning, structure and routine which Bryan needed while it gave Megan a feeling of control over the learning process.
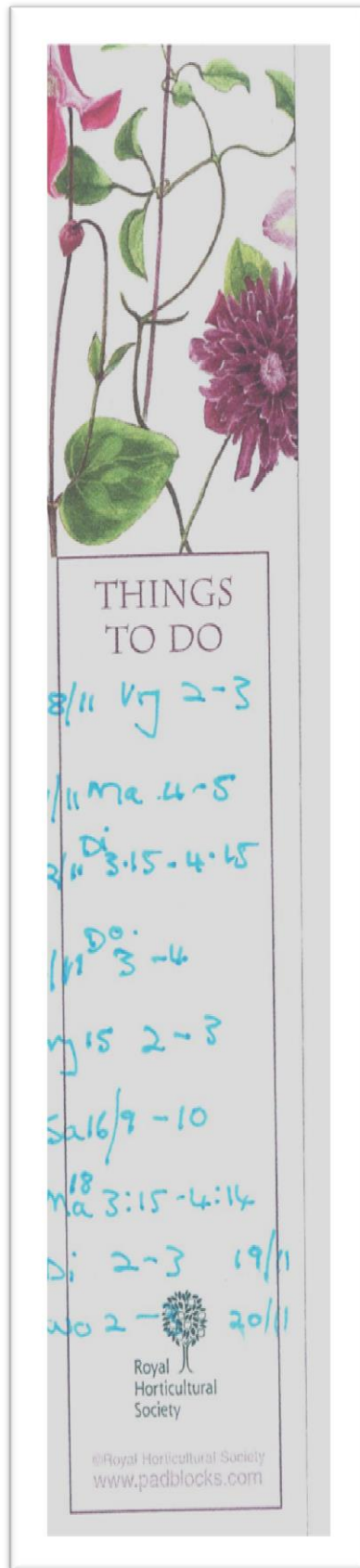
The following excerpts are copies of Bryan's progress reports. The first report indicates Bran's academic progress during terms 1 and 2 while the second report card recorded the progress he had made in term 3. A reflection on this data follows below.

Bryan's progress report for terms 1 and 2

VORDERINGSVERSLAG

LEERDER:

ID NOMMER:

TOELATINGSNOMMER:

GRAAD: Graad 6/B

JARE IN GRAAD: 1

JAAR:

VAKKE	KW1 LEERDER		KW2 LEERDER	
	%	VLAK	%	VLAK
Afrikaans Huistaal	59	4	71	6
English First Additional Language	66	5	65	5
Wiskunde	65	5	57	4
Natuurwetenskappe en Tegnologie	50	4	50	4
Sosiale Wetenskappe	50	4	58	4
Geskiedenis	-	-	52	4
Geografie	-	-	63	5
Lewensvaardighede	67	5	75	6
Aantal Dae Afwesig	1		3	

Vakke wat nie deel vorm van die gemiddeid nie	KW1 LEERDER		KW2 LEERDER	
	%	VLAK	%	VLAK
Rekenaarvaardighede	74	6	70	6

PRESTASIEVLAK	BESKRYWING	PERSENTASIE
1	Ontoereikende prestasie	0% - 29%
2	Basiese prestasie	30% - 39%
3	Matige prestasie	40% - 49%
4	Voldoende prestasie	50% - 59%
5	Beduidende prestasie	60% - 69%
6	Verdienstelike prestasie	70% - 79%
7	Uitmuntende prestasie	80% - 100%

Opvoeder Opmerkings

_____ is 'n aangename seun. Hy toon goei vordering. Mooi so!

Bryan's progress report for terms 1, 2 and 3

VORDERINGSVERSLAG

LEERDER:		GRAAD:	Graad 6/B
ID NOMMER:		JARE IN GRAAD:	1
TOELATINGSNOMMER:		JAAR:	

VAKKE	KW1 LEERDER %	KW2 LEERDER %	KW3 LEERDER %
Afrikaans Huistaal	59	71	72
English First Additional Language	66	65	73
Wiskunde	65	57	58
Natuurwetenskappe en Tegnologie	50	50	71
Sosiale Wetenskappe	50	58	75
Geskiedenis	-	52	89
Geografie	-	63	60
Lewensvaardighede	67	75	73
Aantal Dae Afwesig	1	4	0

	KW1 LEERDER %	KW2 LEERDER %	KW3 LEERDER %
Vakke wat nie deel vorm van die gemiddeld nie			
Rekenaarvaardighede	74	70	69

PRESTASIEVLAK	BESKRYWING	PERSENTASIE
1	Ontoereikende prestasie	0% - 29%
2	Basiese prestasie	30% - 39%
3	Matige prestasie	40% - 49%
4	Voldoende prestasie	50% - 59%
5	Beduidende prestasie	60% - 69%
6	Verdienstelike prestasie	70% - 79%
7	Uitmuntende prestasie	80% - 100%
*	Opdragte nie ingehandig nie.	
a	Afwesig	
-	Nie geassesseer.	

Opvoeder Opmerkings

_____ ..... is 'n pligsgetroue seun en 'n plesier om in die klas te hê. Hy probeer sy beste lewer. Mooi so!

These two excerpts were selected not only to highlight Bryan's academic progress but, more significantly, to show the comments made by his teacher. Essentially this ties every component together as it represents all the aspects which had led to a sense of empowerment. Bryan's parents had commented on the marks and divulged that they felt "so proud of the time and effort which Bryan and I had put in …". This indicated a change in their parental attitudes. I informed them that, although we had committed more than we had done previously, it had, nevertheless, been a team effort. Both Philip and Megan had motivated Bryan throughout the examination period. In addition, if it had not been for Megan telephoning the other parents in the class and establishing a support system between her, the other parents and Bryan's teachers, we would not, for example, have received all the necessary information which we required in order to study. As his teacher had remarked at the bottom of the report Bryan was also able to see what could come from hard work and determination. In essence, this had strengthened their family-centred practices.

4.7.2   SUMMARY OF THEME 4

Empowerment in the context of family-centred practices refers to utilising the resources available. As discussed in this section of the data analysis, Bryan's parents had started to incorporate and manage both these resources and family-support networks, including my expertise as well as the expertise of Bryan's mathematics tutor's in order to meet their needs and expectations (section 2.7).

4.8   DATA INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is defined as giving meaning to something which is presented (Hornby 2010). The interpretation below explains what the data had provided me in light of conducting this study.

There are three significant points of reference embedded in this interpretation, namely, the theoretical framework; the literature review findings; and my own personal experiences. These all act as cornerstones of the interpretation of the data and are discussed below.

The data interpretation and the reporting of the research findings revealed aspects of learning and development in the context of the theoretical perspective of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment. This section of the research study was divided into the following four main themes, namely, parenting support which included parental attitudes and communication capacities; child-learning opportunities which included the role of homework and intrinsic motivation; family and community support and resources which included volunteering capacities and school decision-making and advocacy capacities and family-centred practices which described elements of family empowerment (see Table 4.1).

An interpretation of each theme follows:

4.8.1   PARENTING SUPPORT

It is imperative that parents communicate their thoughts and ideas on a constant basis. In addition, it is important for parents to be involved in their child(ren)'s learning process and that they establish a positive relationship with their children and with the school. This communication will provide insights into the child's learning and development and give the parents a window into the child's academic progress. Constant communication also helps parents to form a better understanding of the academic context. They connect with their children on a personal level and, in this way, able to plan the learning process together. As the communication capacities develop so, too, does a parent's capacity to ask relevant questions. Parents strengthen their bonds with their children and this leads to improved problem solving (section 2.4.2).

In addition to sharing pertinent information and understanding key aspects of the learning process, this will allow enable parents to participate in the learning process and help them to feel sufficiently competent to lend support and to feel valued as an active member of a team (section 2.4.4.1). This will influence parents' attitudes toward the school (including what is required of them to support with homework) and create a change in their perceptions of their children's abilities and their overall learning and development (section 2.4.3). Megan and Philip had responded positively to Bryan's marks. They felt that there had been an improvement in Bryan's commitment to his schoolwork and in his maturity level and which they had not seen before. They could see the difference their involvement had made whilst also possibly finding a catalyst for motivating Bryan to continue his progress by acknowledging his growth and providing him with tangible evidence of his development, thus working towards creating greater learning opportunities than had previously been the case.

Each child is unique in the theoretical framework of learning and development and, thus, the topics of discussion between parents and their children or between parents and teachers would depend primarily on the individual needs of the child and of the parents in their attempt to maintain a sense of control over their family-centred practices. Parents who become involved in the learning process do tend to view the experience form a subjective point of view and this may often lead to frustration, especially when older children reach the age of seeking autonomy. Although Bryan had reached the stage where he no longer thought it was "cool" to work with his mother, as his parents pointed out, he still required considerable assistance (section 4.7.1). Nevertheless, it was also important for Bryan to assume some responsibility for his actions. Accordingly, I was of the opinion the tasks could be delegated and I suggested that either Megan or Philip could help with the homework that required a significant amount of input while Bryan could, perhaps, focus on less demanding tasks on his own. This would help to balance the participation of the family members in Bryan's

homework and, at the same time, gradually improve Bryan's levels of competence in attempting his homework without constant help from his parents. In such situations communication plays a key role in establishing boundaries that must be respected by everyone involved with parents using all the information at their disposal and realising when to take charge (section 2.4) or when to step aside and let their children fight their own battles (sections 2.3.3 and 2.5.7).

4.8.2   CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In terms of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework this component of family empowerment refers to the steps taken by parents to create an environment which is conducive for learning and development (section 2.5). In addition, it is a prerequisite that the support from parents is well established so that these child-learning opportunities may be realised.

Subsequent to importance of establishing their communicative capacities, it is incumbent on parents to acknowledge their children and to communicate their opinions on issues such as the child's personal accomplishments, academic achievements and, perhaps, areas of concern which teachers have highlighted so that parents and their children may formulate a plan of action together and create opportunities to encourage maturity.

Parental involvement meant that the communication between Bryan and his parents regarding homework improved and they were able to manage the workload. Megan and Philip delegated the homework requirement and, subsequently, told Bryan that they would assist him whenever they had to but on the condition that he attempted the assignments on his own first (section 2.3.3). In addition to this agreement, I sensed a more enthusiastic approach to homework than had previously been the case and this, from a contextualised perspective, reveals a sense of empowerment (section 1.5.5).

Like their parents children also need to feel that they have a role to play in the learning process. With Bryan and his parents, it was important for the child to reflect on the learning process. This is in line with the suggestions of Professor John Ashton who highlighted the need for children to meditate and take a moment to find focus. Bryan's parents and I had regularly asked Bryan about his reaction to encouraging comments from his teachers regarding good work delivered and also seemingly negative remarks such as "You can do better". Another instance was when Bryan and I had answered the questions in his book report and when he had been given an opportunity to express his personal feelings through the medium of main character in the book (section 4.5.2). This had enabled Bryan to become part of the learning process and to set his own goals – a critical step for a child of his age (section 2.5.2).

Children's capacity to learn is based on the opportunities which they are given to make decisions about their own learning and to discover an interest and to build on that interest,

thus finding autonomy (sections 2.5.5 and 2.5.6). In addition to taking ownership of their learning processes, it is vital that children experience learning in a positive light. A sense of satisfaction in learning derives from confidence in their capacities to achieve desired outcomes. These achievements are determined by various factors, including the degree of support parents lend to their children (section 2.5.1); the learning strategies which they have acquired in order to solve problems; the level of motivation they derive from their parents and teacher (section 2.5.2) as well as the ability to self-regulate their learning (section 2.5.4).,The notion of working independently with occasional guidance from parents or teachers (as suggested by Stolk and Martello (2013) among others), is critical to the intrinsic motivation (section 2.5.7) which is integral to growing up and entering high school.

Children who are intrinsically motivated develop the capacity to find value in obtaining knowledge on a topic of interest and, thus, furthering their learning and development (section 2.5.3). However, if such opportunities are to be realised, it is essential that structures are in place to enable children to function at their best. In addition, they must have positive learning environments (section 2.5.8.1) which are set out in such a way so as to facilitate the organisation and management of the learning process (section 2.5.2). These capacities ensure that children are able to reflect on their progress (section 2.5.6.1) and to set the goals they wish to achieve in their learning and development (section 2.5.5).

4.8.3   FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Dunst asserts that the aim of this component of family and community support and resources is to mobilise resources so that information may be shared between individuals as well as groups so that specific outcomes may be achieved (section 1.7.4).

Parents who talk to each other are able to share their experiences and to establish supportive networks which allow them to discuss issues of concern pertaining to their children's learning and development. For example, Bryan's mother established a support system with the mothers of the other children in Bryan's classroom. She regarded this support system her "backup plan" in case she and Philip needed information about an assignment which was due on a specific date or they required specific material. In one instance, Bryan was absent from school and had missed out on critical content which he had to learn for his examinations. As a result, he did not have the required content in his book. Megan deployed her "backup plan" and telephoned one of the mothers. She asked whether she could borrow the daughter's book and make photocopies of the missing content. This was an example of how Megan had used a simple, yet effective, resource at her disposal and, as the literature describes, maintained control over the situation (section 1.5.1) In addition, as a result for this interaction, access to information could be shared as well as access to additional support, for example finding tutors who could help with specific learning areas – Bryan and his mathematics tutor – or simply a close friend or relative who could give

advice to parents in need of guidance (section 2.6.4.1). This conceptualises the term "empowerment" in light of utilising resources as part of family-centred practice (section 1.5.1).

In view of the interconnected nature of the components, as emphasised from a theoretical perspective (section 2.2), the establishment of communication between the parents and teachers or anyone else in whom parents may confide is extremely important and will also profoundly shape the capacities of parents to support their children as well as strengthening their voices during key decision-making processes (section 2.6.2).

4.8.4   FAMILY-CENTRED PRACTICES

Dunst maintains that family-centred practices represent efforts whereby parents (and their children) make informed decisions and deploy the best intervention during the child's learning process with the aid of sufficient parent-professional collaboration and partnerships as well as the mobilisation of the resources available and which are conducive for optimal child, parent and family success. Such decisions are, however, not always easy.

A concerned parent is a good parent while a troubled parent is simply a concern. In terms of the learning and development of children, a distinction must be made between those parents who feel "connected" and those who feel "unplugged". I suggested that Bryan's parents employ an au pair to alleviate the burden on Philip and Megan, especially with regard to the more strenuous learning areas which were giving rise to considerable anger and frustration in their parent-child relationship. Although they agreed that this may be a good idea both parents were reluctant to do so as they felt it would be like giving up or, as they put it, "the lazy approach". They indicated that they preferred to be fully involved. This is an important aspect from both a theoretical, as well as a practical, perspective. On the other hand, this emphasises Dunst's view on the importance of positive attitudes (sections 2.4.1; 2.4.2 and 2.4.3) and of communicating such attitudes (section 2.4.4) to the child as this, essentially, creates effective learning opportunities. However, on the other hand, Bryan was a teenager and he regarded doing homework with his parents as embarrassing. As a result, he often projected all his anger and frustration with his homework onto his parents (section 4.5.1). I was of the opinion that directing these feelings away from Philip and Megan and including someone else in the learning process would benefit the family dynamics and strengthen their family-centred practices.

Parents who are concerned about their children and their wellbeing and also organised are aware of the areas in the learning process which need to be addressed on some level. On the other hand, parents who are overwhelmed and who not adequately guided to step in and take control of situations tend to feel disconnected from one or, perhaps, all the components of the family-centred practices and they may easily be rendered powerless in their attempts to support their children. It is, thus, of fundamental importance that these components are

strongly emphasised and strengthened as learning and development take place. In the main, parents who are guided often feel more confident in their family-centred practices despite their possible concerns as compared to those who are not receiving guidance.

All parents are, at some point, confronted with challenges in their children's learning and development. It is impossible to assume that all parents know exactly what to do and are competent enough to support with homework or in any other context for that matter. It is, thus, essential that parents are made aware of the various resources at their disposal and that they are guided in applying these resources in an appropriate manner. As previously suggested, every family is unique. Every family encounters its own "obstacles". The meaning of empowerment for one family may be completely different for another family. Nevertheless, in the context of the theoretical framework of Carl Dunst depicting family empowerment, regardless of circumstances, the key components do not change. It is only the levels of the requirements which may change, depending on a family's situation and what is the most appropriate for a child's wellbeing. In essence, one family may need to focus on a single aspect only, for example, creating a workspace for the child and one which is conducive for learning (sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.8). On the other hand, another family may require a more elaborate approach with the parents needing to focus on more than one aspect, such as parental attitudes and communication capacities in order to change their perspectives of the child's situation and develop an understanding of the learning process before taking any action (section 2.4.4.1). Some parents may simply require support networks to enable them to receive advice from individuals such as professionals in the educational field or else a trusted friend and mentor (sections 2.6.3 and 2.6.4.1).

It is worth noting that empowerment in the context of families and the way in which they focus on maintaining healthy practices should not be viewed in isolation. In other words, the purpose of empowering parents for homework support is not solely to equip families to cope with exams, nor is it simply to help children to pass and move on from one year to the next. In addition, it is not culture bound nor is it applicable to specific social classes. Instead the aim ought to be to co-ordinate all the efforts, as described in the conceptualisation of empowerment in this study (sections 1.5.1 and 2.1), and through the adequate management, process, supervision, control, and governance of the proceedings to continue this approach and guide this practice so as to enable a long-term culture of support to develop, thus allowing for a holistic perspective on a sustainable family-centredness.

4.9   CONCLUSION

The aim of the data interpretation was to make sense of the research findings. Accordingly, it was essential that everything had to "click". This refers back to the concept I used in Chapter 1 to illustrate the double meaning of the word (section 1.10). Linking all the parts together in order to connect the fundamental components required for learning and development was

crucial in the investigation into empowering parents for homework support. I was able to connect with the participants and communicate with them on different aspects of the learning process. In addition, I was able to learn a great deal about the parents and understand their perspectives through our collaboration with regard to our knowledge and insights in respect of Bryan's learning and development as well as see and reflect on the phenomenon from the point of view of everyone involved. I was also able to interpret the research findings and arrive at conclusions.

My agreement with Bryan was that, after our sessions, he would show me one of his Nintendo games as a reward – provided that he had worked well. One of the games that he showed me was *"Mario and Sonic at the Olympic Games"*. This was one of his favourites. He explained to me that the game was all about strategy and that one chose teams to compete. These teams included players (or characters) in the game and who were best suited for each level. As he commented, 'If you really think about it, almost all games require strategy …'

Although my knowledge of and enthusiasm for videogames had faded away over the years, I did, however, appreciate Bryan's meticulous approach to detail regarding these games. Unfortunately, however, the same amount of attention was not always reflected in his schoolwork. Nevertheless, from a personal point of view, the concepts of strategy and selection were synonymous with the methodology and the data analysis process that I used in the study as I, too, had remained *connected.* In addition I had selected the most appropriate *players* with the necessary attributes throughout the research process as well as the best *strategies* in order to analyse the data and, thus, to advance to the next level in this study.

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CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the research findings were analysed schematically according to Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment. This chapter uses the same structure to summarise both the literature findings and the empirical research findings as well as to propose recommendations for strengthening the family-centred practices and, in other words, empowering parents for homework support.

This chapter starts by presenting a summary, emphasising both the practical and theoretical perspectives applicable to the study. The, research conclusions which were derived from my understanding the data are then used answer the research questions. The chapter concludes with my recommendations for parents who feel the need to become empowered in order to support with homework and, finally, from a personal perspective, I describe my own personal reflections on the study in order to shed some light on the impact the study had on me as a researcher.

5.2 INTEGRATED SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE AND THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

The significance of the findings lies within the practical as well as theoretical threshold of Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework. The aim of the study was to investigate the need of parents for empowerment by examining various factors which contribute to a child's learning and development and which, therefore, influences family-centred practices (Goodhart, 2009:6).

The research findings were divided into themes and categories using the same schematic layout as Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment (sections 2.2 and 4.3). This framework includes parenting support (parental attitudes and communication capacities); child-learning opportunities (the role of homework and intrinsic motivation); family and community support and resources (volunteering capacities and school decision-making and advocacy capacities); and family-centred practices (elements of family empowerment) (section 4.3).

The findings pertaining to each of these components revealed the following: In terms of **parenting support**, parental attitudes suggest that it is essential that parents maintain a positive and realistic perspective, not only with regard to homework and their perception of their child's teachers, but also on the child's level of competence, including the child's

emotional state as a potential "obstacle" in the way of learning and development (section 2.4.3). Perceptions help to shape the communication capacities. The findings revealed how talking to the teachers and finding out pertinent information about the way in which the child answered examinations questions had led to positive deliberations between the parent and teacher on the learning process (section 2.4.4.1). This had led to the parents feeling more confident and competent about supporting the child from that point forward (section 2.4). In other words, the parent felt guided (section 2.4.5) and, as a result, more in control of the situation (section 4.4.2).

Child-learning opportunities highlight the role of homework and also the relationship between homework and intrinsic motivation. In the context of this study, homework was regarded as a pedagogical strategy which was used to promote intrinsic motivation (section 2.3). The literature further states that homework promotes self-regulated learning and the desire to set goals for future learning and development (section 2.3.1). Thus, through homework, the child may develop an interest (section 2.5.4). However, the findings in this study revealed that the child had perceived homework as overwhelming and as a burden rather than an opportunity to find value in a topic of interest (section 2.5.5.4).

In terms of intrinsic motivation, the findings indicated that, according to the parents, the child's interests were limited (section 4.5.2) and, thus, encouraging learning by linking the content to the child's interests to other contexts was extremely challenging. In addition, this was preventing the child from achieving autonomy (section 2.5.6).

Family and community support and resources highlights volunteering capacities as well as school decision-making and advocacy capacities in order to gain access to, and control over, available resources. The study revealed that support systems had helped to bring about the mobilisation of the assets at the parents' disposal and, subsequently, to strengthen the family-centred practices. For example, I had recommended the parents employ an au pair who could assist with homework and, perhaps, alleviate the burden on the parents, especially with regard to the demanding leaning areas which were giving rise to frustration and anger between the parent and child at home (section 5.4.3.1). Another example in the context of the study was appropriate study material or the efficient use of workspace (section 4.7.1).

Volunteering capacities affirm a strong belief in the significance of parental involvement, either formally (serving on the school governing body), or informally (attending parent-teacher evenings or participating in school functions (section 2.6.3). An example from the data was the interview I had conducted with the parents in which we had discussed their various opportunities for involvement throughout the learning process, including father–son bonding time and discussing school-related issues (section 4.6.1).

School decision-making and advocacy capacities require parents to exercise sound judgement and to make informed choices regarding their child's learning process (section 2.6.2). An example from the data was the intervention of the parents and the school which had resulted in the child being able to write his examinations in a separate room under the supervision of a teacher in the hope of combating his anxiety when answering examination papers and, thus, enhancing his comprehension and improving his results (section 4.6.2).

The overview above highlights the theoretical as well as the practical significance of empowering parents for homework support by critically viewing a summary of the data, whilst referring to the theoretical framework as well as to existing literature. The empirical research findings also shaped the understanding of the research topic while helping me to draw conclusions and answer the research questions.

5.3   RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The research conclusions are presented as answers to the research questions. The secondary research questions are dealt with first as this led to the overarching research conclusion as the answer to the main research question.

5.3.1   SECONDARY QUESTION 1
What is the role of the learning support teacher in guiding the parents?

While investigating this question it was imperative that I retained my focus on the conceptual framework and viewed the term "support" in the context of empowering the parents through my role as the child's learning support teacher. In addition, support in the context of this study suggested the lending of help or encouragement in order to empower the parents so as to enable them to offer their support with homework. Accordingly, the role of the learning support teacher was to establish open, unequivocal communication by establishing a relationship of trust with the participants and setting in motion a functional process whereby everyone became involved in some capacity. The literature defines empowerment as acquiring resources, power, influence or a voice in decision-making while connecting individuals through their participation. Thus, the role of the learning support teacher was to create opportunities for learning by carefully modifying the methods used to guide the parents according to their specific needs whilst ensuring the adequate communication capacities, sustained parental involvement, co-operative volunteering capacities and resilient decision-making on the part of the parents that would enhance the family-centred practices and, thereby, benefit the child's learning and development.

5.3.2   SECONDARY QUESTION 2

How can parents' confidence become enhanced through guidance in homework support?

In the context of this study: guidance suggests receiving direction in order to improve organisational skills, conduct, supervision, control, and authority over the child's learning process.

In common with the previous question, conceptual significance is important to keep in mind, as the nature of support may include many capacities. Accordingly, support has to be seen in the context (essentially in terms of a particular component of the learning process) to establish where the focus for building confidence ought to be and how to enhance that specific aspect. This may be done by the parents compiling a personal checklist, indicating areas of concern which they would like to address. These aspects may be dealt with systematically throughout the learning process as the parents shape their perspectives, understand certain aspects better in this regard and acquire additional resources in the form of mentorships from experts or help from colleagues, friends and family members. In addition to compiling these lists, parents are enabled to monitor the proceedings and perhaps see differences in their approaches as well as changes in their perceptions from the start of an academic year as compared to the end of that same year. Nevertheless, as a result of these diverse capacities, they also differ from one family to the next and this implies that parents' confidence ought to be viewed in light of their unique family practices.

5.3.3   SECONDARY QUESTION 3
What is the experience of the child who participated in this study of parental support with homework?

Although the aim of the study was to investigate how parents may become empowered to support with homework and the focus of the study was on the parents' perceptions of their involvement in the child's learning process, it was imperative that I not lose sight of the main purpose of what such empowerment means for the child's learning and development once the appropriate support has been provided.

The child in the study (Bryan) had perceived homework as a challenge, constantly fighting against various constraints which, according to him, including pestering parents. Given his age this view was understandable. However, he did show signs of appreciation for his parents' support in times of need. This understanding of their significance was highlighted in key points throughout the learning process. An example of such awareness was when Bryan read his progress report and realised how all the hours which he had sat with his parents studying late at night (despite his objections) had been rewarded.

Thus, it is recommended that children experience the support from their parents in such a way that it is beneficial to them and so that their learning and development is placed at the centre of the empowerment process as depicted in Carl Dunst's theoretical framework.

Once the parenting support has been well established, the involvement of parents ought to promoter opportunities for the child to take part in the learning process and explore his or her own capacities within this process. Bryan was asked how he had felt about his own progress. He commented that the arrangements his parents had made with the school for him to write his examinations in a separate classroom had helped to put him at ease, helping with his anxiety and making him more focused. Therefore, opportunities such as these should motivate the child to view the support from his or her parents in a positive light and encourage further learning and development. Bryan's parents had subsequently promoted introspection in Bryan by asking Bryan what he thought about certain aspects of the learning process, including his strengths, for example, his ability to memorise things very quickly, and, in contrast, aspects which he needed to improve on, for example, his organisational skills and then incorporated these aspects into his learning process. This provided evidence of the child's progress in terms of his academic achievement as well as his growth and maturity.

5.3.4 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION
How can parents become empowered to support with homework?

In order for parents to become empowered, they need to have a sense of control and to feel sufficiently confident to provide the support which is required. The Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment suggests the interconnectedness between all the key components of the framework throughout the child's learning and development process. In addition, there must be shared responsibility on the part of all those involved in the learning process. In other words, a child's willingness to attempt a homework assignment on his/her own is as important as a parent's desire to support with the homework assignment. Empowerment in the context of the study stems from a knowledge of how to execute the homework in such a manner that there is a fair balance of input with everyone participating equally in the process and, thus, sustaining positive family-centred practices.

Correct family practices are extremely significant in the context of empowering parents for homework support. Structure and routine enables the child to learn in an organised manner with the parents supervising the learning process and implementing a homework schedule. Moreover, communication is of vital importance to ensure clarity with regard to information about the school requirements, the family situation and the child's academic progress. This routine structure creates a framework which enables the parents, teachers and child to ascertain which areas in the learning process may possibly require specific attention and support if the child is to develop and maintain autonomy. Such aspects or concerns may also be discussed in established support groups for parents and their children.

The following recommendations are suggested for parents to implement during homework sessions to ensure a level of authority and control within their family-centred practices.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations include appropriate steps which parents may take in order to support their children with homework. These steps can empower the parents by enabling them to taking ownership of the learning process as they invested in the process through their involvement. In this context it is important to consider the term ownership as maintaining control. This coincides with empowerment. It is hoped that these recommendations may strengthen the family-centred practices. In addition, they form part of empowering parents for homework support and are considered in terms of each component in Carl Dunst's theoretical framework.

In keeping with the nature of the data discussed in the previous chapter (section 4.3), I have offered a suitable suggestion for strengthening each component and have subsequently grouped the suggestions in accordance with the same logic as seen in Chapter 4. Therefore, the themes, namely, parenting support; child-learning opportunities; and family and community supports and resources are again indicated in blue and the recommendations (which represent the categories) are indicated in purple.

5.4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING PARENTING SUPPORT

❖ **Check with the child every day**

It is important that parents to ask about the homework on a daily basis so that thinking and planning the family practice of homework becomes reflexive. This way of communication should become a strict routine in terms of which the child shares his/her experiences. In addition, the parents are kept informed about what is happening at school as well as about the child's learning and developmental progress.

The parents should also receive feedback from the school which enables them to identify opportunities where they can become involved, whether in assisting with a difficult homework assignment or perhaps taking note of a school function they may have to attend. In addition, this will enable them to structure and organise their participation in their child's learning and development.

❖ **Maintain a constant homework routine**

Homework assignments are easier to manage and complete when the homework process follows a stringent routine. There are two advantages to a daily homework routine, namely, it enables the homework and learning process to continue, while teaching the child order and daily structure throughout his or her learning and development. This routine should become embedded in the family practice and form a pattern. This pattern might vary from day to day

as parents have to consider their own work schedules or the child's extra circular activities. However, it is imperative to establish a routine that works for everyone involved in order to accommodate everyone so that no one is confronted by a homework assignment at an inconvenient time.

The scheduled homework should be at an appropriate time of day and when the child and the parents have sufficient resources at their disposal to deal with the task at hand. This may, for example, include checking whether the child has brought all the required school books home that day so as to enable the parents to drive back to school and retrieve the homework if necessary and at a time when there is sufficient time to find the class teacher or a staff member on the school premises and who would be able to open the classroom. In the case of asking a friend for advice or verifying something school related, contacting someone in the support network should be done at an opportune time in order to avoid intruding on the person's family time. In essence, this structure will ensure control and prevent frustration or anxiety arising in the household.

❖ **Supervise during homework but avoid excessive interference**

It is of the utmost importance that parents get to know their child and also that they understand his/her strengthens and weaknesses. Constant communication and adequate involvement will help parents to become aware of their child's abilities and, thus, to realise when they should intervene and when they should hold back.

Parents should not overdo it when assisting with homework. They need to know when to lend their support and when to withdraw to give the child space to attempt the work on his/her own. It becomes a matter of concern when a child becomes overly dependent on receiving support as the quality of the child's homework would probably deteriorate without the constant help. Parents should, thus, talk to the school about modifying the workload or perhaps break the content up into smaller sections in order to reduce the magnitude of the work. This may reduce the anxiousness and frustration and encourage the child's independence. In addition, it is critical that children see their progress as a result of their own input as this should motivate a child to set goals and attempt to achieve further success.

5.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING CHILD-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

❖ **Help the child to establish and maintain organisational systems**

Structure is extremely important in order to keep track of the homework assignments and to ensure the effective management of these assignments. It is, therefore, essential to keep "The homework zone" neat and organised. A "homework wall" may be put up in the homework room using a pinup board in order to rearrange clutter. Another way of taking control is to use shelf space and place each learning area in its own separate compartment and this would make it easier to find a particular book or file.

It is also important to provide a child with proper stationary. It is suggested that parents fill a box with the essential stationery items such as pens, pencils; rulers; highlighters and glue sticks, and that the box is kept on the table in the homework zone. This should make it easier to complete assignments and also speed up the homework process instead of wasting time searching for something.

❖ **Incorporate an incentive system**

There are two types of incentive systems, namely, simple incentive systems and elaborate incentive systems. Children who lack motivation may benefit from the introduction of an incentive system as a form of encouragement. Although it is extremely important that children develop an interest in their work and the desire to learn without being extrinsically motivated, parents may introduce a simple incentive system which allows the child to reward him/herself for delivering good work and for recognising the child's achievements. This may include taking the child to his or her favourite restaurant when the family goes out for dinner or allowing the child to watch his or her favourite television programme once the child has completed his or her homework.

Parents may also make use of an elaborate incentive system which includes setting a challenge and working towards meeting the standards set. An example of such an incentive system may be attempting to complete a homework assignment within a specific time period every day and, in this sense, making a game out of it by trying to beat the previous record. This would create an opportunity for the child to set challenges and goals while perhaps changing the child's perceptions of homework in positive way and helping the child to become motivated to achieve greater success.

5.4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

❖ **Social networking**

Parents may feel overwhelmed because of the nature of the demands placed on them to support their children with homework. Every child is unique in terms of his/her capacity to learn and develop. These unique idiosyncrasies and needs may result in parents often feeling isolated in their attempts to support their children with this feeling of isolation in the learning process perhaps exacerbating the anxiety which causes families to feel disconnected. However, this does not have to be the case. Communication between parents and children is an important factor in understanding the unique dynamics in strengthening parenting support and improving a child's learning opportunities. In addition, communication also plays a critical role in helping parents to find additional support for their children through professional learning support or simply support from peer groups. Such support from peer groups may help parents to see other perspectives and share experiences as well as enabling parents to socialise with other families who are, perhaps, facing similar "obstacles"

and find support. For example, one parent may perhaps refer another parent to an extremely competent mathematics tutor of a child requires help of that nature. Another example would be parents talking to each other at school functions and establishing bonds with influential peers.

❖ **Establishing contacts**

As previously indicated, parents should be encouraged to strengthen their family and community support and resources (section 2.6.4.2). This may be done by using modern technology such as forming a parents' Facebook or Twitter group, or simply listing each other's contact details in their diaries. This would help parents to hold conversations with each other and, more importantly, to have access to pertinent information about homework requirements and school events.

❖ **Using a parents' checklist**

Parents often observe things about themselves and about their children when they work together on various assignments. Parents may find it helpful to jot down some of these aspects which they have come across during the learning process. In addition, they could perhaps identify certain aspects about which they feel positive as well as aspects they may wish to address. They could then use these checklists as topics for discussion with their children's teachers on parent evenings or share these issues in their parent-support groups.

5.5   PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY

❖ **What I would like to have done differently**

Although the focus of the study was on the family dynamic and how parents may become empowered for homework support, the data collected pertained only to the opinions of my participants on the child's learning and development. On reflection I would like to have included the school and, more specifically, the opinions of the teachers regarding their perspectives of the child's learning progress as this undoubtedly influences the school dynamic. I realise that that would have impacted significantly on the data collection and data analysis while it may have added weight in terms of the support given provided in the child's learning process.

❖ **Mistakes which I made**

The learning support sessions which I conducted with my participants were constrained by time and this meant that I often had to cover a significant amount of work in a session. In addition, I often found it challenging to cement a concept or drive an issue where it was unequivocally dealt with. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to the parents and child to have more practice on ways in which to lend support. However, in view of the demanding academic workload and the frantic family schedules, this was not always possible. Consistency is key for a child such as Bryan who needs regular input and structure and,

therefore, I should have promoted such consistency perhaps by conducting sessions during the school holidays in order to maintain the stimulation and support.

❖ **Things that excited me the most during the study**

I observed an improved attitude towards the schoolwork on the part of both Bryan and his parents. The fact that there was a plan and an approach to the work, especially during examination time, indicated to me that a sense of ownership in the learning process has developed.

❖ **Things that puzzled me the most during the study**

I tried to understand why, despite the fact that they were aware of all the options available at school for support, Bryan's parents had taken so long to make use of them. In addition, in my opinion, they should have told his teachers about his taking medication to help with concentration much sooner than they did so that the school could have understood any unforeseen behaviour and, perhaps, intervened with additional support as was seen in the case when the school made available a separate room to enable him to read his comprehension test aloud.

❖ **Aspects left unexplored**

I had raised the issue during the interviews with the participants that I would like to have observed Bryan in the classroom context and, perhaps, found out how the interaction with his peers and teachers contributed to his learning and development.

❖ **The most significant moment of the study**

The most significant moment in the study was, undoubtedly, Bryan taking the initiative by writing down all the requirements for an assignment in class and showing an interest in the topic. He had then attempted the assignment on his own. This had been the first sign of Bryan taking personal responsibility for his school work.

❖ **The most disappointing moment in the study**

I had found the homework space in a disorderly state on numerous occasions. It had then taken time to reorganise the table and it had occurred to me that the consistency and structure were sometimes lacking. It was as if the measures which had been taken to ensure optimal support for learning had to be reintroduced and this affected the momentum of the learning process.

5.6   CONCLUDING REMARKS

Parenting is, undoubtedly, one of the most challenging and strenuous experiences in life. It is also extremely diverse and multifaceted. In addition, there is no one solution that works for a family and it is often unfortunately through trial and error that families find some direction in

the learning process. Subsequently, this is viewed in the context of parents seeking adequate guidance (section 1.5). However, many families are often overwhelmed by the needs they are required to meet if their children are to learn and develop fully. This study investigated how parents may become empowered to support their children with homework. In addition to answering the main research question, I focused intensely on the conceptual significance of what empowerment means, not only in the context of this study but also in its significance for families in general. Empowerment may take on many forms, depending on the individual family. It is, thus, essential that the approach to empowering parents takes on a holistic perspective and that it incorporates the necessary guidance to ensure that families are not left to their own devices and, instead, they are able to make the connections which help to promote family-centred practices and which are recognised in all "modern families" of today, regardless of their circumstances. Carl Dunst's Integrated Framework for Family Empowerment suggests that adequate and constant interaction of one component in the learning process will ensure the equal and valued involvement of another, provided that each component is part of the learning process and is thoroughly strengthened (section 2.2).

During one of the homework sessions I held with Bryan, we were studying Natural Sciences and I had to explain electrical circuits. I had to explain the fundamental principle that the current will not be complete if one of the components of the circuit is not in place. Using this as an analogy for Carl Dunst's theoretical framework, it is evident that, similar to an electrical circuit, each component in the learning process is of equal importance to all the others. It is, therefore, not possible for family-centred practices to be fully complete if something is "unplugged".

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ADDITIONAL MEDIA SOURCES

Excerpt from the American TV show *"Modern Family"* on ABC (Season 2), episode entitled "Unplugged".

International Express. (2012) "Friction over the fractions: Baffled parents row with pupils over homework" February 28:8.

Pretoria News. (2012a) "Teachers cannot do their job without parents' help". February 14:13

Pretoria News. (2012b) "Parent involvement key to better education". Wednesday, December 5:14

Redi Thlabi show on 702 Talk Radio and Cape Talk *Asking the question should we introduce a nanny-state like laws and parenting classes?* (9 February 2015)

Malcolm Gladwell interviewed by CNN's Fareed Zakaria on the programme, GPS (October 2013).

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Denkleiers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo tša Dihlalefi

Letter of Consent

Your willingness to participate is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of the study is to *investigate how parents can become empowered to support with homework.*

The signing of this document stipulates that the participants agree to the following:

1. Their consent to participate in semi-structured and open-ended interviews anonymously. With the understanding that their identities, as well as the child's are safeguarded at all time.
2. Their child's participation in unstructured and informal interviews, with the understanding that the information is dealt with care and sensitivity with utmost discretion, anonymity and confidentiality in order to protect the child's identity.
3. In the event that reference is made to participants in transcribing the interviews, pseudo names are used in order to protect the true identities of the participants.
4. The use of their child's workbooks, letters written by the school or the class teacher, including tests, exam papers, and report cards for documentation indicate the feedback from the school on the learner's academic progress.
5. Photos taken during the homework sessions, with the knowledge that the identity of the participant(s) shall not be disclosed at any point.

I/we declare that I am/we are cognisant of fact that:

1. My/our contributions to the research process are valued and encouraged. I/we have access to the dissertation at any point and the writing thereof.
2. I/we have the rights to view, comment on, or change statement made during interviews (should I/we wish to do so).
3. I/we right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process (should I/we wish to do so).

In addition, I/we hereby give my/our consent, and acknowledge that the researcher has comprehensively explained the purpose of the research, my/our role during the research, and the terms and conditions of the agreement.

_____   _____

Signature of parent/participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of parent/participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of researcher   Date