

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN  
KWAZULU NATAL**

**by**

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**DECLARATION**

**I declare that PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KWAZULU NATAL is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.**

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27-03-02

**DATE**

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**DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS**

**MRS SOOKRANI DEVI BRIDGEMOHAN**

**AND**

**THE LATE MR BRIDGEMOHAN**

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## ABSTRACT

This study on parent involvement in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal investigates the experiences of educators and parents of the different types of parent and community involvement as set out in the Epstein typology. In order to investigate this phenomenon a thorough background of the theory and practice of the Epstein model has been provided. In addition the work of other researchers that support the Epstein typology of parent involvement forms an integral part of the discussions. As parent involvement is the key focus of the study, parent involvement in education before and after 1994 are discussed. In this regard relevant educational policy and legislation that are designed to increase the role of parents and the community in Early Childhood Development are highlighted. Parents' role in the provision of Early Childhood Development is explored. The provision of Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal, which provides a backdrop for the investigation, is explained. In addition contextual factors that influence parent involvement in KwaZulu Natal are provided. The research methodology and the research design used in this study are described in detail. By means of a qualitative approach the experiences of a small sample of educators and parents in Early Childhood Development are explored using the six types of parent involvement that include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home and collaborating with the community as set out in Epstein's comprehensive model. The experiences of educators and parents of Grade R learners of the six types of involvement have been included. Although all schools engage in some form of parent involvement, it is evident that not all schools involve parents in all types of parent involvement to the same extent. The study concludes with recommendations for developing strategies to involve parents more effectively in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal.

### **KEY TERMS:**

**Parent involvement; Early Childhood Development; Reception Year; Epstein typology; Parenting; Communicating; Volunteering; Learning at home; Decision making; Collaborating with the community**

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# **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KWAZULU NATAL**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **PROBLEM FORMULATION, AIMS AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The concept of parent involvement is an essential ingredient of educational practice the world over. The term parent involvement, however, has undergone a metamorphosis over the past few decades. Ginsburg, Davis and Fantuzzo (1995:273) argue that parent involvement is an undifferentiated concept that represents a wide variety of behaviours from direct parent participation in academic instruction to parent involvement in school governance. Parent involvement means different things to different individuals. The degree and levels of parent involvement in the different phases of education also varies. The need for effective parent involvement in the education of the young child is articulated by Pugh (in Wolfendale 1989:18) who asserts that the concept of partnership is still far from a reality in most preschool settings. Moreover, there is a long way to go before the care and education of young children are based on a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and real dialogue between parents and professionals. This study attempts to investigate parent involvement in Early Childhood Development with specific reference to the Reception Year (Grade R) in KwaZulu Natal.

#### **1.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

A worldwide phenomenon is the view that education should be the responsibility of professional educators only. This perception is being replaced with the recognition that professionals can be more effective when supported by informed parents (Kaplan 1992:304). Many of the piecemeal initiatives in parent involvement in the past two decades have suffered a predictable loss of momentum, but they have had the effect of encouraging the schools to shift away from "exclusive" professionalism and to open up the debate on real parent involvement in school life (Wolfendale 1989:45).

This shift in attitude can also be attributed to research undertaken in the last two decades on the value of parent involvement. As Geiger (in Kaplan 1992:307) claims the evidence is now both abundant and incontrovertible: Closer ties between the home and school, between parents and educators, translate into improved attendance and higher academic achievement.

This shift in attitude is also very relevant in the South African educational context. The education system is currently experiencing one of the most far reaching programmes of reform and transformation ever seen. Emphasis and recognition of increased parent involvement in Early Childhood Development (ECD) is evident in recent legislation: The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995:21); The National Education Policy (RSA 1996b); The Interim Policy Document for ECD (DoE 1996:2); The South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a: 50); The National ECD Pilot Project Draft Qualifications Framework and Interim Unit Standards (DoE 1998b: 13); Assessment Policy in General Education and Training Phase Grade R to 9 and ABET (DoE 1998a: 13) and the Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997a:7).

A review of literature suggests that parent involvement in children's education provides numerous positive outcomes for elementary as well as preschool learners (Christenson, Rounds & Gorney 1992:178-206). In general, productive collaboration between schools and families has been associated with higher learner achievement, lower dropout rates (Keith TZ, Keith PB, Troutman, Bickley, Trivette & Singh 1993:474-496), a decline in behaviour problems (Comer 1984:323-337), and academic initiative and persistence (Estrada, Arsenio, Hess & Holloway 1987:210-215). Moreover, it is believed that parent involvement is a potent factor that has the potential to lessen the gap in achievement between children from high and low-income families (Milne 1989:32-65). In addition researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have noted the importance of parent involvement as a component of effective schools (Epstein 1987a: 119). Schleicher (1992:29) concludes that strong parental involvement and parent collaboration are indispensable conditions for educational progress and success.

However, parent involvement is approached and experienced in many different ways and a variety approaches or models exists, for example:

- **Ira Gordon's model:** The Family Impact Model, the School Impact Model and the Community Impact Model (Gordon 1977:74-77);
- **Swap's models:** The School-to-Home Transmission Model, the Curriculum Enrichment Model, and the Partnership Model (Swap 1992:57);
- **Comer's model:** School Development Programmes (Comer 1988:24) and
- **Epstein's model (1995:704):** Parenting; Communicating; Volunteering; Learning at home; Decision making; and Collaborating with the community.

The theoretical stance of role players towards home-school relations is a modifying factor influencing the outcomes of these relations. This is because the degree to which educators and parents are influenced by a specific theoretical stance will influence the extent to which collaboration between the home and the school exists.

The models referred to above all have merit. However, in the United States of America research showed that many of these parenting involvement programmes did not close the achievement gap between low income and minority students, and predominantly white middle and higher income learners (Chrispeels 1992:11). On the other hand subsequent studies of these programmes indicate that those with a comprehensive involvement component have a stronger and longer lasting positive impact on all role players.

The Epstein model of home-school-community partnerships is considered a good example of a comprehensive programme (Christenson, Rounds & Franklin 1992:35) and is referred to in the United States publication *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (US Department of Education 1994). The Epstein model has been well researched by the Centre on School, Family, and Community Partnerships of the Johns Hopkins University and implemented by a number of states in the USA, including Maryland, Utah and Wisconsin (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon 1997: vii). This model has therefore been selected for the study and the six areas identified in the model (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community) will serve as the framework for the investigation of parent involvement in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal. This model is extensively discussed in Chapter two.

### 1.3 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Early Childhood Development is a term, which applies to the processes by which children from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially (RSA1995: 33) (see 1.4.3). In South Africa, within this age range further age phases are identified: birth-three years, two to six years and five to nine years (DoE 1998b: 39). This study will focus on the Reception Year (five to six years). The Reception Year is to be introduced in the future as the first introductory year of an integrated four-year Foundation Phase programme (DoE 1996:3). Although the government has made a policy commitment to include the Reception Year (five to six years) as the first year of the General Education and Training cycle, it is not yet part of the ten years of compulsory schooling (Grade R to Grade nine) (RSA 1995:75).

Presently the Reception Year is the overlapping year between the Foundation Phase (six to nine years) and the Preprimary Phase (three to six years). This age group's learning site could be in the formal school or community based. Thus, there is a lack of a true "ownership" of this age phase by both the Foundation Phase and the Preprimary Phase sectors. The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995:75) points out that considerable capacity already exists in non-state preschools and the tradition of community provision of preschooling is an appropriate and valuable asset and should be encouraged and supported.

In view of the commitment made by the Government to include the Reception Year as part of formal schooling, research on parent involvement in this transitional year (Reception Year) is undertaken. Furthermore this investigation will focus on the community-based preschools in the greater Durban area, which is classified as an urban area. These preschools generally have multicultural settings with middle class parents. It is hoped that the research findings will inform sound educational practice and lay the foundation for effective parent involvement in the Foundation Phase.

Parent involvement in Early Childhood Development will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter three, however a brief overview is provided here. The notion of involving parents in their children's early education is not new. For years, connecting home and school has been a fundamental aim of parent cooperative nursery schools (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren

1993:373; Berger 1981:196; & Shimoni 1991:12). In the late 1700's and early 1800's Pestolozzi and Froebel stressed the importance of parent education in kindergartens, where educators taught children (three to six years) in the morning and worked with families in the afternoons. In the early 1900's in Italy Montessori initiated educational methods for use with poor children (four to six years) and their families (Landerholm 1984:6). Montessori's initiative of involving parents and the community in preschool programmes has gained impetus. The Reggio Emilia preschool programme in Italy in the late 1900's still considers parent participation essential (Gandini 1993:4).

Lazer, Irving and Darlington (in Henderson 1988: 43) provide research results of Early Childhood Programmes such as *Headstart* and its extension *Follow-Through* where the level of parent involvement is higher, which show that children score higher than children of similar aptitude and background than those whose parents are not involved. Even more encouraging are long term effects of the same programmes which include higher grades and test scores; long term academic achievement; positive attitude and behaviour; more successful programmes and more effective schools (Karr & Landerholm 1988:60).

Furthermore, there is consensus among well-known authorities on Early Childhood Development that parents and families are viewed as the first and foremost influence upon their children's learning and development (Gordon & Browne 1993:239; Hendrick 1994:21; Clark-Stewart 1982:91; Click 1981:189; Seaver & Cartwright 1986:343; Seefeldt 1989:61).

The Early Childhood Development sector in South Africa recognises the importance of the parent and the community in the education of the young child and this has been articulated in recent policy documents (RSA 1995:21; DoE 1996:40; DoE 1998b: 39).

## **1.4 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

### **1.4.1 Parent partnership/ involvement**

In unpacking the term parent involvement Vandegrift and Greene (1992:57) comment that schools do not always know what parent involvement really means and explain that two aspects need to be emphasised:

- Parents are supportive. They encourage their children, are supportive and understanding. They show a high level of commitment to their children and their education;
- Parents are active, that is, what they do is observable.

Vandegrift and Green (1992:58-59) explain that the combination of level of commitment and participation is what makes an "involved" parent. However an appropriate match between a parent's level of commitment and willingness and ability to be involved must be ensured. LeBlanc (in Kaplan 1992:132) draws a distinction between involvement and participation: to be involved suggests support, while participation stands for action or potential change.

Dekker (1994:5) defines parent participation as the exercise of joint responsibility for education. Pugh (1989:5) refers to parent involvement as a working relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose. One researcher referred to it as a "dustbin term" after she interviewed a number of educators and parents and found little consistency or congruency in interpretation (Shimoni 1991:12). Seaver and Cartwright (1986:346) on the other hand refer to parent involvement as a "Pandora's box" for a childcare programme. Powell (in Ferguson & Shimoni 1992:105) argues that professional communication concerning parent involvement is seriously hampered by imprecise definition and lack of consensus.

The myriad of definitions used to define parent involvement makes interpreting the literature difficult. Understanding the term "parent involvement" may have different implications for different individuals and institutions. One may, however, conclude that its types and forms operationally define parent involvement. For the purpose of this study the terms parent involvement, parent participation and parent partnership will be used interchangeably to refer to a broad spectrum of activities that link the learning site and home.

#### 1.4.2 Parent

According to the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a: 4) parent means:

- (a) the parent or guardian of a learner;

- (b) the person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or
- (c) the person who undertakes to fulfill the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner's education at school.

As a result of social issues the concept of parent or families is in a continual state of change thus the definition of parent or families varies as society changes. Thus a wide configuration of parents should also be noted. These include single parents, divorced parents, teenage parents, homeless parents, older first time parents and working parents (Morrison 1998:30-35; Shoemaker 1995:44-47; Hendrick 1994:31-35; Catron & Allen 1993:60-61; Gordon & Browne 1993:247-247). In this study, the term "parent" is used broadly and refers to the person who has care, custody and control over and concern for the child.

#### **1.4.3 Early Childhood Development programmes**

The programme is the type of service provided for children from birth to age nine (Gordon & Browne 1993:37). According to the Interim Policy Document on ECD (DoE 1996:3) ECD programmes may refer to any series of activities aimed at promoting the development of the young child in a variety of locations, including primary schools, community centres, homes et cetera. According to Morrison (1995:15) early childhood programmes provide "services for children from birth to age eight in part day and full day group programmes in centres, homes, institutions, kindergarten and primary school".

#### **1.4.4 Reception Year**

The Reception Year also referred to Grade R is the year before Grade one. The Reception Year should not be understood as an institutionalized year of instruction in all primary schools in South Africa at this stage. The current context requires indirect preparation for the Reception Year to be introduced in the future as the first introductory year of an integrated four-year Foundation Phase programme (DoE 1996:3).

#### **1.4.5 Educator**

In respect of educators the term includes both formally and non-formally trained individuals providing an educational service in ECD. This would include persons currently covered by the Educator's Employment Act. In ECD both the terms educator and practitioner are used (DoE 1996:3).

#### **1.4.6 Learner**

Learner means any person receiving education or obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a: 4). In this study the learner is the person who is five to six years old receiving education.

#### **1.4.7 Early Childhood Education/Educare (ECE)**

This term refers to the provision of education and care of children from birth to age six. This term is now (post 1994) superseded by the term Early Childhood Development (ECD) (DoE 1996:1).

### **1.5 PROBLEM FORMULATION**

#### **1.5.1 Preamble**

In order to contextualise this research problem a background to the problem is provided. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:42), theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. One can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending on previous reading and experience with or relevant to an area. Theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, which include literature, professional experience and personal experience. In this regard the researcher outlines the sources of this research situation.

The initial impetus to study parent involvement in Early Childhood Development came from the researcher's findings (Bridgemohan 1996) that there was a lack of the desired parent

involvement in Early Childhood Development programmes in South Africa. The study involved literature, which included theory, research and documents on Early Childhood Development that "sensitized" the researcher to the problem. In addition the researcher through her professional experience as a Foundation Phase educator (16 years) found educators grappling with the task of involving parents in the education of young children.

### **1.5.2 Statement of the problem**

A series of educational policy and legislation has recently been introduced in South Africa to increase the role of parents and the community in Early Childhood Development (cf 1.2). In the light of the research and the call for greater parent involvement in Early Childhood Development stated in paragraph 1.4.1, there is a need to explore the type and extent of parent involvement in Early Childhood Development, with a view to making recommendations for developing strategies to involve parents more effectively. The following questions demarcate the problem more clearly:

- What are the characteristics of a comprehensive parent involvement programme as typified by the Epstein Model?
- What is the present situation regarding the provision of ECD in KwaZulu Natal and how is the role of parents conceptualized?
- What are the experiences of educators and parents of the different types of parent and community involvement as set out in the Epstein typology?
- How can these findings contribute to the implementation of effective parent involvement programmes for parents and educators in Early Childhood Development in the Reception Year?

### **1.6 AIMS OF RESEARCH**

In light of the above research problem, the following objectives for this research may be identified:

- The present investigation aims at providing a thorough background to the different types of parent involvement as outlined in the Epstein model.

- The study aims at explaining the provision of Early Childhood Education in South Africa (past and present) including the role of parent involvement in this provision.
- By means of a qualitative approach, the study aims at exploring the existing principles and practices of parent involvement by educators and parents in the Reception Year.
- The study aims at making recommendations for developing strategies to involve parents more effectively in Early Childhood Development.

In this way, data is gathered which can be used to extend the body of knowledge concerning parent involvement in Early Childhood Development; and to make recommendations to promote greater parent involvement in Early Childhood Development.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to investigate parent involvement in the Reception Year against the Epstein typology a literature study is undertaken. The review of literature involves the systematic identification, location, and analysis of documents containing information related to the research problem. These documents include periodicals, abstracts, reviews books and other research reports (Gay 1992:38). In this study both primary and secondary sources will be used. Primary sources refer to the direct description of an occurrence by an individual who actually observed or witnessed the occurrence. Secondary sources refer to publications written by an author who was not a direct observer or participant in the events described (Borg & Gall 1989:115). The authors Borg and Gall (1989:116) further claim that the literature in any field forms the foundation upon which all future work must be built

A qualitative approach is used employing data gathering techniques, such as observation at Reception Year sites and interviews with educators and parents who have children in the Reception Year to investigate how parent involvement is experienced against the Epstein model. Although the relatively small sample of preschool educators and parents characteristic of qualitative methodology, cannot be said to be representative of the Early Childhood Development sector of KwaZulu Natal, this kind of research yields rich descriptive data which can be extended in future research to similar sites.

In conclusion, the use of multiple methods and data sources serves to enhance the validity of the research findings. Data analysis is done according to techniques typical of qualitative research.

### **1.7.1 The use of a qualitative approach**

While a more detailed explication of the methodology, the rationale for choice of methodology and the research design are fully presented in Chapter 4, a preliminary overview is given here. The principal method of investigation is a qualitative exploration of parent involvement in Early Childhood Development with specific reference to the Reception Year.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:2) refer to qualitative research as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The data collected is termed "soft", that is rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Strauss and Corbin (1990:17) concur that qualitative research is any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Miles and Huberman (1994:10) add that qualitative data is an excellent strategy for discovery, exploring a new area and developing hypotheses.

Qualitative research involves holistic inquiry carried out in a natural setting (Borg & Gall 1989:385). In the case of this study inquiry will be carried out in public preschools that have a multicultural setting in an urban area. Miles and Huberman (1994:10) refer to this aspect as people's "lived experience". The emphasis on studying the whole setting in order to understand reality is perhaps the most important characteristic of the qualitative research paradigm (Borg & Gall 1989:385). The researcher therefore has the opportunity of studying the "lived experience" of the educators and parents in preschools in the greater Durban area in KwaZulu Natal. Thus the researcher is the primary data-gathering instrument (Borg & Gall 1989:385).

Although descriptions of qualitative research methods vary considerably, Burgess (1985:6) points out that most writing devoted to this style of inquiry emphasise participant observation and in-depth interviews that allow the researcher to learn first hand. The researcher will

therefore, initially engage in a period of participant observation by observing parent participation in preschools.

However, Sherman and Webb (1990:125) warn that observing, by itself, is never enough because it begs misinterpretation. Interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify or alter what they thought happened to achieve a full understanding of an incident. In light of this warning the period of observation is followed by interviewing the educators and parents in preschools. The selection of the small sample of educators and parents is referred to as purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the purpose of the study (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:218). The authors further agree that the sample size in qualitative studies typically is small.

A semi-structured interview will be used. In a semi-structured interview some questions are specified but latitude is left to the interviewer to explore areas of concern. In the structured interview the order and content of question is completely specified (Walizer & Wienir 1978:288).

Interviews are recorded on audiotape and the tapes are later transcribed for closer examination. This type of research is descriptive, therefore an attempt is made to analyse the data with all of the richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:31) remark that qualitative researchers tend to analyse their data inductively. They do not search out data to prove or disprove a hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered and grouped together. Theory developed this way emerges from the "bottom up" rather than from the "top down", from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that is interconnected.

The above methodology will be used to realise the primary aim of this study, which is to explore and describe how educators and parents in Early Childhood Development experience parent involvement in the light of the types of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community) identified in the Epstein typology.

## 1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

This study can be divided into five distinguishable components:

- (1) In **Chapter two** parent involvement is discussed against the background of Epstein's typology of parent involvement.
- (2) The provision of Early Childhood Development in South Africa (past and present) and the role of parents in Early Childhood Development South Africa is discussed in **Chapter three**.
- (3) **Chapter four** provides a further discussion of the methodology used to investigate parent involvement in Early Childhood Development programmes. The second part of the chapter deals with the data collection strategies used in the study.
- (4) In **Chapter five** the data collected is analysed and presented.
- (5) **Chapter six** includes a synopsis of the findings of this study as well as recommendations arising from the study.

## 1.9 CONCLUSION

The recognition of the importance of Early Childhood Development by the new government is a major milestone, and the commitment to introduce the Reception Year as the first year of compulsory education (Grade R to 9) is commendable. Furthermore, government, as illustrated by the following, emphasises the recognition of parents as important partners in the educational process:

Parents or guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and they have a right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance (RSA 1995:21).

However translating these initiatives into reality requires support and encouragement. This study therefore attempts to investigate how parent involvement in Early Childhood Development is experienced by a small sample of educators and parents and whether it is comprehensive enough to achieve the benefits listed in the literature. It is hoped that findings from this study could contribute to effective parent involvement in Early Childhood Development.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE EPSTEIN MODEL OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

An extensive and growing literature documents the importance of school and family connections for increasing student success in school and for strengthening school programmes (Dauber & Epstein 1991:289). The theoretical stance of the role players towards home-school relations is a modifying factor influencing the outcomes of these relations. This is because the degree to which educators and parents are influenced by a specific theoretical stance will influence the extent to which collaboration between the home and the school exists (Van Wyk 1996:40). For example, when educators make parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interaction with their children at home, feel more positive about their abilities to help their children in the elementary grades, rate the educators as better educators overall and students improve their attitudes and achievements (Becker & Epstein 1982: 85-102). Substantial theorising has been done on this topic which indicates that programmes with a comprehensive parent involvement component have a stronger and longer lasting positive impact on learner achievement (Chrispeels 1992:11). The Epstein model of home-school-community involvement is considered a good example of a comprehensive programme (Christenson, Rounds & Franklin 1992:35) and is used extensively in the United States of America and elsewhere in the world. The Epstein model will thus form the basis of this discussion and the various types of involvement suggested by Epstein will be substantiated by the work of other researchers.

#### **2.2 THE EPSTEIN THEORY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

In the 1980's, Epstein developed a theoretical model to explain parent involvement (Epstein 1996:214). Underlying this, Epstein (1996:121) identified three perspectives which guide researchers and practitioners in their thinking about family and school relations.

### 2.2.1 The three perspectives on family-school relations

The three guiding perspectives enumerated by Epstein (1987b: 121) include:

- Separate responsibilities of families and schools;
- Shared responsibilities of families and schools;
- Sequential responsibilities of families and schools.

Assumptions based on the separate responsibilities of institutions emphasise the inherent incompatibility, competition and conflict between families and schools. It assumes that school bureaucracies and family organisations are directed by educators and parents respectively, who can best fulfill their different goals, roles and responsibilities independently (Epstein 1987b: 121).

The opposing assumption based on shared responsibilities of the school and the home, emphasises the coordination, cooperation and complementarity of schools and families, and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions (Epstein 1987b: 121). It assumes that schools and families share responsibilities for the socialisation of the child. Educators and parents are believed to share common goals for children that are achieved most effectively when parents and educators work together.

Finally, according to the third perspective, the sequential perspective, the critical stages of parents' and educators' contributions to child development are emphasised (Epstein 1987b: 121). Parents teach needed skills to children until the time of their formal education around the ages of five or six. At that time educators assume primary responsibility for children's education. These major theoretical perspectives explain the basic differences in family and school relations.

The perspectives on family-school relations do not, however, explain motivations to reinforce or remove boundaries between school and families, nor the changing patterns in home-school relations. They also fail to explain the influence families and schools have on each other or to take cognisance of student development and the effect thereof on home-school relations.

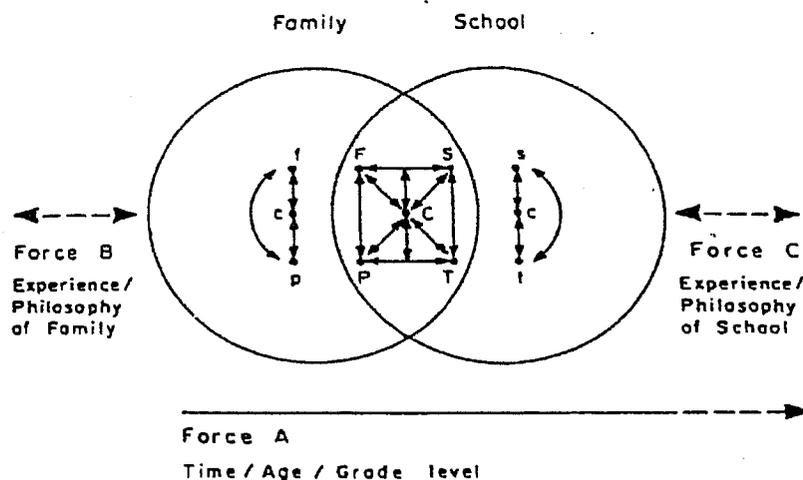
To address all the variables, Epstein (1987b: 126) proposes an integrated theory of family-school relations characterised by a set of overlapping spheres of influence.

### 2.2.2 The theory of overlapping spheres of influence

The concept of overlapping spheres of influence was based on data collected from educators, parents and learners in the elementary grades. This was based on the need for a social organizational perspective that posits that the most effective families and schools have overlapping, shared goals and missions concerning children, and conduct some work collaboratively (Epstein 1996: 214).

The following figure introduces a model of family and school relations that accounts for the history, development and the changing experiences of parents, teachers and learners.

**FIGURE 2.1: OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE OF FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS**



*Fig. 1: Model of overlapping spheres of influence of families and schools*

Key: Intrainstitutional interactions (lower case)  
Interinstitutional interactions (upper case)

f/F = Family  
s/S = School  
c/C = Child  
p/P = Parent  
t/T = Teacher

Source: Epstein (1987b:126)

The model of overlapping spheres of influence includes both external and internal structures. The *external structure* can, by condition or design, be pushed together or pulled apart by three main forces (Epstein 1996:214). The forces as illustrated in the figure above are (a) time, to account for changes in the ages and grade levels of students and the influence of a historic period, (b) the philosophies, policies and practices of the family and (c) the philosophies, policies and practices of the school (Epstein 1990:103). These forces create conditions, space, and opportunities for more or fewer shared activities of schools, families and communities. They determine how much and what kinds of overlap occur at any given time, and affect the interactions among members of these institutions. In this model, there are practices that schools, families and the communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development (Epstein 1995:703).

The *internal structure* of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at the institutional and individual level. Institutional level interactions involve all members or groups within schools, families and communities; individual interactions involve one student, parent or community member (Epstein 1996:215). Combinations of these interactions may also occur within these areas of overlap. Epstein's model of overlapping spheres assumes that there are mutual interests and influence of families and schools that can be more or less successfully promoted by the policies and programmes of the organisations and the action and attitudes of the individuals in the organisations (Epstein 1987b: 130).

The model recognises that although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, other practices reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators regarding children's learning and development. When educators adhere to the perspective of separate responsibilities of families and schools, they emphasise the specialisation of skills required by educators for school training and by parents for home training. With specialisation comes a division of labour that pulls the spheres of school and family influences apart, decreases overlap and restricts interaction between parent and educators (Epstein 1990:104). For example, in some schools there are educators who say, "If the family would just do its job"; and there are families who say, "I raised this child; now it's your job to educate her". These words embody the theory of separate spheres of influence (Epstein 1995:703).

On the other hand schools might conduct many high quality communications and interactions designed to bring the spheres of influence together. For example, educators may say, "I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and support of this community." Some parents may say, "I really need to know what is happening at school in order to help my child". These phrases embody the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein 1995:703). When educators and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required by educators and by parents to produce educated and successful learners (Epstein 1987b: 131). Their combination of labour pushes the spheres of influence together, increases interaction between parents and school personnel about the developing child and create school-like-families and family-like-schools (Epstein 1995:702).

A family-like-school recognises each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome families, not just those that are easy to reach (Epstein 1995:702). A school-like family recognises that each child is also a learner. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework and activities that build learners and feelings of success (Epstein 1992:502). In later publications, Epstein mentions the community as a third sphere of influence (Epstein 1992:503). This means that communities, including groups of parents work together to create school-like opportunities, events and programmes that recognise and reward learners for good progress, creativity and excellence (Epstein 1995:702). They also create family-like settings and services that enable families to better support their children. Community-minded families and learners help their neighbourhood and other families. Epstein (1995:703) adds that "family-friendly" programmes and services take into account the needs and realities of modern family life in the nineties, are feasible to conduct, and are equitable to all families. When all concepts combine, children experience learning communities or caring communities. These terms and examples are evidence of the potential for schools, families and communities to create caring educational environments. Epstein (1987a: 129) notes that the most overlap of family and school spheres for most children occurs during preschool and grade 1. However, efforts to involve parents typically start to drop as early as grade two or three. This emphasizes the importance of establishing parent involvement at an early stage, and underlines the importance of this research.

The concept of change is crucial to studying the overlapping spheres of influence. According to Epstein (1996:219), learners and their families age and grow and change grades, classes and educators every year. Educators change as they become more experienced and as they add new approaches to their teaching repertory. Communities change as leaders, resources, services and citizens come and go. All parts and participants of school, family and community connections change constantly. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence encourages the measurement of change. The task of research is to identify practices that are appropriate at each grade level or level of schooling and to study the effects of school and family connections on learners, parents, teaching practice, and school climate (Epstein 1992:502).

The Epstein model illustrates that at any time, in any school, and in any family, parent involvement is a variable that can be increased or decreased by the practices of educators, parents, administrators and children (Christenson et al 1992:36). Moreover, the overlapping spheres of influence recognize the multiple contexts and interpersonal relations of all participants.

### **2.3 EPSTEIN'S TYPOLOGY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Initially, a framework of five major types of involvement that fall within the areas of overlap in the spheres of influence model was identified (Davies 1991:377). These included: parenting (assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills and the basic obligation of families), communication from and to school, volunteers, learning activities at home and decision making (Epstein 1992:503). A sixth type of school and family partnership was later added to this list: collaborating with the community (Epstein 1995:704). The framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle and high schools (Epstein 1995:705). Each of the six types of parent involvement induces many different practices of partnership, poses specific challenges that must be met in order to involve all families and redefines some basic principles of involvement. Finally, each type is likely to lead to different results for learners, for parents, for teaching practice and for school climate. The selected results provided for each type of parent involvement should help correct the widespread misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children's achievement test scores. Instead, in the

short term, certain practices are more likely than others to influence learner's skills and scores, while other practices are more likely to affect attitudes and behaviours. The selected results have been measured in at least one study and observed as schools conducted their work. Moreover, schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon 1997:7). The six types of parent involvement as espoused by Epstein will now be explored according to their definitions, practice, challenges and expected results. This will be substantiated by the views of other researchers working in the field of home -school relations.

### **2.3.1 Type 1: Parenting**

#### **2.3.1.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

According to Epstein (1995:704), parenting involves helping all families establish home environments to support children as students. In practice this translates to assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, providing family support programmes on nutrition, health and other services and suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each stage and grade level (Epstein 1995:704; 1996:216). Epstein (1987b: 120) maintains that the family environment is important in the development of the child. Epstein (1987b: 121) explains that the most basic involvement of parents is providing children's needs for food, clothing, shelter, health and safety (1987b: 121). Moreover, once the children are in school, parents provide school supplies and space and time for schoolwork at home. Schools can help parents continue their child-rearing obligations that prepare the children and support the school by frequently communicating to parents the school's expectations for parental actions and assistance. Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school are recommended. Neighbourhood meetings and workshops to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families are essential (Epstein et al 1997:8). The term workshop means more than a " meeting" about a topic held at a school building at a particular time. It may involve making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard or read anywhere at any time (Epstein et al 1997:9). The author cautions that it is vitally important to provide information to all families who want or need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at school. Furthermore, to enable families to share information with schools about culture, background,

children's needs and interests, it is important to ensure that all information for and from families is clear, usable and linked to children's success in school (Epstein 1995:705).

The most critical dimension in providing educational programmes for parents is to make sure that the programmes offered are responsive to parents' needs and interests, as they perceive them. Some form of needs assessment is critical, whether it be through interviews, questionnaires, group activities or some combination of these activities. All parents should have an opportunity to respond, and every effort should be made to ascertain that any sample of respondents is representative of the whole parent body (Swap 1992:68). It may be wise to heed the advice of Powell (in Shimoni & Ferguson 1992:109) who suggest that if parent education is to be considered within the child care context, then parent education programmes must be matched appropriately with parents' views concerning what parents need and how best to meet these needs and that relations between parents and staff should be of a collaborative nature. Hamby (1992:65) advises schools to alternate workshops between topics that parents have identified and topics that the school thinks are important. Effective parenting programmes will empower parents with information and strategies for supporting their child's learning.

The importance of the home and the environment is summed up by Epstein (1987a: 120-121) who states that:

Parents lay the groundwork for learner's success in school by building their children's self-confidence, self-concept, and self-reliance. If these aspects of home training are not completed by the time the child starts school, they become a mutual concern and a shared responsibility of the family and the school.

Warner (1991:373) agrees, in adding that children's attitudes about the importance of education and learning begins with the expectation and beliefs of their parents.

### **2.3.1.2 Support for parenting as an aspect for home-school relations**

Support for parenting is captured in Ira Gordon's model of parent involvement known as the **Parent or Family Impact Model**. In this model the school reaches out to the home through

home visits or other communication techniques (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:280). The Family Impact Model was designed to work with families to enable them to cope with the social and education systems (Gordon 1977:75). This approach involves helping parents provide a positive learning environment at home and is supported by research conducted in preschools where parents were trained to engage in supportive home activities. Results indicated that creating a positive learning environment at home has a powerful impact on learner achievement (Henderson 1988:60). This approach also assumes that the family wants to participate in the system but does not know how to socialise and help its children acquire the necessary prerequisites for success.

**Family support programmes** have direct links to early education programmes. These programmes aim at strengthening all aspects of child development, parent education at home, and help parents connect with natural support systems. A well-known Early Childhood Development programme that falls in this category is the Parent Education Follow Through Programme (Swap 1993:5). Cochran (in Shimoni & Ferguson 1992:113) describes a second Early Childhood Programme based on the concept of parental empowerment. In this model the families' strengths and differences are respected and the parent is viewed as the one who knows more about the child than anyone outside the family. In this programme, home visits were designed to give recognition to parenting roles and to reinforce and enrich parent-child activities already being carried out.

Providing parent education programmes is endorsed and supported by other researchers who agree with Epstein in respect of assisting families. The reasons for assisting families is motivated by the following factors:

**(i) Changes in family structure**

Hendrick (1994:31) makes a point that nowadays families come in a fascinating array of configurations, and it is absolutely vital for the teachers of young children to provide assistance to parents in Early Childhood Development. Evidence from other recent Early Childhood Education literature (Gordon & Browne 1993:246-247; Morrison 1995:33-40; Catron & Allen 1993:60-61; Shoemaker 1995: 44-47) stresses that families are increasingly characterised by dual-career lifestyles, single-parent households, teenage parent households

and a rich variety of ethnic minority cultures. This heterogeneity challenges educators to develop flexible parent education programmes that assess parents' capacity to be involved and are more sensitive to cultural differences that may affect home school partnerships (Powell 1991:307-319; Kochan & Mullins 1992:267). Hamby (1992:64) and Gordon and Browne (1993:246) argue that parenting, child development and self-help instruction is particularly helpful to these parents, who need added educator and school support. Parent education, parenting meetings and discussions on early childhood are called for by Hendrick (1994:29) and Cohen and Rudolph (1984:400).

## **(ii) Parenting styles**

The pressure to provide formal instruction in the early years is a growing phenomenon among parents. This view is at variance with the beliefs of most Early Childhood educators (Shimoni & Ferguson 1992:110). An example is cited in DiRocco, Rosenblatt and Stipek (1994:5), where parents who were concerned about their children being educationally competitive in preschool, insisted on academic programmes emphasising basic skills of reading, writing and math. Thus educators experienced conflict between pressures to implement a structured academic programme and their preference for a more informal approach that is supported by expert opinion. The parent's demands, however, are generally based on conscious and unconscious recollections of how they were parented as well as their observations of parenting practices around them (Junn & Boyatzis 1995/1996:148; Seefeldt & Barbour 1986:200; Hurlock 1978:498). Taylor (1995:19) believes parenting workshops can assist parents in cultivating realistic expectations regarding the development of the young child. Hendrick (1988:450) and Click (1981:189) argue that parenting and teaching must be perceived as mutually independent and educators must have an understanding of the status of parents and their attitudes toward child rearing.

### **2.3.1.3 Decline in social capital**

Clark (1988:93) explains that learners receive social capital by exposure to parental standards, rules, norms, adult instruction, guidance and support actions that teach the child language usage, skills and attitudes during a wide variety of home and neighbourhood activities. Schleicher (1992:26) extends this point in claiming that family socialisation has a

greater influence on the child's attitude, learning ability and even on his or her competence in school subjects than the school does. The family, however defined or changed, remains the main unit of care for the child, a source of protection, nourishment, belonging and education (Macbeth 1993:27). The social capital of homes, however, is declining, as reflected by the absence of parents in the home and the decrease of exchange between parents and children about academic, social, economic and personal matters (Coleman 1987:37). Jackson and Cooper (1989:274) argue that schools now depend on the social capital of the community, particularly for low-income families that need the school for a host of programmes, support and activities. The authors argue that parenting programmes are the device, with the help of school leadership, for creating and bringing this capital to bear on the needs of the learners, the family and the school.

Although Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano and Daly (1995:802) support parenting, they argue that many programmes are designed to exert a central influence on parents' care-giving roles, assuming that the skills they bring need to be replaced by more "desirable" values represented by the school. The authors therefore call for unconstrained communication in which all parties concerned learn to approach one another as equals.

#### **2.3.1.4 Benefits for learners, parents and educators**

The expected results of this type of parent involvement are summarised by Epstein et al (1997:10) as follows:

For learners there is an awareness of family supervision and respect for parents. Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs and values as taught by the family are evident. There is effective time management and a balance between time spent on chores, on other activities and on homework. Good or improved attendance and an awareness of the importance of school have been cited as results.

Parents, on the other hand, have a greater understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school. There is an awareness of own and other challenges in parenting and a feeling of support from school and other parents.

Educators have an understanding of family's backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs and views of their children. Understanding of learner diversity and an awareness of own skills to share information on child development also develop.

Similar benefits are evident in other studies of parenting programmes. Four intensive studies carried out by Olmsted and Rubin (in Henderson 1987:48-49) of the Parent Education Follow Through Programme found that parents trained to work with their children and to play other roles in the programme spontaneously improved their parent teaching behaviour at home and their children's performance in reading and math.

Decker and Decker (1988:129) found that parent participation in parent education in Early Childhood Programmes, provided parents with a greater understanding of their children's development and needs, they exhibited greater acceptance of children's differences and developed more flexible child rearing attitudes.

Evaluations of the impact of Cochran's parent empowerment programme, revealed that parents reported stronger feelings of efficacy, closer relationships inside the family and a better understanding of both formal and informal support as well as an improvement in the systems surrounding families (Shimoni & Ferguson 1992:113).

The study of the Parent Orientation Programme that targeted parents of kindergarten through third grade children, which aimed at increasing parents' understanding of the child's curriculum, interests, and helping the family to understand how parents could enhance their children's skills at home, found that parents saw themselves as teachers, and they appreciated for the first time what the school was all about (Jackson & Cooper 1989:276-277). Furthermore parents are also alerted to the different and more effective ways of creating or developing learning opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children (Wolfendale 1992:9).

Moreover, Becher (in Henderson 1987:17) found that parent involvement programmes, particularly those training low-income parents to work with their children, are effective in improving children's language skills, how they perform in tests and behave in school.

In summary, parenting as espoused by Epstein as one type of parent involvement is supported by a host of authors as is evident from the above discussion. However, there is not always agreement as to what information and skills are the most appropriate and how they should be offered to parents (Pugh & De'Ath 1984:43). This type of parent involvement is inextricably linked with communication with the home.

### **2.3.2 Type 2: Communicating**

#### **2.3.2.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

This type of parent involvement involves designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and learners' progress (Epstein 1995:704). These include the memos, notices, phone calls, report cards, and conferences that most schools conduct and other innovative communications with parents that some schools create (Dauber & Epstein 1991:290). Although schools differ in the form and frequency of these communications, it must be noted that schools have an obligation to inform parents about school programmes and their children's' progress (Epstein 1987b: 121). The term communication has been redefined to include "two-way, three-way and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, learners and the community" (Epstein et al 1997:9).

Schools make choices with regard to communication. They might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the three spheres of influence that directly affect student learning and development relatively separate. On the other hand schools may conduct many high quality communications and interactions designed to bring all three spheres of influence closer together (Epstein et al 1997:3).

There are, however, challenges for schools for the successful design and implementation of this type of parent involvement. Epstein et al (1997:9) advise that the clarity, readability, form and frequency of all memos, notices and other print and non-print communications should be reviewed. Parents, who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type print should be considered. The quality of major communications, for example, the schedule, content, and structure of conferences, newsletters, and report cards should be

reviewed. Finally clear two-way channels for communications from home-to-school and from school-to-home should be established. This means among others, establishing enough opportunities for parents to communicate with the school.

Although positive results are highlighted Epstein (1996:226) draws our attention to negative correlations. For example, frequent parent-educator communications about learners' behaviour could be interpreted to mean that schools and families make contact more often when learners run into difficulties in order to try to solve the problems. These good intentions may not pay off, if the only communications between school and home are concerning problems. Educators need to conduct positive communication to establish a base of good relationships to draw on, if they need families to help learners solve academic or behaviour problems.

#### **2.3.2.2 Support for communicating as an aspect of home-school relations**

Although Swap's approach to parent involvement differs to that of Epstein, Swap (1992:57) also emphasises the importance of parent involvement. Of importance is that Swap highlights communication in her different models. Swap (1992:69) asserts that the key to good communication is an attitude that welcomes parents as adult peers in the context of mutual respect. Effective communication is based on relationships between parents and educators in which each respects the other's contribution and expertise; boundaries are clear; conflicts are dealt with openly and respectfully; and contacts are rewarding. As the most obvious reason for parents and educators to communicate is to nurture the growth and learning of individual children by sharing information, insights and concerns, parent communication must be viewed as a necessity and not an extra. A school should therefore become a responsive community institution rather than an outpost of a distant and hostile bureaucracy.

Swap (1992:70) acknowledges that when differences of language, class or background exist, problems of communicating comfortably and unambiguously are usually intensified. She therefore proposes that when schools host meetings or conferences, educators should prepare thoroughly; inform parents timeously; use the session as opportunities for information sharing and joint decision making; practice in anticipation difficult moments and try to

provide a physical environment, which resembles a setting for a friendly formal adult interaction.

Communicating with the family is considered a developmentally appropriate practice in Early Childhood programmes where educators are expected to " work in partnership with parents, communicating regularly to build mutual understanding and greater consistency for children" (Bredekamp 1992:65). The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs uses communication as a criterion to accredit programmes for young children (National Academy of Early Childhood Programs 1984:57). In South Africa similar criteria are tabled in the National ECD Pilot Project Draft Qualifications Framework, and are used for the accreditation of Early Childhood programmes (DoE 1998b: 2).

Wanat (1994:637) extends the discussion on communication in drawing a distinction between formal and informal communication. In a study examining children's school needs and the schools' responses to those needs, it was found that principals and parents agreed that effective communication is essential to respond to children's needs. Written communications (eg calendars, handbooks, newsletters and reports) provided reference points about the school. Although formal communication apprised parents of activities and their children's academic progress, informal communication was more responsive to personal needs.

Katz, Aidman, Reese, and Clark (1996:2) support Epstein's view of a two way channel of communication in remarking " the foundation for good home-school relationships is frequent and open communication, however, both parent and teachers should share the responsibility for creating such a foundation". Eccles and Harold (1996:26) remark that in order to develop an effective system of communication between the school and the home, it is critical that all stereotypes of family be rethought to welcome the variety of persons who now make up learners' families. Schools must also be cognisant of working with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and may need to find new methods of forming the family-school connections.

In a study undertaken by Toomey that looked at two variations of parent communication, where parents supported their children's education with activities at home and were invited to visit the school to receive information and advice or are visited at home and given

information and encouragement, it was found that programmes offering home visits were more successful in involving disadvantaged parents than were programmes requiring parents to visit schools (Henderson 1987:60-61).

### **2.3.2.3 Benefits to learners, parents and educators**

Epstein et al (1997:10) outline the following benefits to learners, parents and educators when effective two-way communication occurs between the school and home:

Learners have awareness of their own progress and of the action needed to maintain or improve grades. They have a better understanding of school policies on behaviour, attendance and other areas of learners conduct. Informed decisions about courses and programmes are made and there is an awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as couriers and communicators.

Parents understand school programmes and policies and are able to monitor the child's progress. They communicate and interact with educators with ease and are able to respond effectively to the child's problem.

For educators there is increased diversity and use of communication with families and an awareness of own ability to communicate clearly. Furthermore there is increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programmes and progress and parent networks for communication are used and appreciated.

The benefits listed above are cited in other research. In Early Childhood programmes, close contact and regular communication between the home and the school improve both parent and educator consistency in working towards the desired goals of promoting the child's development, it also promotes parent identification with the programme, which heightens parents' satisfaction and increases children's success (Catron & Allen 1993:51; Kostelnik et al 1993:375).

Swap (1992:58) observes that when parents and educators get to know each other through informal communication; through shared projects; or through volunteering in the classroom,

children's behaviour and learning problems tend to diminish. Sattes (in Swap: 1993:3) reports positive effects on the achievement of children in grades K-12, when parents are simply informed about and support their children's learning.

Davies (1993:206) also lists many benefits for parents, these include: strengthened social networks; access to information and materials; greater appreciation of their own important roles and personal efficacy and motivation to continue their own education. Furthermore, the contact with other parents experiencing comparable problems often has very positive results.

Hamby (1992:59) agrees with Epstein that educators come to know and have a greater understanding of parents. Leitch and Tangri (1988:72) add that educators report more positive feelings about teaching and about their school.

Evidence suggests that the majority of schools do send written information to parents. Receiving written information, however, does little to increase parents' understanding. They have little knowledge of what actually happens in the classroom (Pugh 1989:175).

### **2.3.3 Type 3: Volunteering**

#### **2.3.3.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

This type of parent involvement involves recruiting and organising parent help and support. The concept "volunteer" means anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place and at any time, not just during the school day and at the school building (Epstein et al 1997:8). Parent involvement at school includes parent volunteers who assist educators, administrators, and children in the classroom or in other areas of school. It also refers to parents who come to school to support learners' performances, sports, or other events, or to attend workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (Epstein 1988:5).

Strategies include schools creating a parent room or family centre for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families, and conducting surveys to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers. In addition class parents, a telephone tree, or other

structures to provide all families with needed information are set up. Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programmes are organised (Epstein et al 1997:8).

In order to face challenges in the implementation of this type of parent involvement Epstein et al (1997:9) proposed that schools:

- Should recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome;
- Draw up schedules for volunteers that are flexible in order to accommodate employed parents;
- Should organise volunteer work, provide training, match time and talent with school, educator and learner needs; and
- Recognise efforts so that participants are productive.

#### **2.3.3.2 Support for volunteering as an aspect of home-school relations**

Volunteer programmes are supported by many other researchers:

This type of parent involvement is similar to **Gordon's School Impact Model** where parents are involved in the school as volunteers. Most of the influence goes from the home to the school and the major goal is to make schools and other agencies more responsive to parents. The School Impact Model is based on educators learning from parents, as well as parents learning from educators (Gordon 1977:76-77).

A second model that lends support to this type of parent involvement is Swap's **Curriculum Enrichment Model**. This model focuses on curriculum and instruction and is built on the premise of mutual respect between parents and educators (Swap 1992:58). An important component of this model is the recognition by parents and educators of the importance of continuity between the home and the school. The volunteer programme contains components similar to the Epstein model, for example, coordination, training, monitoring, and matching volunteers' interest and skills to the needs of teachers. In addition Swap (1992:71) claims

that children, particularly from the minority cultures learn more easily when they are helped by volunteers who look and speak as they do.

Parent involvement in the classroom and the curriculum is also visible in Comer's **School Development Programme**. Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996:53) explain:

Parents work directly in the classroom; parents have a meaningful role in the schools that are directly related to educational activities and the curriculum; parents are involved in changing the climate of the school so that authentic learning and teaching can occur.

The Early Childhood Development sector favours the use of volunteers in the classroom. In developmentally appropriate Early Childhood Education programmes encouraging volunteers is a common practice. Members of each child's family are encouraged to help in the classroom in activities such as sharing a cultural event or language, telling or reading a story, tutoring, making learning materials or playing games (Bredekamp 1992:75).

The Reggio Emilia preschool model is a classic example of an optimum combination of the strengths of family relationships and the integrity of professional practices. The inclusion and involvement of parents in virtually every aspect of the schools' functioning is deliberate and central to the planning and operation of the preschool. Parents are an active part of their children's learning experience. Parents volunteer their services and help ensure the welfare of all children in the school (Gandini 1993:5-6).

### **2.3.3.3 Benefits to learners, parents and educators**

Epstein et al (1997:10) list the following benefits when volunteers are used in the school:

For learners skills in communicating with adults are developed, and there is an increased learning of skills which result from receiving additional tutoring from volunteers. Moreover, an awareness of many skills, talents, occupations and contributions of parents and other volunteers are developed.

Parents have an understanding of the educator's job and are able to carry over school activities to the home. They feel welcomed and comfortable in school and their self-confidence about their ability to work in school and with children are boosted. They also gain specific skills during volunteer work. For example in the Head Start programmes, parent volunteers or aides with limited education or job experience discover their potential and receive the support they need to go back to school and find good jobs (Epstein 1988:4).

Educators on the other hand become aware of parents' talents and interests in school and children, and are able to provide greater individual attention to learners. Educators display a readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school (Epstein et al 1997:10).

Other researchers have recorded similar benefits:

Research on the Parent Education Follow Through Programme indicates that the effect on learner achievement is strong and positive. Children whose parents are directly (rather than indirectly) involved over a period of years, beginning in preschool, score higher on achievement tests than other children. Furthermore, the effects are not evident just in children's achievement but in the quality of schools as institutions serving the community (Henderson 1987:38). Through their involvement, parents not only grow to have a sense of ownership of the school's programme but they also effectively involve other parents, including "hard-to-reach" parents and their own sense of efficacy and self-confidence increases (Haynes & Ben-Avie 1996:53).

Davies (1993:206) states that the benefits of volunteer programmes is that educators' work can be more manageable, parents who are involved have more positive views of educators and the school, and the parents and others who participate are likely to be more supportive of the school.

In Early Childhood Programmes, Gordon and Browne (1993:239) note that the volunteers serve as additional human resources to programmes, extending the reach of the programmes, making it possible for children to receive more. The authors (1993:239) conclude, " Parents

are untapped resources in most schools. The skills and talents in a group of parents multiply the people resources available to children".

### **2.3.4 Type 4: Learning at home**

#### **2.3.4.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

The school provides information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning. In unpacking this statement Epstein et al (1997:8) explain that homework does not just mean work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home and the community, linking school work to real life. Help at home includes encouraging listening, reacting, praising, and guiding and monitoring and discussing, but not specifically "teaching" school subjects. Sandler (1989:127) supports this view, adding that homework is not just a matter of bringing work home from school; it is about homes as places of learning opportunities, developed by parents in communication with educators.

In practice this requires schools to provide information for families on skills required for learners in all subjects at each grade; on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home and on how to assist learners to improve skills in various class and school assessments. Likewise schools should provide a regular schedule of homework that requires learners to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning at school. Schools can also arrange family math, science and reading activities at school and provide families with learning packets or activities for the school vacation (Epstein et al 1997:8).

The schools are therefore challenged to design a regular schedule of interactive homework (eg weekly or bi-monthly) that gives learners the responsibility of discussing important things they are learning. In addition schools should help families stay aware of the content of their children's class work; coordinate family-linked homework activities, and include families in all important curriculum related decisions (Epstein et al 1997:9). Schools and educators may try to foster this type of involvement in a variety of ways. For example educators ask family members to work on particular learning tasks that might facilitate and promote children's class work. Increasing parent involvement in their children's educational

development, particularly at home is crucial, because this is the place that most parents participate in their children's education (Eccles & Harold 1996:31). Parents tend to be more involved in their children's education at home than at school (Christenson et al 1992:33).

Epstein (1987a : 120) sums up in stating:

The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievement, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasise schooling, let the children know they do so continually over the school years.

#### **2.3.4.2 Support for learning at home as an aspect of home-school relations**

Once more this aspect of Epstein's approach is supported by other researchers:

Swap's **School- to-Home Transmission Model** lays emphasis on what parents should do to support their learning at home (Swap 1992:58). In this model parents are involved in two ways. Firstly parents are expected to aid their children's learning by endorsing the importance of schooling and ensuring that the child meets the minimum academic and behavioural requirements. Thus parents are requested to make certain that the child completes his or her homework. A secondary aim is that parents will spend time with their children, so that the cultural capital can be transferred to school. Cultural capital refers to the ways of being, knowing, writing, talking and thinking that characterize those that succeed in the culture. Swap's model proposes that parents should be involved in promoting the values and behaviours that are the essential ingredients to school success.

According to Swap (1992:72), there are several different models that have been suggested for home-based learning activities. These include parent support for supplementary reading activities, parent involvement in generic enrichment activities, parent activities specifically tied to the school curriculum and school activities that are generated from events and incidents in the community.

Hamby's (1992:63) **Parent as Teacher Model** is probably the most appropriate for widespread and sustained involvement of families in learning at home. Moreover, it is this approach that research links most directly with improvements in academic achievement and is well suited to involve not only single parents, but also families in which both parents work.

Many researchers emphasise reading activities as an important aspect of home learning. Swap (1992:72) remarks:

Perhaps the most commonly used model for home learning is a request from schools for parents to support their child in supplementary reading activities, either by reading to the child, having the child read to them, or monitoring the child's silent reading for specified periods per day or week.

The importance of learning at home is highlighted in an Early Childhood Programme: Home-Oriented Preschool Programme (HOPE). In this project parents were trained by paraprofessionals in the home to augment daily lessons broadcast on television (Henderson 1987:38).

Similarly the importance of the child's home environment and his or her learning at home is captured effectively by Bastiani (1995:7) who explains that families have the biggest influence in the child's development. He claims that about 85% of a child's adult language is acquired before she/he starts school. Whilst this influence is more obvious in the early years, it also remains true as children get older and demand to be independent.

#### **2.3.4.3 Benefits to learners, parents and educators**

Many benefits may be linked to the practice of supporting learning at home. Epstein et al (1997:10) list the following:

With this type of involvement learners gain in skills, abilities and test scores linked to homework and class work. They complete homework and have a more positive attitude toward schoolwork, which in turn develops a self-concept of ability as a learner. In addition they view their parents as similar to the educator and home as more similar to the school.

Parents have an understanding of the instructional programme and can therefore support, encourage and help learners at home. There is an awareness of the child as a learner and an appreciation of teaching skills.

For educators there is respect of family time and a better design of homework assignments. Significantly there is recognition of equal helpfulness of single parent, dual income, and less educated families in motivating and reinforcing children's learning. There is also a sense of satisfaction with family involvement and support

Further benefits are identified in other studies. Wanat (1994:632) for example found that when parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home, children are more successful learners at all grade levels. Loucks (1992:19) concurs, "Students who are academically successful tend to receive constant support from their parents and other adults in the home."

A longitudinal study of Project HOPE showed that children aged three to five whose parents were trained by paraprofessionals in the home to augment daily lessons broadcast on television, showed consistently higher achievement through the first few years of their school careers than children who received only television lessons (Henderson 1987:38).

Rich quoted by Hamby (1992:63) makes a salient point:

If teachers had to choose only one policy to stress ... the most payoff for the most parents and students will come from teachers involving parents in helping their children in learning activities at home.

This is corroborated by the observations of Becher (in Henderson 1987:17-18) who states that educators become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, experiment more frequently, and develop a more learner orientated approach when parents are involved with activities in the home.

## **2.3.5 Type 5: Decision making**

### **2.3.5.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

This involves including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Decision making as defined by Epstein et al (1997:9) means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions towards shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas. A parent leader refers to a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.

This implies that schools should have an active PTA/SGB or other parent organisation, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation. Individual advocacy groups to work for school reforms and improvements and committees for family and community involvement should be established. In order to ensure successful implementation schools are obliged to set up networks to link all families with representatives and provide information on school or local elections for representatives (Epstein et al 1997:8).

However it is essential that schools should include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups in schools and offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents (Epstein et al 1997:9). Research on who actually participates in the decision making in schools indicates that the participants are of middle-class socioeconomic status, are long term residents in the community, and tend to be well educated (Epstein 1987b: 124). In addition, minority and bilingual representation in school site councils have been found to be minimal, and women have far outnumbered men except in leadership positions.

### **2.3.5.2 Support for decision making as an aspect of home-school relations**

There is support of this type of involvement and many researchers include parents as decision makers in their programmes.

Seely (1989:5) maintains that if one believes that reform of schools is linked to a partnership model, then school personnel need the advice, strengths, perspective and resources that parents can provide to pursue their common mission. Moreover within this framework, parents and community representatives are accountable for school success. Hence, parents cannot afford to be narrowly focused as passive observers, but as important stakeholders in the decision making process.

Eckart and Wissbrun (1992:120) found that the desire to have their children be successful in the world of work is a catalyst that causes parents to become increasingly involved in children's education. Since both parents and schools share ownership and accountability for the end product, it becomes imperative that processes be created to support parental involvement in school decision making. **Parent advisory councils** should be organized with the expectation that parents will be empowered equally with educators in setting goals, designing strategies, implementing plans and evaluating outcomes.

The structure of an Advisory Council is emphasised in the Early Childhood Family Education Program (ECFE) in the United States that was designed to offer support and information for all parents and to provide a good early childhood education experience for young children. The Advisory Council comprised of a majority of participating parents. Staff and council members work as a team, ensuring diversified leadership and community based support for the programmes. Parents serving on the Advisory Council reported enhanced self-esteem (Kristensen & Billman 1987:279-282).

Comer's **School Development Program (SDP)** includes significant parent participation in decision making in order to enhance the educational process and improve the overall climate of schools (Comer & Haynes 1991:271-277). In the School Development Programme there is a three-tier model of what constitutes parent involvement, namely, (i) parent participation on the school planning and management team, (ii) helping in the classroom or sponsoring and supporting school programmes and (iii) general participation (Haynes & Ben-Avie 1996:53). In all, parents are actively involved in decisions taken.

Gordon's **School Impact Model** welcomes parents to parent advisory committee in an effort to change the school so that it is more responsive to the needs of the home (Greenwood &

Hickman 1991:281). Many programmes aimed at low-income families also require parents to serve on policy councils, committees and boards, enabling them to learn skills in decision making and dealing with school power structures (Gordon 1977:77).

Munn (1993:8) makes reference to parents as members of school governing bodies that challenge traditional home-school relationships in two ways. Firstly, governing bodies are explicitly concerned about the collective well being of the school, rather than an individual parent's private interest. Secondly, they go beyond parent-teacher associations in having clearly defined statutory responsibilities, which in the case of governing bodies are extensive and substantial. The responsibilities include making decisions for such areas as ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum, for managing the school budget, and for hiring and firing of school staff.

### **2.3.5.3 Benefits to learners, parents and educators**

The expected results of successfully involving parents in decision making are as follows:

For learners there is an awareness of representation of families in school decisions and learners enjoy specific benefits linked to policies that are enacted by parents. They also have an understanding that learners' rights are protected.

Parents have a feeling of ownership of the school and make inputs into policies that affect children's education. Parents also become aware of school, district and state policies and are able to share experiences and connections with other families.

Educators have an awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions. Furthermore the view of equal status of family representatives on committees and leadership roles is entrenched (Epstein et al 1997:10).

In addition to the above benefits, Gordon (1977:77) writes that the School Impact Model has led to changes in the way parents and professional educators see each other and, in some situations, to legislation and local district change. Parents develop more positive attitudes about school and staff help gather additional support from the community, and seek more

education for themselves when they are thus involved. Parents learn skills in decision making and dealing with the school power structures.

Davies (1993:206) found that increased opportunities for participation in school decision making contribute to skills of individual and collective empowerment, thus contributing to advancing the prospect of a more democratic and equitable society. In Early Childhood Development programmes when parents are involved in the decision making process, it promotes parent identification with the programme, which heightens parents' satisfaction and increases children's success (Kostelnik et al 1993:375). As parents become more influential in programme decision making, they are more likely to communicate to children the importance of education, support programme policies, offer financial assistance and rally community efforts to promote the programme (Catron & Allen 1993:51).

### **2.3.6 Type 6: Collaborating with the community**

#### **2.3.6.1 Definition, practice and challenges**

The last type of involvement listed by Epstein (Epstein et al 1997:9) involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and children's learning and development. The term "community" as defined by Epstein et al (1997:9) refers not only to the neighbourhood where the learners' homes and schools are located but also any neighbourhoods that influence their learning and development. It means all who are interested in and are affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools. Community is rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents to support learners, families and the school.

The community is one of the overlapping spheres of influence on learners' learning and development in the theoretical model of partnerships. In practice schools are required to provide information for learners and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and community activities that link to learning skills and talents. They should ensure integration with the community through partnerships involving school, civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, other agencies, organisations and businesses. In

return, schools should offer services to the community by means of recycling, art, music and drama for seniors or others. Participation of alumni in school programmes for learners is also recommended (Epstein et al 1997:8).

The challenges facing schools is to solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities. Schools should inform all families of community programmes for learners and ensure equity of opportunities for learners and families to participate in community programmes or to obtain services. There is a need to match community contributions with school goals and to integrate child and family service with the school (Epstein et al 1997:9).

When promoting this type of involvement it is important to pay attention to the changes in today's multicultural society and ensure participation from parents and community members, particularly those from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds. Communities seeking to raise children in accordance with their own culture may want these traditions to be continued in the school (Epstein1996: 232). Traditions and customs that have evolved in a community over a long period cannot be ignored in any new developments (Dekker & Van Schalkwyk 1990:6; LeBlanc 1992:140).

#### **2.3.6.2 Support for collaborating with the community as an aspect of home-school relations**

Support for involving the community is endorsed by a host of other researchers.

Gordon's **Community Impact Model** supports this type of parental involvement. In the Community Impact Model the resources of the community are used to establish a community-home-school partnership (Gordon 1977:77). The influence goes to and from the home, school and the broader community respectively. This model works on the assumption that factors in the home, school, and community are all interrelated.

The importance of the community is an integral part of Swap's **Partnership Model**. Parents are viewed as assets and resources, which are fundamental components of children's success. An important precept of this model is that the school, parent and the community must have a

shared sense of mission about creating success for all children. Successful programmes also draw on other resources within the community, creating business, agency and medical partnerships so that services can be offered to children and families in a nonbureaucratic way and needed materials and funding can be obtained. The combined resources of the community are essential to discovering and implementing effective solutions to improving education (Swap 1992:64-65).

Similarly Heath and McLaughlin (1987:579) in supporting collaborating with the community, refer to the school as a nexus of institutions within the larger environment of the community. In this view the school moves from the role of "deliverer" of educational services to the role of "broker" of the multiple services. Schools can be brokers in two ways: promoting closer linkages between the family and the community and closer linkages between the school and the wider community. The notion of the school as a community nexus is a powerful one and has gained wide support. Kagan (1989:110) explains:

As schools embrace a more comprehensive vision of the nature of the child and of their own role in society, the school house doors swing open even wider. To meet the comprehensive needs of children, contact with other agencies rendering health, welfare, and social services have become routine.

Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996:46) claim that when the two primary societal institutions (the family and the school) team up, the school becomes a potent force in the community, in promoting healthy, holistic development among all children.

In Comer's **School Development Programme (SDP)** parents and the community involvement are encouraged. Comer, Haynes and Joyner (1996:24) point out that the centrality of the family in the child's self-definition and development needs to be recognized and parents and guardians need to be involved in meaningful ways in children's school experiences. Although the focus is on the individual child, the SDP views the child as part of a family unit and neighbourhood, as well as part of the school community. The model provides a framework within which professionals, school personnel, parents and community members can collaborate. Because it is assumed that the child is the reason for the connections between home and school, the model focuses on the key role of the child as

learner in interactions between families and schools, parents and educators, or other influential participants (Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap & Epstein 1995:499).

### 2.3.6.3 Benefits of to learners, parents and educators

Epstein found that the benefits of closer collaboration with the community yield the following benefits:

Learner's benefit from this type of involvement by increasing skills and talents through curricular and extra curricular experiences. They become aware of careers and options for future education and work. They receive specific benefits from programme services, resources and opportunities that link learners with the community.

Parents acquire skills and talents and obtain needed services by using local resources. There are interactions with other families in community activities and awareness of the school's role in the community, and of the community's contribution to the school.

For educators there is an awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction. There is an openness and development of skills in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist learners and augment teaching practice. Thus educators become knowledgeable and are able to make helpful referrals of children and families to needed services (Epstein et al 1997:10).

Additional benefits are illustrated in research on the **Community Impact Model** (as used in Headstart). Findings show that the programme improved the health of many children, and brought many formerly powerless people into the political mainstream (Gordon 1977:77). This observation is corroborated by Landerholm (1984:8) who confirms that parents became politicized and heavily involved in effecting change in their local school. They began to desire to have some control over the education of their children. Further studies on the Follow Through Programme over a period of 20 years; indicate benefits for learners, parents and educators where parents used their skills in advocacy, decision-making and instruction (Christenson et al 1992:27).

Research on Comer's model where collaboration with the community is crucial, revealed that achievement of learners in reading and mathematics improved, increased positive attitudes among parents, educators and learners about school goals were evident, learners' attendance improved, behaviour problems decreased and the number of parents involved in the programme increased (Christenson et al 1992:28). The enhancement of the school climate, when parents are included in the planning and organizing of school activities has also been noted.

Henderson (1987:61) quotes the research by Wagenaar on community involvement and support, in relation to high levels of student achievement. The findings reveal that community group support and fund raising, attending school meetings and a number of school functions, and the number of times the community used the school facilities related most significantly to student achievement.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion the six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive programme of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for learners, parents and educators. Epstein's typology is widely considered to capture the essence of home-school-community relations. The fact that so many individual programmes support what she suggests is proof of the worth of her approach. Epstein, however, contends that one of the biggest barriers to parent involvement is where schools do not have a programme or strategy to involve parents (Epstein et al 1997:13).

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter has described the six types of parent involvement as espoused by Epstein. The six types explain how schools can work with families and communities to assist them to become or stay informed and involved in children's education at home and at school. The techniques described in this chapter are by no means all-inclusive but rather serve to highlight the broad repertoire of practices needed by schools as they strive to work more effectively with parents. A variety of strategies for increasing parent involvement has been suggested.

The expected results and challenges of effective implementation of each type of parent involvement have been discussed. Support for the different types of involvement and benefits are described. A point worth mentioning here, is that although the bias favouring parent involvement in schools is indicated, it is also clear that effective intervention does not just happen without the dedicated effort on the part of all involved. The following chapter will explore the policies governing parent involvement in education in general, and in particular their role in the provision of Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KWAZULU NATAL**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

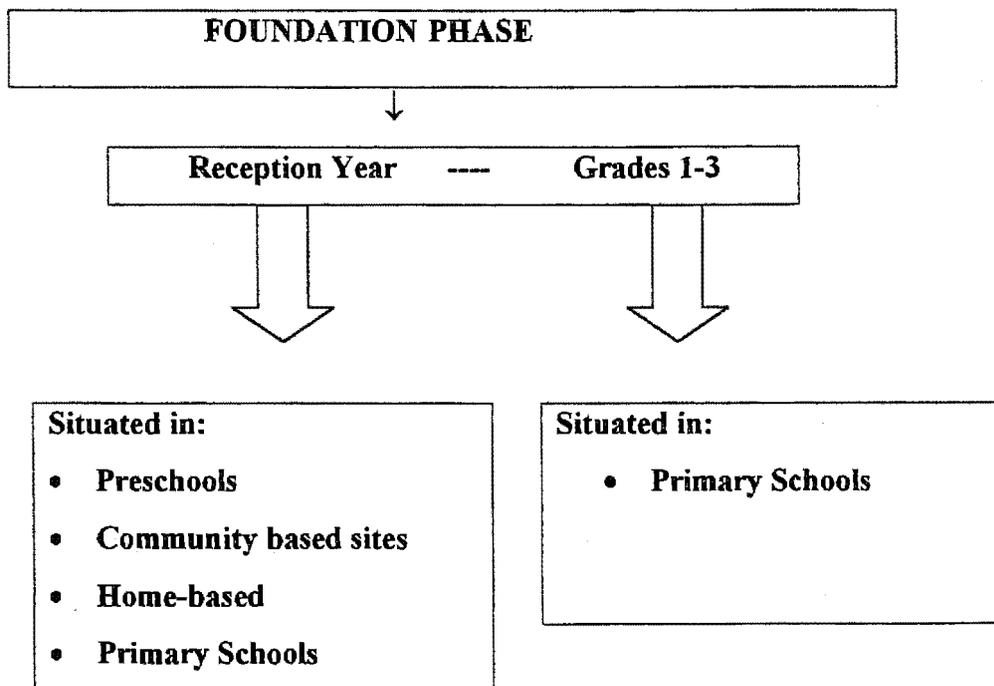
In this chapter the problem is put into context with regard to the phase Early Childhood Education and the Province KwaZulu Natal. In educational circles throughout the world there has been a long standing debate about how parents should be involved in the overall governance and other key activities of schools and how much power they should have (Mkwanazi 1993:51). This chapter examines the changing nature of parent involvement in educational policy discourse in South Africa. It also attempts to provide some important insights into how different parties have conceived this issue at particular points in time (pre 1994 and post 1994). The issue of provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa has been a vexed one. Preprimary provision is the responsibility of the departments of welfare and education. As preprimary provision which includes the Reception Year does not have a single departmental home there have been wide ranging problems. These include uneven provision, which is discussed in this chapter. The existence of an enabling policy framework has effected large-scale changes in the ECD sector and in parent involvement in education, but the move from policy to implementation presents many challenges. For example the devolution of power to provincial governments means that education affecting the young child, falls under provincial control and is a factor, which will determine how far the national frameworks are implemented. Crucial contextual factors that influence the provision of ECD and parent involvement are explained briefly.

#### **3.2 THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In the discussion that ensues the term Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Development are used. It must however be noted that prior to 1994 the term Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Educare referred to the child 0-5 year olds and post 1994 the term Early Childhood Development (ECD) refers to the child age 0-9 years. The focus of this study is parent involvement in ECD with special reference to the Reception Year (Grade R) for five to

six years old. The Reception Year as the first year in the Foundation Phase could be situated in the preschool, as well as in the primary school. The following diagram illustrates this point:

**FIGURE 3.1: LOCATION OF THE RECEPTION YEAR**



In order to appreciate present day provision of Early Childhood Development, one needs to understand it within a context. Therefore a brief historical background of the provision of Early Childhood Education (ECE) prior to 1994 is provided.

### **3.2.1 Preschool provision before 1994**

Before the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century, the population was largely rural, with agriculture as the main source of income. Households were to a great extent self-sufficient, with large families and the extended family was the norm. Overall, the country was sparsely populated. This enabled various cultural groups to pursue their traditional way of life and there was little contact between the different racial groups. In this situation, children were raised at home in the care

of the family. Employment of women outside the home was virtually nonexistent (Jansen, Calitz, Du Toit, Grobler, Kotze, Lancaster, Orr, Smith & Swanepoel 1992:425).

The initial interest in preschool education came as a result of the British influence during the period of colonial rule (1806-1919). The increasing industrialisation and urbanisation in the early twentieth century led to conditions conducive to preschool education movements. The Pretoria City Council founded the first institution bearing the name nursery school in South Africa in 1931 (Jansen et al 1992:426).

The Education Departments would, however, not accept the responsibility for preschools, reasoning that this was the responsibility of the Department of Social Welfare (Malherbe 1977:367). Control of preschools was in the hands of private organisations and individuals in the local communities. In 1969 the state officially recognised preschools as part of the new national education. The National Education Department required all preschools to be registered with the Provincial Department of Education. Moreover, each provincial Department of Education was responsible for the control and financial support of all preschools in that province (Jansen et al 1992: 427).

In 1979 the national Department of Education recognised two categories of preschools: (1) those that were subsidised and (2) those that were unsubsidised, or private. In KwaZulu Natal all the ex-Departments of Education, namely Natal Education Department (NED), House of Delegates (HOD), House of Representatives (HOR) and Department of Education and Training (DET) made provision for funding (subsidy) of preschools. The preschool inspector was expected to provide guidance to the preschools (Jansen et al 1992:428).

Since 1981, schooling has been compulsory for learners from the first day of the school year wherein the learner reaches age six. Learners who reached age six on or before June 30 of any year were admitted to school provided that there was accommodation in that specific school (Jansen et al 1992:432).

In describing the provision of preschool education, mention of the bridging classes must be made. Due to concerns about the extent of environmental deprivation and the detrimental

effects on the achievement of school readiness, in 1984 there was a general introduction to a period of preschool basic compensatory education, called the "bridging period", at primary schools for black, Asian, and coloured children (Jansen et al 1992:435). The programme focused on cognitive skills to achieve school readiness, whereas other important aspects of total development were ignored (Grobler 1991:9). The bridging classes could also be seen as the birth of the rationale for developing a Reception Year.

According to the Interim Policy on ECD (DoE 1996) the provision of Early Childhood Education (preschools) can be characterised by a long history of discriminatory provision with regard to race, geographic location, gender, special needs and funding (DoE 1996:3-4). Between 9 and 11% of all South African children from birth to six years have had access to public or private Early Childhood Education facilities, with the result that:

- Only 2% of under threes were provided for by full-day care and home-based private or community-funded facilities;
- One in three white infants and children received ECE services, compared with about one in eight Asian and coloured children and one in sixteen black children;
- In urban and rural areas full-day care facilities, community based crèches and preschools for children of black working mothers were scarce, generally unsubsidized and poorly resourced;
- Twice as many urban as rural infants and children received ECE provision;
- Only about 2000 infants and children with disabilities attended ECE facilities. Half of these were white children.

This situation was considerably exacerbated by the inadequate funding of Early Childhood Education (preschool) services and discriminatory funding by the education departments. The daily subsidy for white children was R1, for coloured and Asian 80 cents and for Africans 10 to 30 cents (Bot 1987:39). In 1992 the state spent R38 on preschool provision for an African child as compared to the R1 684 for each white child (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:16).

To sum up the approach to early childhood education prior 1994:

The South African state has not given tangible recognition to the importance of the early years of life, has not displayed a comprehensive understanding of or an integrated approach to the problem, and ... has as yet revealed little evidence of a willingness to move towards the prioritisation of services on the basis of need. Rather ... state provision for preschool education and care in South Africa can be characterised as totally inadequate, a situation exacerbated by the fact that what state provision there is, occurs inversely to need. State provision can further be characterised as segregated, fragmented, uncoordinated, and as lacking in both comprehensive vision and a commitment to democratic involvement (Van den Berg & Vergnani 1986:119).

The brief historical background that spans the era between 1969-1994, shows that legislation dealing with education and care of preschool children was not an integrated system. Rather it was divided and subdivided among the various state, provincial, and municipal authorities. The preschool facilities within the state structure, therefore, varied according to the specific education department (Jansen et al 1992:430-431). In the absence of effective state intervention the major lifeline for the provision of Early Childhood Education services to communities was and has been non-governmental agencies and efforts of parents and community based organisations (DoE 1996:4).

### **3.2.2 Early Childhood Development: after 1994**

Consistent with the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995) and the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (DoE 1996) the Education White Paper 5 Early Childhood Development (DoE 2001b) defines Early Childhood Development as an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to at least nine years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially (DoE 2001b:8). The Reception Year refers to the five to six years old child.

The Government has responded positively to the ECD challenges described in paragraph 3.2.1. Global influence has, however, played a significant role in the way the changes to the

provision of Early Childhood Development and the role of the parent and community in ECD in South Africa has been made. Three such events quoted in the Interim Policy for ECD (DoE 1996:9-10) are acknowledged:

The ratification by South Africa of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child in 1995 has been influential in the way children's rights are reflected in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). The Convention promotes the value of the family and the principles of joint and shared parental responsibilities.

The second international event that has been instrumental in bringing about change is the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. Focusing on the principle that "learning begins at birth", this conference emphasised the need to expand early Childhood Development programmes to include family and community interventions especially for disadvantaged and disabled children.

Thirdly, The World Summit for Children (1990), this summit synthesized the principles and concerns of children and urged the world's societies to work for children's enhanced development (DoE 1996:9-10).

The framework, emanating from these three important international events, provided the vision, values and principles around which ECD has been contextualised and catered for in South Africa. Some of the policies and programmes that have recognized the importance of and contributed to the developments around ECD are listed below:

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996c:13) in Section 28 of the Bill of Rights provides among others, that:

- (1) Every child has the right-
  - (a) to a name and nationality from birth;
  - (b) to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment;
  - (c) to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services;
  - (d) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.

- (2) A child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

The Constitution, (RSA 1996c: 14) also provides in Section 29 of the Bill of Rights among other that:

- (3) Everyone has the right-  
(a) to basic education...

The Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training adopted in 1995 recognises the importance of the family and the community in the development of the preschool child's education and training (RSA 1995: 33,21,75). It proposed that:

- Early Childhood development must be approached within a wider and holistic context which will include multiple learning environments, namely the school, family and the community that influence the development of the child;
- Early Childhood Development depends on and contributes to community development, and education of parents should go hand-in-hand with the education of children;
- Parents or guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and have the right to be consulted by state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance.
- The tradition of community provision of preschooling should be viewed as an appropriate and valuable asset and the variety of institutional forms of Reception Year provision be encouraged and supported.

In 1996 the Government adopted the National Programme of Action for Children (NPASC 1996:43) which focuses on the integrated delivery of the following services to children: nutrition, child and maternal health, water and sanitation, ECD and basic education, social welfare development, leisure and cultural activities and child protection measures.

The Interim Early Childhood Development Policy document (DoE 1996) of the Department of Education was adopted in 1996. It provided for the implementation of a National Reception Year Pilot Project to test a low cost model and curriculum for the implementation of the Reception Year in partnership with non-governmental organizations and community based ECD services providers. As a consequence of this policy, National ECD Pilot Project interim unit standards for ECD practitioner training were developed. In addition the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (DoE 1996:2) endorsed that:

Parents should be valued as primary educators of their children and as active partners with other family and community members in facilitating the process of learning.

In 1996, the National Department of Education, Provincial Education Departments and the European Union allocated R125 million to implement the National ECD Reception Year Pilot Project (DoE 2001b). The project achieved the participation of 2,730 ECD sites and Reception Year practitioners, and approximately 66,000 Reception Year learners countrywide over a three-year period. Two of the pilot project's main objectives were to make and test innovations in the ECD field related to accreditation of practitioners, policy and subsidy systems, and to research the most effective means of delivering Reception Year education (DoE 2001b: 18)

The Interim ECD Policy document (DoE 1996:17) committed that the Reception Year would be phased in over a five-year period due to resource and other constraints. Robinson and Biersteker (1997:16) however, argue that this is unlikely to realize due to budget constraints. The national ECD pilot project located the Reception Year in community based facilities, used non-formally trained practitioners and paid a subsidy per five to six year old. It was envisaged that a more cost effective and sustainable system would be put in place (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:16). Parents and the community played a significant role in the national ECD pilot project. Parent committees were set up (cf 3.6) and these committees were responsible for the overall management of the site in the community. The pilot project targeted communities with areas of greatest need and least financial resources.

The Quality Education for All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development (DoE 1997e) places particular emphasis on preschool learning and advocates inter-sectoral collaboration of the Department of Education with the Departments of Health and Welfare and the White Paper on Disability (DoE 1997d) adopted in 1997 focuses on the provision of services to very young children.

This list of policies, laws and programmes demonstrates government's commitment to ECD. Although there is evidence of the government's commitment to recognising the need for provision of ECD in South Africa, the need for preschool facilities and services greatly exceeds the provision thereof. Most children have no access to Early Childhood Development facilities of any kind, as there is not enough money from the government or alternative sources for Reception Year programmes. Children in poverty-stricken rural areas have fewer services than in urban areas. Furthermore, many children younger than the official school going age attend primary schools as a form of free childcare, as there are insufficient Early Childhood Development programmes. The overcrowding in Grade one could be avoided and educational quality improved if there were sufficient Early Childhood Development programmes (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:17).

The historically low budgets given to Early Childhood Development are of particular concern to education. It has been said (DoE 1996:11) that ECD is a priority and must be given bigger slices of the education budgets when they are redistributed. But ECD has been neglected in more recent government policy statements, legislation and budgetary expenditure on education. This contradicts a commitment made in the ANC policy framework and in the White Paper on Education and Training of 1995. Both proposed a Reception Year for the five year olds as part of the ten years of free and compulsory schooling (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:18).

The Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, in explaining his Implementation Plan for Trisano states his nine priorities and acknowledges that there are important gaps in the policy and implementation framework. In this regard Early Childhood Development is highlighted (DoE 2000a:8). One needs to commend the state for acknowledging ECD and its commitment to provision. However, the researcher believes that there are no "quick fix" solutions to the legacy of the past. We are still grappling with the unequal provision of ECE

programmes in the past. In addition, South Africa is a developing country, with pockets of a first world economy, which impacts on the type of ECD and parent involvement found in different areas and communities. For example, the provision of Early Childhood Development programmes in KwaZulu Natal is different to the provision of ECD in other provinces in South Africa.

### **3.3 THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KWAZULU NATAL**

Early Childhood Development services do not fall neatly into any one government department or level of government or sector. Presently the five to six years old children (Reception Year) are provided for in two broad categories of provision: those inside the primary school system and those outside the primary school system, in community based or private services (Atmore 1998:296). Reception Year service provision is the responsibility of the Department of Welfare and the Department of Education (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:156).

Funding for Early Childhood Development has been low. KwaZulu Natal received 0,27% of the national/provincial budget in 1996/97 (Robinson & Biersteker 1997:2). Parental fees, averaging R20.73 per month, are the primary source of income for ECD community based sites. The Education White Paper 5 Early Childhood Development (DoE 2001b: 11) states: "75 per cent of ECD provision is fee-based, unlike the case with primary schooling where fees play a relatively small role compared to public funding, the financial burden for ECD falls disproportionately on the poor".

The national ECD Pilot Project that enhanced the implementation of the Reception Year programmes ended on the 31 March 2000. However, allocation from the Provincial ECD budget, has been made for Phase 2 of the ECD Pilot Project. Phase 2 involves providing support of 175 practitioners who participated in the national ECD Pilot Project. A specific budget of R4.8 million has been ring-fenced for ECD for the year 2001 - 2003. This budget is mainly targeted at supporting the continuation of ECD Pilot Project (Phase 2), in other words the focus is on bridging provision in community-based sites. The KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture has accepted that the Reception Year (Grade R) will

become part of compulsory education but with its financial constraints, does not see its way clear to financing the Reception Year from the current allocation (KZNDEC Oct 2000).

As mentioned in paragraph 3.2 the Reception Year although seen as the first year in the Foundation Phase could be situated in preschools as well. Prior to the pilot project, many communities in KwaZulu Natal came together and with the aid, of non-government and welfare organisation, civic structures, the church, and to a lesser degree the corporate sector and provided preschool education. This community-based approach to preschool provision has provided for maximum participation and responsiveness to local needs and conditions. Parental control has been a major characteristic of provision (Atmore 1998:294).

The locations of community-based services are in buildings owned by churches, private homes and primary schools, and in shacks. The following table illustrates that just over half (57 percent) of community-based sites are located on their own property.

**TABLE 3.1: BUILDING LOCATION: COMMUNITY BASED SITES (N=110)**

<b>BUILDING LOCATION</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Shacks	9.1%
Private homes	16.4%
Primary schools	2.7%
Community sites	57.3%
Church	10.0%
Other	4.5%

Source: Khulisa Management Services: ECD pilot project baseline study (1998:9).

A significant development in provision of ECD in KwaZulu Natal, is that in the future all Reception Year classes with the exception of independent preschools will form part of the primary school. The KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture (KZNDEC) provincial policy for the Implementation of Grade R in the year 2000, states that classroom space at an existing preschool may be considered a suitable facility for Grade R classes if the

owner of the land, on which the school is based, indicates a willingness to contract in terms of the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a: section 14), thereby ensuring the effective use of all available facilities. Such a Reception class becomes a "satellite" to a primary school, and the practitioner responsible for the Reception Year reports directly to the principal of the primary school, not the preschool (KZNDEC 2000:1).

This development is aligned to the Interim Policy for ECD that recommends that a variety of forms for the Reception Year programme is supported, such as play groups, child minding, family based programmes, alongside the more institutional forms. Such provision could be located in schools, ECD/community centres and homes (DoE 1996:16). In KwaZulu Natal there is an increase of different forms of provisions for young children.

The following statistics obtained from a snap survey (KZNDEC 1999) in KwaZulu Natal provides information on the number of Grade R learners in the system. The Reception Year learners in preschools and community based sites are not included.

**TABLE 3.2: NUMBER OF GRADE R LEARNERS**

<b>TYPE OF INSTITUTION</b>	<b>PROVISION OF LEARNERS</b>
Public Ordinary Schools	63 150
Independent Schools	3 147
ECD Pilot Project	5 400
Total	71 697

Source: KZNDEC Snap Survey (1999).

A comprehensive audit was subsequently undertaken by the National Department of Education. The Nationwide Audit of ECD Provisioning in South Africa, (DoE 2001c: 28) provides information of the distribution across types of ECD provision in the country:

**TABLE 3.3: NUMBER OF ECD SITES IN THE COUNTRY**

<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>SITES</b>
Eastern Cape	3,231 (14%)
Free State	1,665 (7%)
Gauteng	5,308 (23%)
KwaZulu Natal	5,684 (24%)
Mpumalanga	1,367 (6%)
Northern Cape	422 (2%)
Northern Province	1,987 (8%)
North West	1,174 (5%)
Western Cape	2,644 (11%)
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>23,482</b>

Source (DoE 2001c:28)

The above table indicates that of the 23,482 ECD sites a total of 5684 sites (24%) with a learner enrollment of 213,950 exists in KwaZulu Natal. It was not, however, possible to determine how many of these sites offered Grade R. The types of sites in KwaZulu is indicated in the table below:

**TABLE 3.4: TYPES OF SITES**

<b>SITE TYPE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
School based	1,460 (31%)
Community based	2,031 (44%)
Home based	1,140 (25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,631</b>

Source (DoE 2001c:92)

The above statistic shows that the provision of ECD in KwaZulu Natal is located both within the formal schooling system (31%) and outside the formal schooling system (69%). Of particular significance is that 69% of the sites are managed and controlled by the community. This substantiates the point that parents have and are still the major role-players in the

provision of ECD in KwaZulu Natal. In essence there are two categories of ECD institution-based provision: public and independent. The control and management of ECD services is not vested in the Provincial Education Department alone.

### **3.4 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

To understand the role of parents in schools today, it is useful to look at how parents' interaction with schools came into being. In view of the fragmented nature of education under apartheid, manifested in separate education departments in South Africa, it is not possible to generalise when talking about the practice of parent involvement. Therefore only selected legislation that provides an insight into the evolving nature of parent involvement in both black and white population groups will be discussed.

#### **3.4.1 Parent involvement in education before 1990**

South Africans have experienced different educational histories. The historic pattern can be characterised by schools and colleges that were ethnically segregated and the ultimate control of funds and policy was retained by white central governments (RSA 1995:18). Policy on governance was no exception. Statutory parent bodies in white schools were wholly representative bodies and had extensive powers, while those in black, Asians and so-called coloured communities included nominated members and did not have much power. The main power was vested in district parent bodies, which consisted mainly of members nominated by government. Mkwanazi (1993:52) argues that the state had clearly intended to transfer much of the burden of financing education, and some of the burden of administering it, to the local committees. Real collaboration played a secondary role and emphasis was on co-option. This resulted in opposition and parents and communities rejected this structure. Thus there was a major breakdown of a tradition of parent involvement in the majority of communities in South Africa.

According to Mkwanazi (1993:55), the government in 1980, commissioned the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), under the chairmanship of JP de Lange, to make recommendations about the provision of education in South Africa which would address the deepening education crisis and the intransigence of parents refusing to get involved in

education through established structures. The De Lange Report (HSRC 1981a: 14) proposed that: “ Education shall give positive recognition to the freedom of choice of the individual, parents and organisations in society”.

The report emphasised the need for a much greater share in decision making at school level on the part of both parents and educators. The report envisaged the participation of parents in the area of curriculum development. In relation to the structure the report proposed a school governing body structure, whose functions would be:

- To interpret the needs and wishes of the parents of the local community in the field of education and to mediate between them and the professional staff...
- To support the principals and the teachers in their professional task...and to encourage parents to regard themselves as partners in the task of education.
- To take the major responsibility for the appointment of professional and support staff to the school, subject to criteria... laid down by the responsible education authority...
- To accept responsibility for (fundraising)... (HSRC 1981b: 73-74)

The report did propose a greater role for parents in education. A notable shift in greater decision-making on the part of parents was evident.

### **3.4.2 Parent involvement in education: 1990-1994**

In February 1990, the then State President, Mr. FW de Klerk, formally committed the white South African parliament and population to a process of dismantling apartheid and officially renounced racism as a legitimate basis for social life. In this context, the period since 1990 has seen significant policy changes in South African education (Mkwanazi 1993:57). Of particular relevance to this study were the proposals made in regard to parent participation in education. Thus reference to the Educational Renewal Strategy, the Model C school system, and A Curriculum Model for South Africa will be made.

In October 1990 Minister Piet Clase, the minister of National Education, made an announcement which enhanced the power of white parents to make decisions about white schools. From the beginning of 1991, white schools were able, under certain circumstances,

to change their status to one of three new models widely known as the "Clase Models". For the school to change to one of these models, the parents had to vote for the model of their choice in an election with a high percentage participation and a large majority of parents in favour. In early 1992, the government unilaterally, and without consultation announced that all white state schools would become Model C schools unless parents voted by a two-thirds majority to remain as status quo schools, or Model B schools. Model C essentially provided for semi-privatisation of white schools. The Model C policy differed from earlier parent involvement policies in that it not only gave white parents practical and financial responsibilities, but it also involved them in management matters and decision making structures of the school. In other words, the state had introduced a policy that substantially increased the role and power of white parents (Mkwanzi 1993:58).

In a further attempt to develop national policy in education, the Department of National Education launched the Educational Renewal Strategy (ERS) in 1991. The ERS contained proposals for the decentralisation of the system through the establishment of management councils at all schools with increased decision-making and executive functions. The decision-making powers were over the admission policy of the schools, subject to a broad framework determined by the education authority concerned (ERS 1991:75-76). The only direct mention of parents is that they should be educated about their role in the management councils. No strategies were offered to facilitate the education of parents for their new role. Moreover, no details were given to the composition of these councils.

The Curriculum Model for South Africa acknowledged parent participation in curriculum development. In outlining the principles and procedures of curriculum development the document recommended the "involvement of all interest groups from within and from outside education and inputs at grassroots level" (DNE 1991:2).

In subsequent development the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) an initiative of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) was set up to investigate policy options for the restructuring of education in South Africa. The NEPI Report (1993:9) stated that international evidence suggests that among other things, good relations between school and community is an important element in improving the quality of schooling. The committee argued further that as this is a comparatively low-cost intervention, and as they are often

neglected aspects of education systems, there can be considerable scope for cost-effective internal reorganisation of the provisions of schools in developing countries. This call was adhered to and following the 1994 elections, the government of national unity in South Africa introduced policies and legislation to increase the role of parents and communities thereby democratising governance in education.

### **3.4.3 Parent involvement in education: post 1994**

The education system in South Africa has since 1994 experienced one of the most far-reaching programmes of reform and transformation ever seen. A dramatic paradigm shift is noted in parent involvement practices in education and training in South Africa, as a logical and essential part of the transformation envisaged in new policies. A critical characteristic of the shift is the move from parents serving as onlookers to the active participation of parents in education. This reflects a changing perception worldwide of parent involvement in the education of their children. The old practice of involving parents in fund raising activities and the odd open day is grossly inadequate to deal with the challenges presented by new policies aimed at transformation. Policy and legislation that reflect this paradigm shift are highlighted.

- The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995:21) states:

Parents or guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and have a right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance. Parents have an inalienable right to choose the form of education which is best for their children.

The fundamental policy framework of the Ministry of Education, set out in the Ministry's first White Paper, Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (RSA 1995) is significant as it has served as the principal reference point for subsequent policy and legislative development.

- The South African Schools Act (SASA) (RSA 1996a), by increasing the role of parents has democratised governance in education. According to the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a: 18), the school governing body (SGB) consists of teachers, parents and non-teaching staff members of the school, the principal and in the case of secondary schools, also appointed students. Parents form the majority of the members of the school's management council. The Act outlines the functions of the SGB as follows:

- to promote the best interest of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at school;
- to adopt a constitution and develop a code of conduct for learners at school;
- to administer, maintain and improve the property, buildings and grounds of the school;
- to determine the time, admission and language policy of the school;
- to encourage parents, learners, educators and other staff at school to render voluntary service to the school;
- to recommend the appointment of educators and the appointment of non-teaching staff;
- to determine the school fees paid by parents of learners.

Prior to 1994 the management of the school (principal, deputy principal, heads of department and educators) made decisions on school fees, time, admission, code of conduct and the budget of the school. Appointment of educators was done by officials in the Department of Education. The situation has changed and the above functions indicate that parents now play a vital role in decision making on crucial aspects of the school system.

- The National Curriculum Framework for General Education and Training (DoE 1997b) introduced Curriculum 2005. This new curriculum envisaged for general education presents a move away from a racist, apartheid, rote learning model of learning and teaching to a liberating, nation building and learner centred outcomes-based one. Although the first move towards the renewal of the curriculum was made with the release of the White Paper on Education and Training in 1995, the real impetus came in the form of the emerging National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which establishes the scaffolding of a national learning system that integrates education and training at all levels. Curriculum 2005 lies at the heart

of the Department of Education's commitment to transformation (DoE: 1997b: Introduction). Significant to this discussion, is that the development work and planning process of the new curriculum 2005, which were characterised by the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders including parent bodies.

- The Assessment Policy in the General and Education and Training Phase Grade R to 9 and ABET (DoE 1998a) grounded in the context of the requirements of the Curriculum 2005 Policy Documents, aims to assist each school to develop sound school-based assessment practices which will improve students' learning, as well as the quality of learning programmes. The policy (DoE 1998a: 12-13) states:

Educators have the overall responsibility to assess the progress of learners in achieving the expected specific outcomes. The assessment process involves a partnership between educators, learners, parents and education support services.

The policy (DoE 1998a: 14) further determines:

Where it is felt that a learner needs more or less time to demonstrate achievement, decisions shall be made based on the advice of the relevant role-players: educators, learners, parents and education support services.

The inclusion of parents as stakeholders, in making decisions around the progression of their children is a notable shift from the past, where educators and other departmental officials made such decisions on their own.

- Emanating from the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a), the Language in Education Policy (1997) was developed. According to the Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997a: 3-7):

The right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual... The parent exercises the minor learner's language rights on behalf of the minor learner.

This is a definite shift from the past where the state prescribed the language of learning and teaching. The Soweto uprising on the language issue in 1976 is an example of the language prescription by the state and its exclusion of the parent and learner community in making language decisions. Thus the new Language in Education Policy heralds a paradigm shift from the old to the new. The parents and the community now have the right to select the language of instruction for the learners at a particular school, provided that it is within the overall framework of the obligation on the education system to promote multilingualism (DoE 1997a: 3).

- There are also policies and legislation that make it obligatory for educators to work closely with the parents and the community. The Employment of Educators Act (RSA 1998) ensured that the historically divided teaching force is now governed by one act of Parliament and one professional council- the South African Council of Educators (SACE). The code of conduct drawn up by the South African Council for Educators determines:

An educator, where applicable:

- recognises the parents as partners in education, and promotes a harmonious relationship with them;
- does what is practically possible to keep parents adequately and timeously informed about the well being and progress of the learner;
- recognises that an educational institution serves the community, and therefore acknowledges that there will be differing customs, codes and beliefs in the community (SACE Pamphlet 1997: par. 4 and 5).

The National ECD Pilot Project Draft Qualifications Framework and Interim unit standards (DoE 1998b) was set up to be a transformative and emancipatory model allowing access to lifelong learning for practitioners in the ECD field. In order to receive a qualification and for a Resource and Training Organisation (RTO) to be accredited, the practitioners had to meet the requirements of the core interim unit standards. In the core unit standard of Managing the Learning Programme, practitioners are required to encourage family and community involvement in the ECD programme (DoE 1998b: 2)

From the above it is clear that the state has accepted and endorsed parent involvement in education in general and more specifically in the Foundation Phase as well. Legislation is important and does create the right climate for parent involvement. However, having such policies does not guarantee that many parents will become involved. The document Education in South Africa: Achievement since 1994 Report (DoE 2001a: 5) reveals that by the year 1999, systemic transformation in terms of policy was in place, but the challenges of implementation remained, as mandated policy by itself did not lead to institutional change. It was for this reason that the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, outlined his Call to Action in July 1999.

The Call to Action was operationalised in January 2000 in a plan known as Tirisano, a Sotho word meaning “working together”. The choice of this word reflects the contention that an education system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be built by a small group of people, or even by the government (DoE 1999). The Tirisano Implementation Plan calls for a massive social mobilization of parents, learners, educators, community leaders, NGOs, the private sector and the international community, motivated by a shared vision (DoE 2000a: 6).

In light of the above discussion it is abundantly clear that the importance of parent involvement in the education of the child is recognized and the need for greater parent involvement in the various aspects of educational matters is endorsed.

### **3.5 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KWAZULU NATAL**

Many different types of ECD services are available in KwaZulu Natal. There are two main categories of ECD institution-based provision: public and independent (cf 3.3). Public ECD institutions include primary schools (Reception Year) that are completely funded or receive a subsidy by provincial departments of education. ECD services and programmes for children aged three to five years also include:

- Preschools that receive a subsidy.
- Preschools included in the National ECD Pilot Project.
- Preschools involved in the Family Literacy Project.

A much greater variety of ECD services exists in the category of independent ECD institutions. These institutions are funded through parents' fees, community fundraising and/or donations of material, with some or no financial support from government. Independent ECD provision currently includes:

- The Reception Year (Grade R) at independent schools.
- The Reception Year (Grade R) attached to public schools, but managed by the school governing body and operated by a private individual or the community.
- Independent preprimary school that are privately operated or by the community.

Both types of provisions cater for the Reception Year (Grade R). Research of the National Pilot Project provides valuable data on the role of parents in the governance of Reception Year classes in community-based sites. The table below illustrates the composition of governing committee members in community-based sites:

**TABLE 3.5: GOVERNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: COMMUNITY BASED SITES (N=94)**

<b>Committee members</b>	<b>Representation in percentages</b>
Parents	95.7%
Practitioners	53.2%
Business Representatives	5.3%
Church Leaders	10.6%
Site Owner	12.8%
Other	7.4%

Source: Khulisa Management Services (1998:27).

The table illustrates that parents and practitioners make up most of the membership. The research team found that in most cases it becomes the responsibility of the practitioner to recruit governing committee members and to ensure their roles and responsibilities (Khulisa Management Services 1998:27).

These committees meet on a regular basis, in most cases monthly. The committee makes decisions on the governance, budget, admission policy and practitioner performance and provisioning aspects (KZNDEC 1998:4). The study on the ECD pilot project carried out by Khulisa Management Services (2000:78) revealed that: In 1999, 97.3% of community based sites had a governing committee, as compared to 96% in 1998 and 86% in 1997. The frequency that such a committee meets is provided in the following table:

**TABLE 3.6: FREQUENCY OF GOVERNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS AT COMMUNITY-BASED SITES**

	1998 (n=99)	1999 (n=107)
Once a week	2.8%	1.9%
Once every two weeks	12.4%	2.8%
Once a month	59.0%	52.3%
Every 2 to 4 months	21.9%	23.4%
Every 4 to 6 months	1.9%	2.8%
More than 6 months between meetings	1.0%	1.9%
When necessary	9.5%	15%

Note: The percentages in 1998 do not add up to 100% because more than one answer could be given. In 1999, fieldworkers were required to check only one answer that most accurately describes the situation.

Source: Khulisa Management Services (2000:79)

From the above table it is evident that on average, more than half of the governing committees meet frequently (at least once a month) and another quarter meets quarterly which augers well for community participation on governance structure (Khulisa Management Services 2000:78).

The practitioners who serve on the governing committees assist parents in their roles and provide support programmes for the parents. According to the National ECD Pilot Project Draft Qualifications Framework and Interim Unit Standards (DoE 1998b: 2) practitioners are required to encourage family and community involvement in the programme in order to receive accreditation.

In a survey undertaken in 5444 schools in KwaZulu Natal by the Education Foundation to determine the extent and function of school governing bodies (SGB) in KwaZulu Natal in April 1997, it emerged that only 30% of schools appeared to have SGBs (Walters 1998). Further relevant statistics indicate that:

- 1500 or 89% of schools had their principals represented on the body.
- only 179 or 11% of schools had non-educators staff represented.
- 1575 or 94% of schools had parents represented.
- only 12% or 199 of schools had learners on their SGBs.
- 177 schools, or 11% of schools also had representation from other categories.

In more recent research (Strauss & Burger 2000:30) on governing bodies in 84 primary schools in KwaZulu Natal undertaken by Research Institute for Education Planning the following findings emerged. The SGBs were constituted in more than 98% of the cases. According to the majority of responses, it was the responsibility of the SGBs to govern the school. 64% of principals and 68% of educators indicated that the SGBs had received training and in all cases that the meetings took place on a monthly basis or once every three months. Principals were not sure about which functions should be performed by the SGBs and which by the management committees. The SGBs were, however, very involved in decision making on the use of school funds (Strauss & Burger 2000:30)

The Family Literacy Project, which has been established at some preschool sites in KwaZulu Natal, is one example of support programmes for learners and parents. This project aims at providing materials and training to adult caregivers in the development of early literacy skills, and where necessary, developing adult literacy (Desmond 2000:2).

The research statistics provided in the previous paragraphs paint a picture of the incremental development of management support in preschools in KwaZulu Natal. In the present study an in-depth research of parent involvement is undertaken. The researcher plans to use a wider lens, researching many aspects of parent involvement and the way the various role players such as parents and educators perceive and experience parent involvement.

### 3.6 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ECD PROVISION AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Early Childhood Development takes place in a broader societal context, wherein a large proportion of the population suffers from extreme deprivation, poverty and malnutrition, inadequate housing, mediocre civic amenities, grossly inferior education and opportunities and inferior health services (Bot 1987:62). The majority of young children are learning-disadvantaged by virtue of the apartheid system (Robb, Rickards & Biersteker 1994:46). These external factors could impact on the role parents play in their children's education. Some of these factors are discussed below:

#### 3.6.1 Family structure

The majority of women in both the developing and the developed worlds confront the need to combine economically productive work with the care and nurture of their children. Factors such as urbanisation, industrialisation and migration have given rise to a greater number of women working away from home (NPASC 1996:11). A high proportion of women in South Africa have entered the labour market. The following figure shows the number of women who are employed in South Africa:

**TABLE 3.7: ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION BY POPULATION GROUP AMONGST THOSE AGED 15-65 YEARS**

	African Black	Coloured	Indian/ Asian	White	Unspecified Other	Total
<i>Employed</i>						
Male	3 506 509	633 417	234 583	1 060 736	46 658	5 481 903
Female	2 175 967	496 099	128 903	795 716	35 259	3 631 944
Total	5 682 476	1 129 516	363 486	1 856 452	81 917	9 113 847
<i>Unemployed</i>						
Male	1 810 570	141 555	29 312	45 938	12 543	2 039 917
Female	2 395 422	157 676	21 068	34 127	14 437	2 631 730
Total	4 205 992	299 231	50 370	89 065	26 980	4 671 647

Source: Central Statistical Services (1996) (Excluding Institutions)

In addition there is a sharp rise in the number of female-headed households in diverse cultural settings. Findings from a study on 84 primary schools in KwaZulu Natal indicated that although the majority of interviewees were married, a substantial percentage indicated that they were single (Strauss & Burger 2000:13).

These issues have implications for addressing the need for childcare. Children are left to formally or informally organized systems of childcare or childcare is delegated to siblings, grandparents or other extended kin (NPASC 1996:11). In the previous century in South Africa, the extended family and kinship bonds, adaptability of family roles and emotional support were a uniting force. People lived in close proximity and during the early years of a child's life, he or she learned most of his or her values within the family situation. However, currently it is expected of more and more South Africans to participate on many levels of society at large and the result is that little time is devoted to the child's life. Thus the family loses control over children (Hatting 1995:13).

### **3.6.2 Societal factors**

Anderson (1988:xx) points out that just as family systems have changed, so have the local communities on which families depend for helping networks and social participation. In the local community in Durban today, there are entirely new communities such as shanty communities. In addition there is overcrowding. In the study conducted by Strauss and Burger (2000: 15) it was found that approximately 40% of the households indicated between four and six people living in the same house, while up to 41% indicated eight and more people. This figure is the highest of all provinces in South Africa. Stromquist (1994:29) makes a salient point that a common characteristic of contemporary society is the increasing concentration of population in the cities.

Furthermore the values of these social groups differ markedly because of the divergent multiplicity of religion, culture, language and political views (Hatting 1995:15). Each group is convinced that the values of their traditions are the best and are not concerned about the values of other people. Malan (1992:1) attributes this attitude to the fact that South Africa has a long history of cultural separateness and that many people through history tended to categorise themselves in their religious and cultural domains. Floyd (1998:124) found that

whether parents from diverse cultures are able to interact comfortably with schools, depends on their past educational background and whether their native community was urban or rural.

### **3.6.2.1 Poverty**

Schools face additional challenges as many of the shanty communities have problems with employment; housing and some residents lack proficiency in English and live in overcrowded environments. In the study of the 84 primary schools in KwaZulu Natal Strauss & Burger (2000:13) report that they found that 61% of the fathers and 45% of the mothers were working. The employment rate of the fathers and mothers gives an indication that income in most of the households might be very low. Parents are under pressure to get a day's meal. Attending a school function or becoming involved with the child's day is not a priority in these poverty stricken homes.

In a recent newspaper report, a psychologist in the greater Durban area reported that his practice sees an average of ten young men and women for counseling on an array of problems which include poor academic performance, delinquent behaviour and drug and alcohol dependency. His youngest patient, a 12-year-old boy, had been a dealer for a drug gang, selling the merchandise at his school and on the streets. He believes that: "the importance of social status had contributed to the recent increase in juvenile delinquency" (Premdev 2001:1).

### **3.6.2.2 The pandemic HIV/AIDS**

South Africa has the fastest-growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, with more people infected than in any other country. About half of South Africa's population of 40.6 million are children. At present, there are more than 4,2 million South Africans infected with HIV. HIV/AIDS not only attacks individuals. It also attacks systems. The following table provides alarming statistics on the consequences of the pandemic:

**TABLE 3.8 : THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE PANDEMIC: PROJECTIONS TO 2010**

	1999	2005	2010
Percentage of SA workforce HIV positive	11.5%	20%	22.5%
Percentage of SA workforce AIDS sick	0.4%	1.65%	2.7%
New AIDS cases per annum	145,256	466,365	625,180
Number of AIDS orphans	153,000	1,000,000	2,000,000
Life expectancy of SA females (years)	54	43	37
Life expectancy of SA Males (years)	50	43	38

Source: Current Issues in Comparative Education 2000 Vol 3 (1)

KwaZulu Natal has the highest number of people infected with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The people most vulnerable to HIV are women and historically marginalised people including the poor, the unemployed, and those who do not have access to health facilities. There is a decline in learner enrolment, as households can no longer afford to keep children at school because of health care cost.

The demand for Early Childhood Development is bound to increase as young children are orphaned and need to be cared for. Parents have to cope with the illness and all the related problems and may not have the time to get involved in the education of their children (Bridgemohan 2000: 1).

Coombe (2000:5) draws our attention to the harsh reality of the impact of the pandemic on education. She warns that HIV/AIDS reduces the number of parents who are twenty to forty years old, increases numbers of orphaned children, deepens poverty and school enrolment rates are expected to decline. Dropouts due to poverty, illness, lack of motivation and trauma are set to increase, along with absenteeism among children who are head of households, those who help to supplement family income, and those who are ill.

The National Policy on HIV/AIDS for learners and educators in public schools and students and educators in further education and training institutions (RSA 1999) commits the Ministry of Education to minimize the social, economic and developmental consequences of HIV/AIDS to the education system, all learners, students and to provide leadership to an

HIV/AIDS policy (RSA 1999:3-4). However, Coombe (2000:11) argues that the government's new strategy is strictly focused on the predisposing factors of HIV/AIDS, preventing or finding a cure, and monitoring health interventions. It does not address the social, development, human rights, economic and infrastructural consequences of HIV/AIDS.

### **3.6.2.3 Illiteracy**

According to Strauss and Burger (2000:41) the literacy levels of parents can affect the performance of learners negatively. In the research conducted by Strauss and Burger (2000:41) in eighty four primary schools, they found that more than 45% of the parents did not complete primary education and a large portion was found to be illiterate. Carger (1993:38) points out that parents who have had limited schooling themselves will generally have difficulty helping their children with their homework.

Moreover, Strauss and Burger's (2000:42) work on Monitoring Learner Achievement in eighty four primary schools in KwaZulu Natal, found that overcrowding in some households, the general poverty of a large part of the population and the level of education of parents could have played a major role for the low scores in tasks used in the Monitoring Learner Achievement Project (MLA).

## **3.7 CONCLUSION**

The provision of Early Childhood Development in South Africa can be characterised as segregated, fragmented, centralised, and inadequate. Early Childhood Development provision is the responsibility of both the education and welfare departments. In the absence of the state's involvement in preprimary provision, parents and the communities have played a significant role in the provision of preprimary facilities. The recognition of ECD by the new government is a major milestone in the history of education. Parent involvement in education in general has undergone change. There are policies and legislation that promote parent involvement in education. Thus, a definite paradigm shift is noted. Urbanisation has given birth to new kinds of communities. Additional situational factors like poverty, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS may have an impact on the nature of parent involvement that is found in

preschools. Schools are required to implement policies that mandate greater parent involvement. Translating the rhetoric of increased parent involvement into action, however, can pose great challenges to schools. This study is therefore undertaken to investigate the nature and practice of parent involvement in ECD and more specifically in the Reception Year in KwaZulu Natal.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapters formed an important background to the investigation contained in this thesis. Chapter two examined the phenomenon of a comprehensive model of parent involvement within the framework of the Epstein Model. Attention was also given to the contributions made by other researchers in the field of parent involvement. Chapter three explored the provision of Early Childhood Development particularly in KwaZulu Natal and the evolving nature of parent involvement in the South African education system. In other words both chapters two and three gave the theoretical background against which this research was set to take place.

The literature survey carried out in these foregoing chapters provided a comprehensive overview of existing research as an essential preliminary step in the researcher's preparation for the investigation. The substantial literature study served to identify critical components of the topic.

Following the literature study, chapter four now presents a detailed description of the methodology and design that were employed in the investigation.

#### **4.2 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY - A THEORETICAL BASIS**

##### **4.2.1 General orientation**

According to De Vos, Schurink and Strydom (1998:5) research in the social sciences are characterised by the fact that they study human and cultural activity directly, often in the here and now rather than in the past, although the historical dimension is not excluded and is often very important. Basically the direction of the research process and the research methodology are determined by the choice of the researcher between a quantitative and qualitative, or combined quantitative-qualitative approach (De Vos & Fouche 1998:15).

The following definition of qualitative research by Denzin & Lincoln (1994:2) is offered: "Qualitative research is a multiperspectpective approach (using different qualitative techniques and data collection methods) to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meanings that the participants attach to it". In essence the primary aim of this approach is the interpretation or construction of the lived experience of the participant.

Qualitative research is described as a "many labelled tradition" (De Vos 1998:240). The most commonly used labels are: field research, fieldwork, naturalism, ethnography, interpretative research, and constructivist research. Qualitative methodology has its roots in a phenomenological perspective upon social reality. In other words in order to understand social reality, the researcher must understand the life-world of the individuals from their own frame of reference.

The same point is made by Krefling (1991:14) who adds that qualitative research may be defined as "a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them on their own terms". Furthermore qualitative research aims to understand the meaning that people attach to everyday life. This kind of understanding can be described as the attempt to achieve a sense of meaning that others give to their own situations through an interpretative understanding of their language, art, gestures and politics. This process of understanding operates on at least two levels. Firstly, the investigator seeks direct understanding that is a perception of the "what" of an action. The researcher then proceeds to seek an understanding of the meaning that the participant assigns to his/her actions, that is, the "why" of the activity (Smith 1983:12).

The following explanatory points have been made about this type of research:

- Qualitative researchers use an inductive form of reasoning and aim to understand phenomenon within a particular context. This means that qualitative researchers develop concepts and understanding from patterns in the data, rather than collecting data to prove a hypothesis (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:5).
- In terms of ontology (nature of reality and human behaviour) the researcher aims to

understand reality by discovering the meaning that people in a particular setting attach to it. To the researcher behaviour is intentional and creative, and it can be explained but not predicted. Thus the researcher's task is to investigate and explain all phenomena, in the way these phenomena appear "in their fullest breadth and depth" (Omery 1983:50).

- With reference to epistemology (the relationship of the researcher to reality and the road they will follow in search for truth) the qualitative researcher is participative because he or she interacts with the participant (object of investigation) (Schurink 1998:242). The researcher negotiates relationships and through the self-as-instrument begins the process of collecting and analysing data (Weinstein-Shr 1990:346).
- The qualitative methodology is dialectical and interpretative. During the process of interaction between the researcher and the participant, the participant's world is discovered and interpreted by means of qualitative methods (Guba & Lincoln 1988:108). Such qualitative methods are loosely defined as those research procedures which produce descriptive data, as embodied in people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. This descriptive data enable the researcher to know people personally and to perceive their life-world from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Taylor 1975:4). Therefore, the researcher requires different qualitative techniques and data collection methods aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing their reality from their point of view (Schurink 1998:240). Qualitative research requires that the data to be collected must be rich in description of people and places. For these reasons the qualitative researcher will seek out "information rich" informants. This can be done by purposive sampling, but one can get equally good participants when using snowball-sampling (Patton 1990:169).

Schurink (1998:241) summarises that the qualitative paradigm stems from an interpretative approach, is idiographic, thus holistic in nature, and the main aim is to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life.

#### **4.2.2 The use of qualitative research in the development of a theory for professional practice**

According to De Vos, Schurink and Strydom (1998:4) "the caring professions" can be identified as psychology, the mental health professions, nursing, occupational therapy, education and social work. Schurink (1998:248) maintains that for the caring profession emphasis should be on research that yields results that can further develop their practice and wisdom necessary for interventions and problem solving. The most important characteristics of a profession is that professionals should be able, through an active thinking process, to convert knowledge into professional services and thus to select interventive skills according to a body of knowledge and theory (Compton & Galaway 1989:89).

This study in a qualitative way, develops and passes on to educationists knowledge that will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena of parent involvement, in other words an understanding of the complex interaction between parents and the preschool.

#### **4.2.3 Generation of grounded theory**

Attention is given in the ensuing discussion of the unique role played by qualitative research in the generation of grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990:24) designate the grounded theory approach as a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon.

Schuerman (1983:111) explains further that the grounded theory approach is concerned exclusively with the generation rather than the testing of theory. The grounded theory approach uses research to develop theory systematically. Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) comment further that a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. It is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to the phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it; rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area emerges. In sum, theory developed in this way emerges from bottom up, from many disparate pieces of collected evidence

that are interrelated (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:29).

### 4.3 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

During qualitative research, the researcher occupies an integral position in the research process. Such research involves close, detailed and intensive work that requires that the researcher himself or herself participates in the social situation under study (Lemmer 1989:132).

Bogdan and Taylor (1975:8) advise that in order to gain an understanding of the participants and their own perspectives, the researcher must necessarily become involved in the lives of the participants. According to Punch (1994:185), the researcher is expected to become involved in prolonged immersion in the life of a group, community or organisation in order to discern people's habits and thoughts as well as to decipher the social structure that binds them together. Schurink (1998:260-261) explains that in order to understand people's life-worlds researchers need to think in their symbols and that the data must be collected in the participants' own language and within their meaning systems, that is, values and norms. Data collection, specifically in the beginning, involves participation in the daily lives of the people being studied by observing things that happen and by listening attentively to what is said without saying too much.

The researcher is required to identify and empathise with his or her participants in order to understand them from their own frame of reference (Smith 1983:8). Thus, the researcher cannot occupy the role of an aloof observer but instead must strive to build a relationship of trust and rapport with his or her participants. From the outset qualitative researchers should strive to establish a cordial atmosphere so that the participants will feel secure enough to trust them. Mutual trust not only ensures cooperation, but also improves the quality of collected data (Schurink 1998:259-303). In order to gain authentic knowledge of the participant's life-world, Bogdan and Taylor (1975:9) write that the researcher is required to temporarily suspend his or her beliefs and assumptions in an effort to understand the participants while refraining from passing any judgement on them. Berg (1995:91) concurs that the golden rule is to go into a setting with an open mind, not be judgemental but appreciative, and never correct the behaviour observed.

However, qualitative research also demands that, while becoming deeply involved with the

participants, the researcher must also be careful to maintain a certain detachment from the participants and their perspectives so that after having accomplished the reconstruction of the participants' reality, the researcher can transcend this view, to see what the participants do not see, that is, the formal features, process, patterns and common denominators which characterise the participants' view and situation (Schwartz & Jacobs 1979:48).

While the researcher must enter the world of the participant in a spirit of trust and empathy, at the same time he or she must remain alert to the meaning of what the participant is saying or doing. The maintenance of a simultaneous involvement and detachment appears anomalous, for there appears an apparent contradiction in aiming for intimate rapport and yet treating the person's account critically (Schwartz & Jacobs 1979:48). The researcher therefore has to maintain a delicate balance between involvement with his or her participants and the maintenance of a certain degree of detachment. As Bogdan and Taylor (1975:108) explain:

Undoubtedly counterproductive to completely hold back his or her feelings ... somewhere between total self-disclosure and total detachment lies the happy medium which the researcher would strive to meet.

Lastly, it is important that the researcher explains his or her research procedures and interest to both participants and gatekeepers. Identifying particulars proving the researcher's credentials reassures the participants that they are dealing with a bona fide researcher. The aim and object of the proposed investigation, how it will be undertaken and the envisaged purpose of the results should be set out clearly. Practical aspects of the research such as data collection methods and recording of data should be discussed in detail (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:20).

#### **4.3.1 Researcher effects on data**

In qualitative research, the researcher himself or herself is the research instrument. Just as quantitative investigators have to learn to use their instrument, those who undertake qualitative research have to prepare themselves, thoroughly as research instruments. This designing requires self-examination as well as mastery of interpersonal skills and data analysis techniques (Schurink 1998:259).

Because the researcher both collects and analyses the data, it is possible that the researcher will exercise some effect on the data collected, thereby possibly affecting the validity of the research (Bogdan & Taylor 1975:108). For example, the researcher is not part of the setting and will therefore, despite attempts to fit in or disguise his or her true identity, be noticed in the setting. It is a well-known fact that participants will not act naturally when in the presence of an outsider, especially if they are aware of the fact that they are being studied. In order to decrease researcher effects on the data, the researcher should thus strive to blend in with the setting by structuring his or her role in such a manner as to collect the type of information required, while at the same time restricting disruption of the normal flow of events as far as possible (Schurink 1998:259). As Bogdan and Biklen (1982:43) point out the researcher must "blend into the woodwork" striving to interact with his or her participants in a natural, unobtrusive and non-threatening manner.

The personality of the researcher and the participants' feelings and responses to the researchers can also influence the data (Schurink 1998:261). In order to overcome this influence Berg (1995:4) recommends that the group under study should be observed systematically over a period of time. In addition **more than one** method should be used to collect data, since different methods provide different facets of the same symbolic reality and more valid results can thus be obtained. Furthermore the various techniques selected allow the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the life-world of his or her participants (Lemmer 1989: 139).

#### **4.4 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

The various strategies of enquiry used by qualitative researchers will differ depending on the purpose of the study, the nature of the research question and the skills and resources available to the researcher (Morse 1994:223). Each of the different strategies of inquiry has its own perspective and methods of data collection; for example interviewing, participant observation, documents and data analysis, for example, analytic induction and grounded theory (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:353-360). These techniques allow the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the life-world of his or her participants. Observation, individual and focus group interviews were the dominant strategies employed in this current investigation to study parent involvement in Early Childhood Development in the light of the Epstein typology of parent involvement.

#### 4.4.1 The semi-structured face-to-face interview

Interviewing is regarded as the universal mode of systematic enquiry (Holstein & Gubrium 1995:1).

According to Schurink (1998:297) face-to-face interviewing treats the interview as a pipeline for extracting and transmitting information from the interviewee to the interviewer. In this way face-to-face interviews help us to understand the closed worlds of individuals, families, organisations, institutions and communities. Kvale (1983:174) maintains that the semi-structured interview is neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. It is conducted following an interview-guide, which rather than containing exact questions, focuses on certain themes. The interview is taped and transcribed word for word. The typed out version together with the tape constitutes the material for the subsequent interpretation of meaning.

In qualitative investigations the semi-structured interview is adopted as a suitable method for data collection as it allows the interviewer to secure lucid, accurate and full accounts from informants based on the informant's personal experience (Burgess 1984:108). The three main types of semi-structured interviews are the open-ended interview, the semi-structured interview with a schedule and the in-depth interview (Schurink 1998:299-300). Greater detail is provided on the semi-structured interview with a schedule, as the technique was used in this study.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with the use of a research schedule. The schedule is a guideline for the interviewer and contains questions and themes that are important to the research. Although the questions do not usually have to be asked in a particular sequence, they do ensure that all relevant topics are covered during the interview. The interviewer strives to keep the informant relating experiences and attitudes that are relevant to the research problem and encourages the informant to discuss these experiences naturally and freely (Burgess 1984:107).

Schurink (1998:311) explains that as the objective is to collect reliable information, interviewers are required to evaluate the responses of interviewees continuously and, when necessary, to stimulate interviewees through probing to provide additional information or, in the case of vague answers, to give further particulars. However, probing should always be done in a friendly, reassuring and non-threatening manner. In other words, interviewers should make it clear that although a given response is acceptable, further information is required. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:136) concur,

adding that by means of sensitive questioning, a comment or even a smile or a nod, the interviewer must encourage talk so that sufficient detail is solicited to create a clear picture of the informant's experiences. The aim of the semi-structured interview is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed material filled with words that reveal the interviewee's perspective.

The semi-structured interview is conducted in a free and open atmosphere and is usually recorded on audiotape. It is also advisable for the interviewer to make complementary notes during the interview. In this manner, emerging themes as well as significant nonverbal behaviour is used in conjunction with tape-recorded data during analysis and interpretation of data (Bogdan & Taylor 1975:112-119).

Schurink (1998:305-308) list the following basic principles that should be adhered to, in accordance with the needs of both the interviewer and the interviewee:

- **Respect and courtesy:** interviewers should always treat their interviewees with respect and courtesy. The inherent dignity of an interviewee should not be injured.
- **Acceptance and understanding:** acceptance of an interviewee implies that the interviewer has the ability to identify with the interviewee. It indicates an acceptance of people despite their problems and shortcomings
- **Confidentiality:** Interviewees should be satisfied that their identity and any information that they provide will in all circumstances be treated as confidential. A pseudonym should be used if preferred by the interviewees.
- **Integrity:** In order to maintain a sound relationship of trust, interviewers should not raise false expectations, and interviewees should be treated with absolute honesty.
- **Individualisation:** People need to be recognised, accepted and allowed to create a unique life-world. The recognition of the differences between people is intrinsic to the principle of individualisation. This principle is based on acceptance and recognition of the uniqueness of every interviewee with regard to nationality, religion, race, personality and background.

The main advantage of the semi-structured interview with a schedule is that it provides for relatively systematic collection of data at the same time it ensures that important data are not

forgotten (Schurink 1998:300). In this study use is made of the semi-structured interviews, which employs a set of themes and topics to guide questioning in the course of the dialogue. The semi-structured interviews were used to interview individuals as well as focus groups.

#### 4.4.2 Focus group interviews

Within the realm of qualitative methods, focus groups have much to offer as an adjunct to other qualitative techniques, such as informant interviewing and participant observation. As a qualitative method for gathering data, focus groups brings together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher (Morgan & Spanish 1984:253-254). In addition as a source of knowledge about determinants of behaviour, focus group sessions are helpful in answering questions of how and, in particular, why people behave as they do. Often obtaining this type of information involves probing into the participants' sub-conscious (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981:443).

Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998:314) describe a focus group interview as a purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between eight to ten individuals with common interest. However, Burgess (1984:117-118) discusses the viability of using a group of only three participants.

Focus groups interviews usually involve a **small group** of people. The group should be small enough for all the participants to have the opportunity to share insights and large enough to provide diversity of perceptions. Lemmer (1989: 150) claims that the validity of the sample depends not so much upon the number of cases studied as upon the degree to which an informant faithfully represents a certain cultural experience. However, in order to counteract observation effects and to maximise the validity of findings generated by focus group interviews the researcher selects **homogenous but not too familiar people** (Schurink, et al 1998:314-316).

Further characteristic are cited by Folch-Lyon and Trost (1981:447). They contend that the groups should be scheduled for a day and time that is convenient for the participants. Furthermore all discussions are recorded on tape. The recorder can be in full view of participants. Its presence should be explained indicating that, while all opinions are of interest and value, it is impossible for

the researcher to take written notes of everything or to accurately remember the different points of view. Although neutrality of location is important discussions can take place in a variety of settings.

The major advantage of focus groups is that they offer the chance to observe participants engaging in interaction that is concentrated on attitudes and experiences that are of interest to the researcher.

In essence, the strengths of focus groups come from a compromise between the strengths found in other qualitative methods. Like participation observation, they allow access to a process that qualitative researchers are often centrally interested in: interaction. Like in-depth interviewing, they allow access to the content that we are often interested in: the attitudes and experiences of our informants. As a compromise, focus groups are neither as strong as participant observation on the naturalistic observation of interaction, nor as strong as interviewing on the direct probing of informant knowledge, but they do a better job of combining these two goals than either of the two techniques (Morgan & Spanish 1984: 260).

In order to gain insight into the natural setting of the participants, the researcher in the present study also engaged in participant observation, a discussion of which follows.

#### **4.4.3 Participant observation**

Participant observation is generally regarded as the principal data-gathering strategy of qualitative research. Researchers who make use of participant observation are interested in the ways in which people usually make sense of or attach meaning to the world around them (Schurink 1998:279). The main aim is to focus on naturally occurring events in natural settings. Participant observers therefore study their participants in their natural setting in which the behaviour occurs. Researchers should as far as possible visit, and preferably spend time in, their participants' natural habitat where they can obtain first-hand data on how their participants go about their daily lives. In this way participant observers are able to observe the ordinary, usual, typical, routine or natural environment of human existence (Miles & Huberman 1994:10).

Participant observers consider their objects of study as a whole and do not reduce them to variables. The researchers typically want to know where, how and under what circumstances

human meanings are moulded. They are therefore primarily concerned with the process rather than simply with the outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:28). Participant observation facilitates both insight and empathy. It entails an involved role for researchers, a role that places them inside the phenomenon under study and enables them to obtain insights into the life-worlds of the participants (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:6.).

Because participant observation requires personal access to the everyday life of the research participants, researchers should become directly involved in their participants' world. Ideally, the participant observer should become a member of the group under study. However, participant observers sometimes distance themselves from their participants, thus performing a non-participant observer role (Schurink 1998:282-283). This distinction is not clearly demarcated as a multitude of levels of participation can be distinguished between a researcher who does not participate at all in activities of the group he or she is studying and one who participates as much as possible in such activities (Lofland 1971:115). Schurink (1998:283) quotes Gold who distinguishes master roles that can be played by participant observers, namely full participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and full observer. Researchers usually all participate to a greater or lesser extent in the activities of their participants. In the case of this study the researcher assumes the role of full observer.

According to Muton, Wildschut and Boshoff (2000:135) the outside observer stands apart from the setting, attempts to be non-intrusive, and assumes the role of a "fly on the wall". The authors further explain that in general, the degree of the structure and the degree of participation of the observer in a study tend to vary with the purpose of the study. However, whatever the purpose of the study, four questions face the observer:

- What should be observed?
- How should the observations be recorded?
- What procedures should be used to assure the accuracy of the observation?
- What relationship should exist between the observer and the observed, and how can such a relationship be established?

The answers to these questions differ, depending on the nature of the study and the extent to which observational procedures are structured.

A distinction between structured and unstructured observations is noted. Unstructured observations are often utilised in qualitative approaches. These usually aim to describe the life experiences through narrative accounts, which emphasise meaning and cultural context of behaviour. Observational data here are combined with information from conversations, interviews and documents to provide an in-depth picture of the perspective and cultures of the participants (Muton et al 2000:141).

Key features of qualitative approaches are flexibility and a minimum of structuring. This does not mean that the observer begins data collection with no aims and no idea of what to observe, but there is a commitment to begin observation with a relatively open-mind, to minimise the influence of preconceptions and to avoid imposing existing preconceived categories. The aim is to develop theoretical ideas from an analysis of data collected (Foster 1996:6). Semi-structured observation is often used as an exploratory technique and so the observer's understanding of a situation and focus may change as the observation progresses. These changes are not undesirable; in fact they represent the ideal use of semi-structured observation (Muton et al 2000:141)

In the present study a semi-structured observation is used.

#### **4.4.4 Analysis of data and report writing**

Data analysis is the process during which the researcher formally identifies themes and constructs hypotheses as they are suggested by data. No attempt is made to test or prove them. Characteristic of qualitative research is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data which occurs throughout all stages of the study (Burgess 1985:9). However, it is only after the fieldwork stage of the research has been completed that the researcher concentrates most on analysis and interpretation of data (Bogdan & Taylor 1975:81). This makes it necessary for the researcher to develop a set of procedures whereby data is organised, managed and evaluated.

Poggenpoel (1998:335) states that how data are stored and retrieved is at the heart of data

management. A good storage and retrieval system is critical for keeping track of what data are available for permitting easy, flexible, reliable use of data and for documentation of the analysis made so that the study can, in principle, be verified or replicated.

A coding system is generally used in analysing qualitative data. The researcher's task with regard to coding is to recognise persistent words, phrases and themes within the data for later retrieval and restoring. There are two ways to manage the coding system, namely by computer software programmes or manually (Poggenpoel 1998:335).

There is no right or wrong approach to do data analysis in qualitative research. There are, however, guidelines a researcher can adhere to (Poggenpoel 1998:337). Schurink (1998:332) offers the following guideline. Firstly the researcher should be attentive to words and phrases in the respondents' own vocabulary and capture the meaning of what they say or do; secondly, whenever a theme in his or her material is noted, acts and statements should be compared with one another to establish whether there is a concept uniting them. As the researcher identifies different themes, he or she should look for underlying similarities among them. The above guidelines should be kept in mind when the researcher selects and utilises a strategy of data analysis.

The following discussion outlines a selected data analysis procedure. The interview data collected by means of audiotape are transcribed verbatim and data collected in the notebook are organised into personal and analytical logs. The method of data analysis involves:

- Reading carefully through all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole;
- Picking any transcript file and reading through it, jotting down ideas as they come to mind, asking oneself what the interview is about, while writing thoughts in the margin and identifying major categories;
- Reading again through all the transcripts files and underlining units of meaning related to the identified major categories;
- Putting the units of meaning into major categories while at the same time identifying subcategories within major categories;
- Identifying relationships between major and subcategories and reflecting these as theories.

The writing about qualitative data is central to the analytic process, because in the choice of particular words to summarise and reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, lending shape, form and meaning to the voluminous amounts of raw data. The research results are written up according to key themes or hypotheses, supported and illuminated by the informant's own quotes (Poggenpoel 1998:337-343).

As mentioned previously there is not a wrong or right way to perform data analysis, however, the researcher should be able to account logically for the stages in data analysis and the final conclusions should be based on generated data. It must be noted that the above description is only one procedure for data analysis suggested. This method has been discussed, as the researcher will follow the above-mentioned procedures to analyse the data.

#### **4.4.5 Validity and reliability in qualitative research**

There is general consensus that qualitative inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller 2000:124). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982:44), reliability in qualitative research is viewed as the fit between what is recorded as data and what has actually occurred in the setting under study. Validity is determined by the extent to which the data represents the actual participative experience of the participants.

Since this study uses an audio-visual method in qualitative research it is important to make reference to Guba's model that is used to ensure validity and reliability ie trustworthiness. Four strategies are proposed to ensure trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In order to ensure trustworthiness, truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality are important. Truth-value asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the participants and the context in which the research was undertaken. Applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings; it is the ability to generalise from findings to larger populations. In other words it involves whether it is fitting or transferable. Consistency considers whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same participants or in a similar context. Lastly neutrality refers to the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the participants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perspectives. Confirmability is the strategy to

ensure neutrality. (Lincoln & Guba 1985:290-296).

Qualitative researchers routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits. Researchers engage in one or more of these procedures and report results in their investigations (Creswell & Miller 2000:124). As triangulation is the procedure used to validate data in this study, this procedure will be discussed further.

**Triangulation** is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. As a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A popular practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study (Creswell & Miller 2000:127).

#### **4.5 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY**

In the case of this study, which has as its aim to explore the existing principles and practices of parent involvement programmes in the Reception Year in light of the framework of the Epstein Model, a qualitative approach has been opted for. The rationale for this choice is that qualitative methodology is most suitable for an exploratory field. In this case the question is how parents and educators in Early Childhood Development experience parent involvement against a well renowned model of parent involvement, namely the Epstein model.

Furthermore, initial interest in this research project arose from the researcher's own interest in Early Childhood Development. The researcher has had the opportunity of teaching in a Grade R class, of training new teachers for the Reception Year, of conducting research in the ECD field and of being an integral part of the government's National Early Childhood Development Pilot Project in South Africa. The close connection between the researchers's self and his or her field of study is frequently true of much research. The researcher is therefore sensitive to the experiences in the

Early Childhood sector.

## **4.6 DESIGN OF PRESENT STUDY**

In light of the above discussion, a qualitative research method using semi-structured interviews and observations was decided upon and hence the process is explained.

### **4.6.1 Introduction**

This study was carried out within the framework of a qualitative research approach using an semi-structured interview with an interview guide, by means of which major themes and questions identified during the literature study were used to elicit data. The researcher also engaged in a period of observation and the field notes were also used to record data.

### **4.6.2 Locating and selecting informants**

Qualitative research requires that the data to be collected must be rich in description of people and places. For these reasons the qualitative researcher used purposive sampling methods by identifying access points (settings where participants could be more easily reached) and selecting especially informative participants (Patton 1990:169). Researchers seek out groups where the process to be studied will be most likely to occur. This type of research focuses on the detail and quality of an individual or small groups' experience rather than the way the behavioural traits or individuals with specific characteristics are distributed in a known population (Lemmer 1989:150).

In addition sampling and selection of a site has to a large extent been determined by the strategy of enquiry used by the researcher (Marshall, Neuman & Rossman 1995:55). The researcher chose three primary schools. The schools were chosen because of their accessibility and the willingness of the principal and staff to be part of the research. The characteristics of the schools selected are discussed in chapter five.

As mentioned previously in purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be "information rich" with respect to the purpose of the study (Gall, Borg & Gall 1996:218). The

participants that included the principals of the schools, educators and parents in each school were selected. In the case of the educators, the educators who taught in the Reception Year participated in the interviews. The principals in consultation with the educators in the Grade R class suggested parents who were felt to be concerned and informed and who could offer insightful and relevant information on their experiences of parent involvement in their respective schools. An attempt was made by the researcher to have both fathers and mothers of Grade R learners as participants. However, it was a problem getting the fathers to participate as they were working or were not willing to participate in the investigation. In total three principals, nine educators and nine parents participated in the interviews.

Typically, qualitative researchers have relied on both formal and informal access routes in the process of finding suitable informants. The accessibility setting and the researcher's ability to build up and maintain relationship with participants usually determine successful fieldwork (Lemmer 1989:137). Once the researcher has located the participants he or she must gain the person's cooperation and explain one's research procedures and interest (Shurink 1998:258).

### **4.6.3 Data collection**

The researcher followed the protocol of the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture in conducting research in public primary schools. The Department has a policy that there should not be any disruption to the school if permission is granted to an individual to carry out research. The following aspects were considered.

#### **4.6.3.1 Access to schools**

In the case of this study the researcher being an employee of the Department of Education sought permission from the Director of Provisioning in the North Durban Region to conduct the research in **three public primary schools** in the greater Durban area (see Appendix I). A letter providing information of the topic and the methodology were stipulated. A letter approving the application was issued (see Appendix II). This letter granting permission was used to negotiate entry into schools. The researcher then visited all three schools to negotiate access to the schools and explained the proposed study. The aim of the study and the procedures were outlined to principals

in the schools. Gaining access to the schools did not pose a problem as all principals knew the researcher who is an official of the Department of Education. The researcher emphasised that her role was one of an independent investigator, completing a personal study and was not an official representing the Department of Education. The issue of anonymity of data and the rules for preservation of confidentiality were highlighted and pledged. It was further agreed that the interviews and observations would be undertaken at a time that was suitable to the school and at the convenience of the parents. The principals in the respective schools consulted with parents and staff on the possibility of the researcher carrying out the research. The responses from all three principals were very positive. The principals identified educators who taught in the Reception Year and suggested parents who were felt to be concerned and informed and who could offer insightful and relevant information on their experiences of parent involvement in their respective schools and who were willing to participate in the study.

#### **4.6.3.2 Participant observation**

Having selected the schools and having obtained permission to conduct research, the researcher visited the school to gain insight into the nature of educator-parent, principal-parent, parent-parent, learner-parent interaction in the natural setting and in a normal school day in the life-world of the participants. Observations were completed between April and May 2000. The researcher made extensive notes of the observation. The notes made during the observations have been used in reporting on the key themes.

#### **4.3.6.3 Interviews**

Principals, educators and parents were asked to complete a questionnaire, prior to the interview (see Appendices III – V). The questionnaire was used merely to gather data about the principals, educators and parents. The information has been captured in tables in chapter five. In addition the participants also approved that the interviews will be recorded and they were assured that the anonymity of both school and individual would be maintained.

- **Face-face interviews with the principals**

The interviews were conducted from April to June on days selected by the school. In all three schools principals were willing and eager to talk. They also indicated that they had no problem with the interview being tape-recorded. The interviews were conducted in the principal's office. A general conversation on education and the routine issues preceded the interview. When the researcher gauged that the principals were relaxed, she then began the interview. The interview began with a general discussion of their jobs as principals. The researcher found that generally principals were so eager to talk, that the researcher had to sometimes intervene and steer the conversation to parent involvement. Field notes were jotted down during the interviews. Appendix IX provides an example of an interview.

- **Focus group interviews with educators and with parents**

In the case of this study the researcher had to reiterate to the educators that she was not present in an official capacity but rather on a personal visit to conduct her own research. To create a relaxed atmosphere the researcher spent some time engaging in conversations on issues like the weather and their families. In order to gain the confidence and trust of the educators the researcher explained that the research was not to judge their practice of, but rather an attempt to understand schooling and parent involvement. It was further explained that the research could be used to help both parents and educators in their understanding and practice of parent involvement in schools.

The parents were interviewed when they came to drop off their children in the morning and in one case the interview was conducted when parents came to fetch the children in the afternoon. This ensured that parents were not inconvenienced. In school A and B parents were eager to talk and were grateful that they had been selected and granted the opportunity to participate in an interview. The parents in school C however were aloof and eager to complete the interview as quickly as possible.

In the focus group interviews with the parents and with the educators the discussions were guided by means of an interview schedule, which provided a flexible guideline for the interview (see Appendices VI-VIII). The interviews took the form of a conversation, with the interviewees being

encouraged to talk freely and not an exercise where they answered questions. All focus groups interviews were tape-recorded. This was done to ensure that the data were accurately acquired, to avoid the problem of selective hearing and note taking and to minimise distortion and omission in transcribing. In adhering to the advice of Schurink et al (1998:321) the researcher ensured that note taking did not interfere with the spontaneous nature of the group discussion.

#### **4.6.3.4 Data analysis**

As Poggenpoel (1998:334) correctly points out the analysis of the data begins with data collection, the researcher found that this process began from the very beginning of her field-work. She spent weeks transcribing the data into transcripts. This was followed by a period of reading and reflection on each transcript. After several readings the significant concepts and themes were identified and jotted down. The researcher then used different coloured pens to highlight major categories and phrases and words were selected and written down alongside the transcript. These became sub categories of the major themes identified. She then found that she was beginning to comprehend the participants' experiences conveyed in their own language. In transcribing the data, notes made at the interviews became crucial as it helped to register some of the emotions of the participants. Constant reference was also made to the field notes made during the period of observation.

#### **4.6.3.5 Presentation of the data**

As the Epstein Model was used as the framework for this investigation, the categories and sub-categories are presented within the six types of parent involvement espoused by Epstein. The themes are discussed within this framework as it facilitates cross-referencing to literature. Modungwa (1995:26-27) rightly points out that the results of research are discussed in the light of relevant literature. In addition the participants' own words are quoted and descriptions are provided. According to Bogdan & Biklen (1982:179) an example of raw data within the presentation helps to provide the opportunity for the reader to gauge the level of validity of the research data.

#### 4.6.3.6 Issues of reliability and validity in the present study

Validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings and can be divided into external and internal validity. External validity refers to the degree to which findings can be generalised to the population from which the participants were drawn (LeCompte & Goetz 1982:32). High validity depends on the data collection and analysis techniques used (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:391). The reliability of the present design is discussed against the criteria determined by Schumacher and McMillan (1993:386-388).

- **The researcher's role.** The importance of the researcher's social relationship with the participants requires that research studies identify the researcher's role and status within the group. This was discussed in paragraph 4.3.
- **Informant selection.** Informants must be described as well as the decision process used in the selection. The choice of schools and the selection of the informants are described in paragraph 4.6.2.
- **Social context.** Social context influencing data content and description should be included of people, time, and place where the interviews took place. These issues are discussed in paragraphs 4.6.3.1 and paragraph 4.6.3.3.
- **Data collection strategies.** Precise description must be given of the varieties of observation and interviewing, as well as the way in which the data were recorded and under what circumstances. This information is presented in paragraph 4.6.3.
- **Data analysis strategies.** Through retrospection accounts must be provided of how data were synthesised. The process of data analysis is described in paragraph 4.6.3.4.
- **Analytic premise.** The conceptual framework must be made explicit. This was done in chapter one (Van Wyk 1996:147).

#### **4.6.3.7 Triangulation**

There are three recognised forms of triangulation relevant to this study. In the first place a form of triangulation occurred by comparing data from focus group interviews with educators with the notes made during the observation. Secondly, comparison of educator interview data was also made with interview data from the principal in each school. Moreover, a comparison could be made between the interviews data from the focus group with educators, with that obtained in the group interview with parents.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter discusses the qualitative methodology and data collection techniques. It also provides the rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach for the study of parent involvement in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal. The chapter describes the methods used to obtain the data, that is observation, in-depth and semi-structured focus groups interviews. An account of data analysis, presentation of data and the reliability of the present study are also provided. In the next chapter the recommendations that emanate from the data generated will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter two the Epstein Model against which this investigation was carried out has been discussed. In chapter 3 the provision of Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal was described. The launch of the Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development in May 2001 outlines the plan to achieve a phased, poverty-targeted approach to the establishment of a national system of provision of the Reception Year (DoE 2001b: 3). The aim of this investigation is to explore the existing principles and practices of parent involvement programmes in the Reception Year in the greater Durban area against the framework of the Epstein Model. In other words the investigation looks at the experiences of educators and parents of the different types of parent and community involvement as set out in the Epstein typology. In chapter four the method of research and procedures followed in collecting the data were outlined. On completion of the participant observation and interviews, the information recorded was transcribed. This chapter presents and describes the data gathered from the investigation carried out in three public primary schools (Reception Year). The process of analysing the data was an enriching experience and the words of the informants are quoted as they were recorded. No corrections have been made to the words of the informants. Although the Epstein typology has been the frame of reference throughout this study, the data has not been artificially categorised within this framework. Likewise, all participants were allowed to discuss parent involvement from their own frame of reference and the categories and sub categories allowed to emerge from the data. However, in keeping with Epstein's typology the six main categories are used here to facilitate cross-referencing to the literature.

Although the focus was on the experiences of educators and parents with learners in Grade R, principals and educators tended to give a broader picture of parent involvement as practised in the early years of schooling.

## 5.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 5.2.1 The participants

In-depth and focus groups interviews were conducted in three schools with three principals, nine educators and nine parents. Biographical data of all informants are presented in the tables below. Information that may have an impact on the responses has been captured.

#### 5.2.1.1 Principals

The principals in all cases have served in the same primary school for more than seven years and in two cases the principals served for more than fifteen years in the same school. Thus they have a sound knowledge of the parents and the community. Two of the principals are females and one principal is a male. Principals were required to indicate the area that they reside in. The response is recorded as neighbourhood if they live in the neighbourhood and away from school, if they do not live in the neighbourhood.

**TABLE 5.1: THE PRINCIPALS**

PRINCIPAL	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Gender	Female	Male	Female
Age	55	51	51
Teaching experience (years)	35	25	26
Years as principal	3	3	9
Years in the present school	7	15	21
Area that you live in	Away from school	Away from school	In the neighbourhood

### 5.2.1.2 Educators

In the case of the educators, all nine educators were females, which is characteristic of the gender of educators in Early Childhood Development. The educators had substantial experience in Early Childhood Development ranging from ten years to twenty-five years. Only two educators had one year of experience. In schools A and B educators are required to rotate and teach in different grades in the Foundation Phase (Reception Year to Grade three). Educators had to indicate the area that they live in as this information does impact on their knowledge and understanding of the community.

**TABLE 5.2: EDUCATORS IN SCHOOL A**

<b>EDUCATORS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	37	44	24
<b>Teaching experience</b>	16	15	1
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>No of children</b>	3	2	None
<b>Area that you live in</b>	In the neighbourhood	In the neighbourhood	In the neighbourhood

**TABLE 5.3: EDUCATORS IN SCHOOL B**

<b>EDUCATORS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	36	47	31
<b>Teaching experience</b>	15	23	10
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>No of children</b>	2	4	2
<b>Area that you live in</b>	In the neighbourhood	In the neighbourhood	Away from school

**TABLE 5.4: EDUCATORS IN SCHOOL C**

<b>EDUCATORS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	42	53	25
<b>Teaching experience</b>	15	22	1
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Divorced	Married
<b>No of children</b>	2	3	None
<b>Area that you live in</b>	In the neighbourhood	Away from school	In the neighbourhood

**5.2.1.3 Parents**

Of the nine parents interviewed, three were working parents. There was only one male parent. The researcher did endeavour to include fathers in the interviews, however, this did not materialise. The fathers were working and in some cases they were not willing to participate. An observation is that the parents were young with ages ranging from twenty-two to thirty five. All interviews were conducted on the school premises, where the participants were comfortable in their natural settings. In the case of parents, they met with the researcher when they came to drop off their children in the morning. In the case of school C, the researcher met with parents when they came to fetch their children.

**TABLE 5.5: PARENTS IN SCHOOL A**

<b>PARENTS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Female
<b>Age</b>	35	29	30
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Married	Separated
<b>No of children</b>	2	1	1
<b>Breadwinner</b>	Husband	Wife and Husband	Brother
<b>Relatives living with you</b>	None	None	Parents, brother and sister-in-law

**TABLE 5.6: PARENTS IN SCHOOL B**

<b>PARENTS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	36	33	26
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>No of children</b>	4	4	2
<b>Breadwinner</b>	Husband and wife	Husband	Husband
<b>Relatives living with you</b>	None	None	None

**TABLE 5.7: PARENTS IN SCHOOL C**

<b>PARENTS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female
<b>Age</b>	32	33	31
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>No of children</b>	2	2	2
<b>Breadwinner</b>	Husband	Husband and wife	Husband
<b>Relatives living with you</b>	Grandmother	Father- in- law	Mother

### 5.2.2 The schools

A brief description of the three schools is provided. The researcher engaged in participant observation in all three schools and greater detail of the observations has been included in the discussions of the themes.

## School A

This is a multicultural school. Generally the learners live in the community. The school can be placed in the middle socio-economic bracket. In other words the parents in this community are generally employed and are able to sustain a life style of the lower middle class community. The school is neat, the buildings and grounds are in good condition and it was evident that teaching and learning are in progress. The Grade R classrooms are at one end of the building and the play area for the Grade R learners has good equipment and is fenced. The facilities like taps and toilets are designed for the learners in Grade R. There was a security guard at the entrance of the school. Parents live in council built flats and houses. The flats are in a poor condition: many flats had broken windows and the area surrounding the flats is polluted. There are also individual average size houses. There are very few recreational facilities available to the community. There is a swimming pool, library, a mosque and a community hall.

**TABLE 5.8: SCHOOL A**

Total number of learners	634
Total number of educators	17
Total number of classrooms	19

## School B

The school is a multicultural school, with about 40% of the learners living in a township about 30 kilometres from the school. Buses or taxis transport the learners on a daily basis. This school is situated in a poor socio-economic community. The building is very old and dilapidated. One entire block of the school was destroyed by fire and could not be repaired due to a lack of funds. The school was vandalised and the toilet seats and taps stolen. There are inadequate toilet facilities because only a few toilets have been repaired. According to the principal, this is an ongoing occurrence and even if repairs are done the vandalism continues, as the school does not have a fence. The school does not have a special outdoor play area for the Grade R learners. The principal and the Heads of Department have two tiny offices and the secretary uses the stock room as her office. One classroom has been

converted into a school library. Although the table below indicates nineteen classrooms, not all are suitable for use. The principal provided a history of the school:

There is a unique situation concerning this school in that it was built with the monies donated by the community through the sugar mill. The mill delivered the materials to build the school, but they in turn deducted the money from the wages of the labourers ie the forefathers of this community. So the community technically own this building and the sugar mill owns the land, but as long as the school is running the sugar mill will not take away the land. The parents here feel they own the school.

This history is relevant, because it has an impact on the parents' attitude towards the school. The third generation of the labourers who built the school presently reside in the homes. Parents live in small houses built by the sugar mill. The houses are made of brick and it was a change to see smoke coming out of the chimneys. The neighbourhood is totally neglected. An interesting observation is that parents and the school staff sometimes refer to the neighbourhood as the "village". There are no recreational facilities in the community. During the period of observation there was much movement of parents in and out of school, however it was evident that educators were engaged in teaching activities. This is a poverty stricken community with many social challenges.

**TABLE 5.9: SCHOOL B**

Total number of learners	385
Total number of educators	13
Total number of classrooms	19

### **School C**

The school is situated in a plush suburb in Durban. This is a fully integrated, multicultural school. This is a Junior Primary school that caters for learners from Grade R to Grade three. The Grade R classes are situated away from the main building. The outdoor play area has

excellent equipment. The classrooms have special furniture and resources for the learners. It is the only school with a well-constructed sand and water play area. The washrooms are neat and have all the necessary facilities for little children. There are learners from all race groups attending the school. The learners live in the area. The community is affluent and the standard of living is high. The school building is in an excellent condition, the grounds and gardens are well kept and various sporting facilities are available in the school. The school has a separate administration building. There are offices for the secretaries, a waiting room, a hallway with a constructed display area. There is tight security and parking facilities for parents. It is a well-developed area with excellent recreational facilities. There are more than one swimming pool, shopping centres, parks, libraries, the fire station, clinic, sports clubs, halls and churches within the community. On my way to the school I was surprised to find signs providing direction to the school. The traffic department had put these up. The atmosphere in the school was characterised by discipline and hard work.

**TABLE 5.10: SCHOOL C**

Total number of learners	350
Total number of educators	18
Total number of classrooms	15

The present investigation was carried out against this background. A discussion of the key themes follows.

### **5.3 UNDERSTANDING THE TERM PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The principals view parent involvement as parents' knowledge and awareness that education is important for their children, and that providing education to their children will mean a better future for their children. In explaining the term parent involvement the principal in school C emphasises parents' support of their children and support of the school. She mentions the support of the school in "just the things they say about the school, the general chit chat that goes on in the car-park".

Educators on the other hand limit parent involvement to supporting the child in their work, payment of the school fees, monitoring the child's progress and assisting the school. Educators believe that especially in the Grade R parents do not have a choice and that they have to be involved. It is interesting to note that educators in all three schools made similar comments:

- Well, in pre-primary, you have to have parents involved. You have such close contact with them everyday.
- You see it's the child's first year in school, the parents contact the school.
- In Grade R the parents should be more involved.

In contrast parents emphasise their roles in terms of their duties to their children and less importance is given to their roles in assisting and supporting the school as an institution. Moreover, parents have the perception that the school is doing them a favour by inviting them to attend functions and participate in school activities. This means that the parents are not aware of legislation and policies that have recognised parents as partners in education of their children. It was surprising to note that this perception came from school C where parents are generally literate and exposed to the media. A parent in school C remarked:

I think that parent involvement is a privilege not a right. We cannot demand to be involved. I think we need to point that out more often, we are grateful to the school for the way they encourage parent involvement.

In practice it is evident that the roles of parents and the roles of educators are clearly demarcated. Educators believe that teaching and educating the child is their key responsibility and that parents should focus their energies on providing for the physical needs of the child and supporting the child with school work that is completed at home.

The relationship between parents and educators of Grade R children is good. However, this relationship changes and parent involvement decreases as the child moves on to higher grades. An educator in school B who moves up with the learners from Grade R to Grade 3 describes how the extent of parent involvement changes. She emphasised:

With my parents you find there is a bit of interest because the child is at the beginning of school, but you find that this diminishes as the child moves to Grade two and three, where you find **NO, NO** (loud) parent involvement.

An educator in School A made a similar observation in stating:

In Grade R the parents are more supportive than the higher standards. When it comes to donations they will make sure that they give the money or school fund. These children bring their school fund on time. Even the teachers will say, we see the parents in Grade R but we never see them again after their children leave Grade R. In the Grade R we have a very good relationship with the parents.

## **Discussion**

Principals, educators and parents seem to have differing perceptions of what parent involvement entails. The understanding of the concept of parent involvement is limited. It would seem that parents and educators have a different understanding of parent involvement. The lack of a common understanding of the concept of parent involvement can pose a threat to effective parent involvement in schools. It is this very situation that leads to partners, that is the school and parents working at cross-purposes with each other, yet both claim to work in the best interest of the child. If there is consensus then the school and the parents will have knowledge of what is required of them in performing their different roles. It then becomes possible for both the school and the home to work effectively in partnership (cf 1.4.1). However, schools seem to decide when and how parents can be involved. There is a definite transformation in the methods of involving parents. Previously parents were only involved in fund raising activities and this role has been extended. However, the educators still relegate less important tasks to parents. For example educators maintain that parents cannot be involved in classroom decisions.

The decrease of parent involvement as the child moves to higher grades is reflected in literature. In discussing the overlapping spheres of influence (cf 2.2.2) Epstein reported that across the grades as children, families, and schools change, the nature and extent of overlap

in practices and the interpersonal relationships among partners also change. For example efforts to involve parents typically start to drop as early as grade two or three. In addition Epstein (1995:703) found that partnerships tend to decline across the grades, unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level. Jackson and Cooper (1989:30) conclude that parents of elementary grades are more involved than parents of middle grade children.

## **5.4 PARENTING**

According to Epstein, (cf 2.3.1) in practice parenting involves assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, providing family support, programmes on nutrition, health and other services and suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each stage and grade level.

### **5.4.1 Parent and child relationship**

Principals and educators felt that in Grade R parents shared a healthy relationship with their children. It has come to light that parents need help in balancing their roles in child rearing. Parents are supportive of and helpful to their children, however, in their enthusiasm to do their best they are not encouraging children to develop and accept responsibilities. The principal of school A indicated:

There are some parents that are totally over-indulgent, overly protective almost stifling the development of their children in their eagerness to support them, and there are those who are completely neglectful to an extent that we have to give their children food.

An educator in school B is of the view that:

Most of the parents, if you look at it, they have a good relationship with their children, they pamper their children, hot lunches come to school. And you know children should learn to be responsible, they should bring their own lunch to school.

I was intrigued by the fact that although the schools admit that the parents share a healthy relationship with their children, they are of the opinion that parents have difficulty in raising their children with acceptable values and morals.

#### **5.4.2 Educators and principals' view of parents' coping skills**

Both educators and principals highlighted that parents are not coping well with their parenting tasks. Educators and principals in all three schools blame the parents for problems that they encounter with the learners at school. The schools collectively identified one or more of the following as the result of poor parenting: Poor behaviour, bad manners, lack of respect for others, poor eating habits, poor discipline, not being able to follow instruction, rough talk, child abuse and watching programmes that are not suitable for children. The principal of school A refers to the fact that "the TV has become very much a baby sitter". In school C an educator is of the opinion that because parents are young, they are not coping. The principal of the same school maintains:

.... that parents need help in discipline, you know I think that they are at a stage where they have heard that corporal punishment is out, they don't like giving their children a slap, but they don't know what to replace it with. I think that another thing is TV watching, they don't know how to differentiate between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable for little children. You know you get home from work, you have to cook supper, help the older children with homework, they just say go and watch TV and they don't have a clue as to what the children are watching.

The principal from school A is of the view that only a small percentage of parents are coping and the rest have a "don't care attitude". She attributes this to domestic problems. She provides some interesting information about the parents in school A:

I don't think parents are coping with their jobs. In our community, we have a lot of broken homes, broken marriages, single parents, a lot of divorce cases and separation. If I had to do a survey you will find that in every class half of them come from broken homes, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse.

These problems affect children negatively. Moreover, fathers are not involved. The principal in school B was upset and revealed some of the experiences that show that parents are not coping. He expressed concern with:

I have many parents coming to school asking about the child, they want to see the child or give the child something, and when we ask them which grade is your child, they don't know and I find this happening more in the case of fathers. That tells me you know the father does not spend enough time with the child finding out from the child how you are doing in school, who is your teacher, what are you learning or see their books.

## **Discussion**

The general attitude of the educators and parents are that the majority of parents are not coping with parenting. The attitude of educators and principals is a negative one, however, it is interesting to note that in the case of two schools, namely, school A and B, the reasons provided are related to the parents' socio-economic status and other social problems. Whereas in the case of the affluent school, time and a lack of knowledge are cited as reasons. The schools were confident that poor parenting was the cause of the problems they had with learners. It is a concern that although the schools have recognised the problems, they have not provided structures or programmes to help the parents in their parenting skills. Swap (1993:5) claims that family support programmes have a direct link to Early Childhood Programmes. These programmes aim at strengthening all aspects of child development, parent education at home, and help parents connect with natural support system. All schools need to give greater attention to providing support programmes to parents.

### **5.4.3 Parents' view of parenting**

Of the nine parents interviewed, three of the mothers were working and one father was working. The other five were parents who stayed at home. Parents have feelings of joy, pride and frustrations. In all schools parents made reference to their stress and frustrations. In school A, a single parent related her experiences with a great deal of emotion:

With my one she is the only one and being a single parent for a year now, she gets very aggressive, she knows she has a father, he is not a good role model for her, you know we had our problems ... and you know now it is just me and my baby, and because of her I cannot go to work because she doesn't want to come to school, she wants I must be there all the time and she wants I must bring her to school. It is very stressful, it is hectic. My child is lacking, because she does not have both parents. I am trying to do everything for both, and by the end of the day, when I go to bed like I drop dead.

Another parent found that being a parent is very stressful, because her two children are very demanding and she has no time for herself.

A father in the school A indicated that, although he is proud to be a parent, he finds his role hectic. He provided the following information:

Hectic, you see I come from work. I am on night shift. My wife leaves home at seven o' clock, so she waits for me as soon as I come she leaves. Then I have to see to my child's breakfast, dress her up and bring her to school and then I go home and sleep. Then I have to get up again at twelve, I come back to school to pick her up. When I go back home she wants to play and wants my attention, so I cannot go to sleep again.

## **Discussion**

Parents indicated their frustrations in raising their children. All parents agree that the manner in which they bring up their children is different to the way they were brought up (cf 5.4.5). In fact, the majority of parents stated that it is very stressful and hectic. Ironically the working parents seem to be coping better with their job of being a parent. The parents cited problems of behaviour, discipline, listening, communicating with their children, getting them to follow an instruction and attitudes of their children as problems that they encountered. In examining the reasons for their inability to cope I found that contextual factors such as family structure and poverty contributed to their inabilities. Morrison (1995:33-40) and Shoemaker (1995: 44-47) explain that families are increasingly characterised by dual-career lifestyles

and single-parent households and claim that these factors challenge educators to develop flexible parent education programmes.

#### **5.4.4 Support for parents in their parenting skills**

Parents were very honest in admitting that they needed help, however the areas identified by some parents will not necessarily address their problems. For example, a parent in school B identified a need for speech and drama and extra activities for children, yet she identified discipline and behaviour as problems. Extra activities will keep her children out of home for a longer period of time but **will not** address her problems in discipline. In some cases the parents have approached the school for help. For example the father in school A did indicate that he needs help in communicating with his child.

In two schools the principals act as counsellors and assist parents on a one to one basis at a very personal level. They indicated that a substantial amount of time is spent helping parents with their domestic problems and advising them. Although the educators and principals in school C mentioned talking to parents about their problems, they have a more formal approach to assisting parents. For example, they have a mother support group and they offer a Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) course. Educators act as facilitators and the parents who attended the courses benefited. The principal of the school C expressed her views:

I have had a number of parents whose children are six or seven who say, "My child would not listen to me, I just don't know what to do?". Our school actually offered the STEP course and a few years ago we had like four different groups that run simultaneously, but now they think they know it all and they actually are clever.

The educator in the same school reported:

Some parents need assistance, during my last year of interviews I had a mother and a grandmother and they say they are really battling with the child and they have no guidelines, they do not know what to do or where to go. So I said

there are clinics that run courses on “You and your child, you and your toddler”.

The principal of school B believes that parents “need to understand some psychology of child rearing”. He uses a one on one discussion with parents by calling them in and addressing problems that are specific to certain parents. He describes the situation:

Many parents whose children run into problems at school, behaviour problems or having learning difficulties, when we call on the parents to discuss with them we find generally they do not interact enough with their children or they have disturbances at home. They need advice on how to interact with their children.

At school A support to the parents is provided via workshops and meetings. The principal at school A mentioned:

We try to support them. We have an open day, but before they go into the classroom, we give them a talk, we talk on general things like uniform, punctuality, coming regularly to school, leave taking and dangers and helping the child with homework, getting assistance from the library, things like that where we are trying.

Parents expressed the need for a forum where they can discuss and share their problems:

But I feel as parents we should have our own committee where mothers and fathers get together and each one has the phone numbers and we discuss things, about your child in school. So that we give teachers our feelings as well, instead of always listening to the teachers, you do this and you do that, they should also listen to our advice.

## **Discussion**

It is disconcerting to note that the school C has relegated its responsibility of assisting families to a clinic. It is true that the school C has courses to assist parents but they indicate that they are poorly attended. The “same” parents attend the support group for mothers and the ones that need assistance do not attend. The support group serves as a social event rather than helping parents who need help.

The practice of school B of addressing all the parents at a school open day, on the routine issues, can be criticised, as it is really a meeting that assists in the smooth functioning of the school. In essence the school is ensuring that the rules of the school are followed. Although schools claim to be supporting parents in their roles of parenting, this is not evident in their practice. One may commend the schools for trying, however, schools need to evaluate their programmes to see if the desired outcomes of assisting families are achieved. Epstein et al (1997:9) caution that it is vitally important to provide information to all families who want it or need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at school. Moreover, the most critical aspect in providing educational programmes for parents is to make sure that the programmes offered are responsive to parents’ needs and interests, as they perceive them.

### **5.4.5 Changes in parenting style**

The parents acknowledge that the way they bring up children is different from the way they were brought up. They also conclude that the children of today are different and good moral values, discipline and respect for elders are lacking. Most parents are inclined to believe that it is not their fault, as circumstances have changed. Some parents even blame the school for the lack of discipline and respect. A parent in school A comments:

But schools too they are not what they used to be, see like discipline of the children, like if you come late they don’t do anything. Like when we used to be late, we use to fright, we knew we will be punished, we will be detained. The school policy has to change.

Another parent in the same school commented on the dress code at schools. She maintains that children today are allowed to wear fashionable and fancy accessories and that the schools need to be “more tough” on these aspects.

A parent in school B concluded that children today have a lot of freedom:

We couldn't have freedom, and we had to listen to our mummies and daddies, like these days children, they **DON'T (loud)**, you know they want to tell you what to do. Some of them got an attitude problem; you can't tell them that this is wrong; they feel that what they do is right.

On the other hand the parents in school C have a different perception of freedom. One parent compares her childhood with that of her child and explains:

I think mine have less responsibility than I had, you know at this age now I tend to do a lot more for them than my mum did, I had to do the household chores. But I think that they have a lot more responsibilities in another sense, what they have to cope with they have to grasp everyday, we had such careless days we did not have to worry about crime. You know they see the security at school, and they are quite aware of it, and it is quite stressful, they also see and hear so much as well.

The second parent at school C concurs in adding, “ I agree, we had more freedom we did not have to worry about locking the doors and gates and security”.

## **Discussion**

Parents' parenting skills have changed. It is interesting to note that although parents agree that children today are not respectful and lack discipline, they make excuses for their children's behaviour. On the one hand the blame is shifted to the school and on the other hand the parents maintain that children are affected by the crime rate. Parents have to also acknowledge that they need to find ways of solving the problems associated with discipline.

According to Emmons, Comer and Haynes (1996:36) context influences behaviour, schools and the community need to offer programmes that will address behaviour problems.

#### **5.4.6 The impact of social factors**

As mentioned above (cf 5.4.2) there are many parents who are divorced, separated or single. In addition there is unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse and other disturbances at home. The principal in school A describes the home conditions as: "It is overcrowded they have about eight people living in a one bedroom flat and in most flats they have tenants. I also had one or two cases of child abuse".

An educator in school B commented:

You see today's parents, most of them are leaving their children with their grandparents and in this school we have lots of them. We have single parents, children in foster care, divorce and even abuse. The grandparents are illiterate.

#### **Discussion**

Poor living conditions contribute to parents' frustrations with child rearing. In two of the three schools all respondents mentioned at least one or all of the problems of alcohol, overcrowding, divorce, unemployment and broken homes. A social worker in the area where school A and B are situated reported that:

The living conditions of many families have had a negative impact on young children. Sometimes there are ten or twelve people sharing a one-bedroom flat. Drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and boredom have fuelled a recent rise in sex crimes against children. (Sunday Tribune July 2001:1).

The issue raised by the social worker on boredom is relevant especially in the case of school A and B. According to the principal of school A there are limited recreational facilities in the community and in the case of school B there are no recreational facilities available. One can

empathise with the parents in these schools as they have limited resources available and their personal circumstances do affect their parenting. Jackson and Cooper (1989:31) also agree that the pressures of living in crowded quarters, in neighbourhoods where drugs may be a way of life, where temptations for children are everywhere, make it increasingly difficult for parents to get involved in schools.

## **5.5 COMMUNICATING**

This type of parent involvement involves designing effective forms of school-to-home and home to school communications about school programmes and learners' progress (Epstein 1995:704) (cf 2.3.2).

### **5.5.1 Informal communication**

In all three schools observed the direct contact and informal discussion with parents in the mornings when parents come to drop off their children and in the afternoons when parents pick up their children is the most common form of communication between the parents and the educators in Grade R. Educators indicate that when parents have problems they come in and discuss them.

Parents find this a convenient time to ask the educator about the child's progress or to discuss any problems that they may have. Although some educators find this dialogue time-consuming and infringing on planning and preparation time, they accommodate parents. An educator in school C who comes in earlier to prepare for the day's work finds that no matter how early she is, there is always someone waiting to speak to her. The educator indicated:

Parents come in every day, so there is discussion every morning; normally this follows like half an hour in the morning. And earlier than seven, like I get here at seven, either to mix paint or something, there are dads, who actually wants to talk to me and they are actually thrilled that they can have a conversation with me, otherwise you actually miss those parents.

### 5.5.2 Formal written communication

All schools send circulars, letters and notices home, they make use of message or note books, report cards are sent to parents to inform them of the child's progress and newsletters are sent out from all schools. Although all schools mentioned the various forms of written communication, the quality and the frequency of this form of communication varies from school to school. For example School A and B indicated that they send out newsletters once a quarter, whereas school C indicated sending out newsletters once a month. In two schools an official letter is sent out to all parents at the beginning of each year, to remind parents of their roles and responsibilities. The principal of school B provides information that is sent out to parents.

In the general letter that I send out at the beginning of the year, I remind the parents of their responsibilities as parents, that they should check on their children's homework, that they should send their child neatly dressed to school, that they come with lunch, that they develop a sense of responsibility in their children, give them tasks at home and check out their homework.

A similar letter is sent out in school B. This formal communication is a routine activity of the school at the beginning of each academic year. Children are expected to act as couriers, taking and bringing back messages. This is an unreasonable demand for Grade R children. For example, in one school the principal communicates regularly with the parents through announcements at the assembly. The school uses this method in spite of their knowledge that children do not take messages home. The educators complained that children "forget". If the school is serious about communicating with the parents then more formal notices need to go to parents.

An educator in school C emphasised that they have a host of notices going out regularly. She sounded irritated and said:

Plus we have all sorts of little notices going around. Mrs Ngcobo will bring them around. Just before story time they fold them, put them in the notebook, put up the green flag and put them into their bags.

In school C educators have a green flag in the notebook, and if the child goes home with the green flag up, then it means that there is a message for the parent and if the book comes to school with the green flag up then it means that there is a message for the teacher.

## **Discussion**

It is clear from the interviewees' responses that all schools attempt to communicate with parents using methods that are most suitable to their circumstances. Dauber and Epstein (1991:290) identify memos, notices, phone calls, report cards, and conferences that schools conduct and other innovative communications with parents that some schools create as forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications (cf 2.2.3.2). The notices and circulars serve to inform or remind parents of events at school and they are general in nature, whereas the discussions in the mornings are at a more personal level. Wanat (1994:637) found that although formal communication apprised parents of activities and their children's academic progress, informal communication was more responsive to personal needs (cf 2.2.3.2).

### **5.5.3 Parents' meetings**

In all schools observed parent meetings are an important means of communication with the parents. The agendas and frequency of the meetings differ from school to school. For example in school C the principals, educators and parents indicated that they have a general meeting once a year and then a meeting to discuss school fees at the end of the year. Then they have special meetings once a term.

In school B the principal explained:

We have parents' meetings. If there is a matter that concerns all parents and if there is any explaining to be done, if we know that parents would need to ask questions and will need clarifications, a letter or circular won't suffice then we will call the parents. We will send a notice to say that in two weeks' time we will have a meeting.

The meetings in school A are also based on needs of the school, the school calls a meeting to discuss school fees and other policies of the school and then special meetings are called during the year.

Furthermore, in light of the new curriculum implemented in all three schools, special meetings to discuss Outcomes-Based Education are scheduled. An educator in school B talks about special meetings that are held: "Then we have special OBE meetings, informing them what OBE is all about, informing them of the changes in the curriculum and their involvement in OBE".

Schools see the need of informing parents of the new curriculum and assessment procedures and have increased the number of meetings with parents. As parents do not really understand the new curriculum and have anxieties, they are more alert and motivated to find out more from the school.

#### **5.5.3.1 Poor attendance at meetings**

Every school complained of poor attendance at the meetings. In addition there was consensus that the parents that should attend do not attend. The principal and educators of school A expressed their concern:

We get only those that are interested, you know those children that are doing well. But the ones who are abused, there are problems at home, broken homes; we need to see them, they never come.

Schools have meetings over weekends, yet the attendance is poor. The principal of school B who schedules the meetings for a Saturday afternoon to suit parents, believes that parents are just not interested. He maintains:

We also look at the most opportune time, where the most number of parents possible will, attend, so we take that into consideration, but even then I would say about 50% of the parents will attend.

The situation in school C is slightly different. The principal commented:

When we have a meeting, which has something to do with the children, you know directly with the children then we have excellent attendance. .... But when it comes to school governance part they are not really interested.

Although all schools concur that there is a problem of poor or non-attendance at meetings, only school C has attempted to address the problem. Parents appreciate the efforts of the school in helping them to attend the meetings. A parent articulated:

They often have baby sitters for important meetings when they want parents to come. One of the teachers or one of the teacher's older kids watches over the children. They are in the media centre and generally there is a movie for the kids. And we have car guards when there is a meeting in the evenings.

The second parent applauds the efforts of the school and believes that because the school cannot get a time that suits everyone, providing baby sitters helps parents, and provides an opportunity for parents to attend.

School C admit that they are sometimes forced to use certain devious strategies to get parents to attend. The principal in school C provides two examples:

I know members of the governing body say this is an important meeting. There is a possibility of a fee increase next year, to try and get them there ...

So what we have been doing recently is, you know in OBE the parents have to be involved in assessment, we have been saying this is a night where you can come and fill in the assessment sheet of your child's work. Just to get them there.

### 5.5.3.2 Parents' views of school meetings

Generally the parents who were interviewed indicated that they attend the meetings and are given an opportunity to speak. However they also mention the problems encountered at the meetings.

Although we have much opportunities to speak, but you don't do it and then you find that some parents have this to say and that to say, but they don't say anything at the meeting. Some are shy, some are illiterate. But then everyone is not perfect.

At school B the parents indicated that they are not invited to all the meetings.

We are not invited to all the meetings. Mostly about school fees and what they are going to pay and things like that. When they call us we are here and we do have to sign the register, so that teachers know we came to the meeting. But if you look at the register for the parents who signed, you will find that the same parents come all the time.

In addition parents in the same school who abide by the rules feel that there is no need to comment on aspects of the school, which do not concern them. A parent comments:

They ask you at the meeting who wants to talk, and you are free to talk about anything. It is a open meeting and it is your choice to talk. But you see we do our things right so we don't have to talk.

### Discussion

Communicating with the family is considered a developmentally appropriate practice in Early Childhood Programmes ( Bredekamp 1992:65). From the data gathered it is heartening to note that schools use a variety of methods in trying to communicate with parents. However, the contact seems to be based mostly on the needs of the school, for example the meetings focus on the general issues and school fees. If the meetings are always based on routine

matters, then parents are not interested. One parent in school C indicated that “sometimes parents look at the topic and then decide whether to attend or not”. Hamby (1992:65) advises schools to alternate meetings and workshops between topics the parents have identified and those that schools think are important. The Open Days, Family Braai and other such functions are well attended; this may be the case because parents enjoy these events. Swap (1992:69) rightly points out that effective communication is based on relationships between parents and educators in which each respects the other’s contribution and expertise and contacts are rewarding. Schools need to be flexible in their approach especially in drawing up of meeting agendas. From the parents’ perspectives they are called to a meeting but they do not make the desired contributions for different reasons. In Grade R one may conclude that the arrival and departure time discussion is sufficient for both parents and educators, however parents need to be involved in other aspects of the school life which includes meetings.

#### **5.5.4 Personal contacts between educators and parents**

When educators were asked how often they contact parents, the general response was when there is a problem. The following excerpts indicate the responses from educators in three different schools:

School A: If there is a problem we send for them, we phone them or send a note or a message.

School B: When there is a problem. Yes, that’s right (laugh).

School C: When we need to see them, about a problem or something.

Only two schools reported that parents are quick to make contact with the school on their own when there is a problem. The principal in School A complained:

But let there be complaints, you see what I noticed with the Grade R, each parent is concerned with his or her own child, the teacher must make sure their child is comfortable, another child cannot touch him or do anything, we will get a call or they will come.

The educator in school B agreed:

... But parents would not come if there are problems in the class, if the child is performing badly or we want them to come and help, yet if there is a problem with the teacher, they are too ready to come and complain.

The principal in school B made the same observation and concluded that parents show concern only when they want to complain about a problem.

## **Discussion**

Educators contacting parents only when they have problems is not limited to this investigation (cf 2.3.2). The intentions of the educators may be noble, however, parents may misinterpret this. Epstein (1996:226) warns that the good intentions of educators may not pay off, if the only communication between the school and the home is concerning problems. Educators need to conduct positive communication to establish a base of good relationships to draw on, if they need families to help learners solve academic or behaviour problems.

### **5.5.5 Innovative ways of communicating**

Only school C mentioned parent interviews. The idea of meeting each parent personally is the start of the communication process. In school C no child is admitted to the school without an initial interview with the parents. An educator explains the initial interview:

The principal interviews all parents, both parents are interviewed, and the child comes in, and they have a tour of the school, she introduces them to the prospective teachers, gives the child a sticker, and asks the child please draw a picture. We explain everything, like bring your swimming costume, towels, little green bag on Friday morning, everything should be labelled, send money in a labelled and sealed envelope with the child's name and what the money is for and the total amount and that sort of thing.

The routine of parent interviews is followed through the year. The school formally reports on the child's progress four times a year. This is done twice a year via interviews. An educator in school C describes the process:

We have the parent interviews. We have a parent week in the first and third term so they can chose what time they want to come in, either in the afternoons or the evening, they decide which day will suit them and then we meet them.

The principal in school C regards the parent interview as an invaluable event:

The teachers have parent interviews, which are very useful. A lot of things that come out of those interviews are not necessarily school related but they have a huge impact on the child's development and how they are coping at school, but as I have said, it is very important to have that one-on-one interview.

Only school C records all contact with the parents. These records are a part of the school property and the "green card" moves up with the child till he or she leaves the school. The principal provides reasons for keeping such records:

They have a green card in which the teacher notes every time she has contact with the parent - just a brief summary of what was said, because you know what happens at the end of the year, when you recommend they need more time, then the parents say they have never heard this before, it's the first time this is being told to them. The teacher then brings out the green card and says "actually we had an interview in April then in June, you know it's all been recorded and it's a valuable record for the teacher as you go higher into the next grade.

On my visit to school C, I noticed a billboard placed at the school entrance at a very strategic point. Notices of the week's events were displayed. During the interview an educator in the school laughed and commented, "We have a billboard out there and it actually helps me to

remember". On entering the hall way there was a display of works of art and other projects with learners' names labelled neatly. When I complimented the principal on the display, she indicated, "Oh, if you come again you will find different things, we change it all the time according to the current themes". Parents use the same hallway and they have an opportunity of admiring their children's effort.

## **Discussion**

Interviews as a method of communicating are not new especially in Grade R and it is surprising that just one school uses this type of communication. Setting up the interview requires planning and time on the part of educators. The idea of reporting on the child's progress during an interview is a definite way of getting the parents to come to school, and the school, which schedules the interview during the afternoons and evening where most working parents can come, can be commended. Posters and billboards also fulfil an important role in communication.

### **5.5.6 Scheduling of contact time**

Although all educators agreed that it is important for parents to be interested in the child's progress and that they appreciate the involvement, most indicated that sometimes parents are unreasonable. The situation is very prevalent in school B, as one educator explained:

Then as we said there is no fence they just walk in whenever they feel like. Because it is so open they can come in from any side they want to. They are in and out the whole day, they walk around and there is no privacy. But sometimes, we personally tell them we are busy can you please come back later or come back at lunchtime, or else we will be talking the whole day.

In contrast the parents in the same school do not see their visits as a problem. In fact they view their visits as something that makes educators happy and view their visits as important in getting to know what is happening at the school. One parent remarked that: "And even the school allows us to come and find out about our children's progress. We are free to come to school whenever we feel like". Another parent in the same school believes that they have an

advantage as they live close by and so they visit often, whereas with the high school it is not so close so they visit once a month.

The third parent elaborates:

Only if you come to school you communicate with others, they tell you about something that is happening at school. And if you know somebody, like my friend I tell her this is what is happening at school. So if you don't talk to anybody you won't know what's going on, and if you sit at home all day you wouldn't know what's going on.

## **Discussion**

Educators view parents in a negative light as they interpret the reason for the regular visits of parents as coming in to check on them. Furthermore they find parents disrupting their day's work. Parents are unaware of this disruption and the invasion of the teachers "privacy" is the time educators spend with the children of the parents who visit all the time. None of the schools had a policy on parent-teacher contact time. If the school had a policy that stipulates when parents may visit the educators, then this conflict will be resolved. Epstein (1992: 61) found that a policy on parent involvement as well as school and teacher practice, are strong predictors of parent involvement in school and at home. An interesting observation that I made is that, not a single educator or principal mentioned visiting the homes of children. Henderson (1987:60-61) found that programmes offering home visits were more successful in involving disadvantaged parents than were programmes requiring parents to visit schools. In school A educators indicated that they drop off the children at home when they have not been fetched but did not indicate that they visit the homes. In the Early Childhood Family Support Programme, home visits were designed to give recognition to parenting roles and to enrich parent-child activities already being carried out (Shimoni & Ferguson 1992:113).

### **5.5.7 Levels of communication**

It is interesting to note that there are two tiers of communication. Firstly parents communicate with educators, and secondly they communicate with the principal. In essence

it would seem that the discussion with educators focuses on the child and problems that they may have concerning the child, whereas the communication with the principal focuses on the parents' problems as individuals, they may or may not be school related. The principals of all three schools indicated that they make time to listen to and assist parents. In the case of school A the principal claims solving problems and assisting parents takes up much of her time. She goes on to comment:

We have good communication at school. I think it is because of my attitude, I know every parent, I have been here, this is my seventh year, and I think I have this relationship with them. You know every child if they have gone up to Grade seven. They grew up with me and I know about the parents' problems. I counsel them and help them.

The principal of school B illustrates how he copes with some parents:

Sometimes a parent will come in cross and upset about something, you know, and I believe if a person approaches you with that attitude you need to listen to them, because if they have something on the chest that they need to get rid of and listening, I think is half the battle won. So I listen to them and then I try to encourage them.

The principal in school C on the other hand is not inundated by problems of parents. But she does stress the importance of making herself available to parents. She indicates, "I try to be available to parents as often as I am able to. If they need to see me I will fit them in".

## **Discussion**

The principals in all three schools were very positive about their roles of assisting and working with parents. It is heartening to note that although greater responsibilities of managing the school are thrust upon them, they consider assisting parents as an essential function of their role. There is also this understanding and acceptance that both the parents and the school have a vital role to play in the education of the child. One principal expressed this view in stating "We cannot do it alone, the parents cannot do it alone, it is a joint

venture". The principal in school B explained: "It's a partnership that we share with parents and that partnership is not only with parents, it's a partnership with the child as well...". The feelings reflected here are noble, however their practice does not reflect partnership. Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) do remind us that parents are more likely to become partners in their children's education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices to involve parents at school.

## **5.6 VOLUNTEERING**

This type of parent involvement involves recruiting and organising parent help and support (cf 2.3.3). It refers to parents who come to school to support learners' performances, sport or other events, or to attend workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (Epstein 1988:5). Parent involvement at school includes parent volunteers who assist educators, administrator and children in the classroom or in other areas of school.

### **5.6.1 Types of involvement**

In all three schools the most common ways of getting assistance from parents include:

- Relief teaching when educators are away
- Accompanying educators on excursions
- Collection of anti-waste materials
- Repairs and maintenance of school buildings
- Baking and sewing activities
- Sporting activities
- School functions eg. Fun Days, Fun Run, Family braais
- Transport for learners

Repairs and maintenance of the school building are areas where parents assist without any difficulty. They have expertise and are comfortable in assisting. In school C, which serves a more affluent community, the school is able to draw on the professional help of parents, as explained by the principal: "There have been individuals who have been wonderful, like the architect who has designed the preschool, organised the building and that sort of thing".

In school B educators are, likewise, appreciative of services rendered by the parents: “ We have an uncle of a child who is a carpenter, he is busy at the moment fixing the desks”.

It would seem that parents are not asked to help much in the classroom. Relief teaching involves merely watching over children and not teaching.

### 5.6.2 Innovative strategies

School C has different programmes of activities where they encourage parents to be involved. Some of the activities mentioned are:

- Movie evening
- Tuck Days
- Ice- cream days
- Media Centre activities

An exciting and interesting strategy to encourage volunteers, that is “bunny sitting” is noted.

We have two bunnies, we share it and this is how it kind of works. Parents have to volunteer to take the bunny home and care for it and then bring it back. And that’s actually booked for the whole year. It’s like you adopt the bunny for the weekend. The parents have to supervise how the child takes care of the bunny, feed it, give it water, exercise it and return it on Monday morning. I’ve got children waiting to take the bunny home.

In order to accommodate all parents the school schedules special activities for the weekends. The principal remarked: “There is maintenance, in which parents can help with the repairs, parents can help with the fun days, school galas, you see some parents are only able to assist on a Sunday”.

In addition school A often uses a system of trading off the non-payment of school fees for some kind of service that may be offered to the school. The principal explains the system:

We send letters to parents inviting them to come and help, like if they can't pay school fees you know when they get a grant, we ask them to come and help with their skills like carpentry, they can come and volunteer to do anything, maybe do voluntary teaching when the teacher is absent as well.

In school B parents' are required to "volunteer" their services largely on fund raising issues. The principal comments:

In terms of spending, fetes which we had last year, or through their children where we get forms printed and they can go out on collection drives, where they take the forms to their workplaces, where they can share in the responsibilities of fundraising for the school.

In the interviews no other examples of volunteering were mentioned by school B. The parents in school B, however, have some creative ideas on how parents can volunteer. The parents are of the view that if schools plan activities for them they are willing to be involved. For example a concerned parent in school B suggested:

You see now the school is gone... if you look at it from the outside, according to certain parents the school is looking very shabby and the education is not good ... if our parents got together, they can do something. If each parent did something, if somebody wants to cut the grass, another can contribute materials, the school can get renovated. Painting if every parent can, not a big amount of money, but something our school will have a good look.

## **Discussion**

Although parents are involved in volunteering their assistance in the activities of the school, the school decides on the areas in which they can help. Only school C makes provision for the parents to select the area and the time that is convenient to parents. Epstein et al (1997:9) proposed that schools should draw up schedules for volunteers that are flexible in order to accommodate employed parents. Although all schools mentioned relief teaching, no school offers any training to the parent on what they can do with the learners in the classroom. In

essence parents sit in the classrooms and act as child minders. Schools should organise volunteer work, provide training, match time and talents with school, educator and learner needs (Epstein et al 1997:9).

### 5.6.3 Recruiting parent volunteers

In all schools observed parents are approached by the school for help. According to the principal of school A:

I approach them for help; some of them come on their own, at the beginning of the year who say "If there is anything I can do to assist, please ask". We send letters home asking them to come and help.

An educator in the same school explains:

At the beginning of the year we send a circular home to get the name of parents and telephones of parents who are willing to assist in the school and we list the aspects down, like coaching, training, tuck shop, relief teaching, excursions and sports weekend.

The approach in school B is an informal one. The principal discusses his approach:

I have on occasion asked parents for help. But the response I must admit is not very encouraging. There are a number of ... a set group of parents who we have approached directly and said, we need your help in terms of relief teaching, some would help on sport day, whatever activities we have at school.

School C has a definite procedure for recruiting help from parents. The principal comments:

What we do at the beginning of the year we have a sheet, a letter that gets sent out to the parents to say these are the kind of things where you could help, like covering books in the media centre or gardening or sewing or helping with the movie evening like we have one this evening and then you will find parents

will say, “ Yes I am quite happy to do it” and then you need to approach them directly and say you have put your name down for movie evening that is on Friday and then they will come forward and do it. I noticed that if you use a direct approach, they are usually quite happy to help, than if you ask who will help.

What is interesting is that the school delegates the responsibility of organising volunteers to a parent who is a member of the school governing body in school C. She describes:

It all starts with a form. The school sends a form to all parents stating the areas they will like help in. Then the parents fill in the form to say how and when they can help. Then it comes to me and I make a list of the parents and we will call them when we need them. If I know that someone has offered their assistance but has not filled in the form, then I also contact them. Like the other day, I talked to someone who said that they have not filled in the form but would like to do hot dogs and a movie.

The principal also uses the initial interview to recognise talents and ways in which parents can assist. An educator gives an account of the principal’s response:

She says “ oh, ya, you are an accountant that’s wonderful, you know, you are a musician, how wonderful you will be welcome to assist us”. Like we have an electrician, and he comes and helps in many electrical things.

School C definitely enjoys success in respect of volunteers, an educator sums up the situation aptly:

But parents do come up and volunteer their help. Some of them will come and offer to make hotdogs on hotdog days, some of them will come and offer to cover books, to accompany us on outing, some will offer to do baking when we have cake sales. They are very keen to volunteer.

#### 5.6.4 Limited volunteering

According to the schools only a handful of parents come to offer their assistance. It is the same parents who help all the time. The principal in school C who has the most parents involved in volunteering claims that it is because she approaches them. She asserts “parents rarely come to offer, .... but if you say, will you actually help with the braai, and then they will happily do it”.

In some cases in school C parents are frank and indicate that they just do not have the time. A parent describes her schedule:

I find that there is no time to get involved in outside activities. I belong to a church group, then there is a fitness club and a running club and parents can get involved if they have the time.

In school B the principal believes that parents come forward to help when they can have fun and enjoy themselves. He states:

Some would help on sport day, whatever activities we have at school, they are the faithful lot who seldom say no. But when it comes to volunteering, generally “no”. When there is something that can gain from, have some fun .... then they are prepared to come and help.

However, in general only a few parents are involved on a regular basis. The principal in school B elaborates “These one or two will come on their own, they have talent and will offer their assistance in a conversation”.

The parents in school B agree that only some parents are involved. An involved parent expresses her concern:

I think we are involved enough. I am sure that the other parents can be involved. Every time the principal calls us, or the teacher calls us, are you

available tomorrow for relief teaching or anything like that we are always there to help, we don't refuse.

School B emphasises that parents volunteer because the schools requests it. There are a few parents who assist all the time, yet the school is selective and chooses certain parents. An educator comments: "We look for reliable parents who will be able to handle the class, we don't take anybody, and from our experience we sift out the good parents".

In response to my comment that parents do not come forward to assist because they may not know how to help, the principals and educators disagreed emphatically. They believe that the list that schools send out is sufficient to inform parents of the areas where help is needed. It is positive that the schools do send out the circular, but they work on the assumption that all parents are trained in sport, relief teaching and repairs. The open-ended list used in school C allows parents to select the areas they could help in, and this may be the reason for more volunteers in school C.

#### **5.6.5 Educators' attitudes to parents as volunteers in the classroom**

An educator in school C was very firm about the areas in which parents can be involved. She explains as follows:

We are very organised that it is not even necessary for the parents to be involved in the classroom. There are areas where parents can help, gardening, any mending, if there are any repairs to be done at school. There are lot of things parents can do, you know we levelled the fields, we needed manure, the sand pit, and there is always some job for a parent.

Another educator in the same school indicates that parents are welcome as observers.

I sometimes ask parents, if they say my child does not have any friends, I say you are welcome to come and observe, I personally don't mind, I sometimes think that it is like scales falling from their eyes, but the child cannot see the parent, because as soon as the child sees the parent, the child's behaviour

changes. But I think that it satisfies the parent, they can see their child is coping well in school and then they can carry on with their lives.

There is consensus amongst educators in school C that parents should not be involved in the activities in the classroom. However, in schools A and B educators are keen on having parents assisting in classroom activities. The principal in school A voices a concern about the lack of desired involvement in classroom activities:

They must get more involved, they can come into the classroom and help the teacher with group work, while the teacher is busy with one group they can help with the other group. They can help with the story telling, you know things like that, taking them out for their games, toilet training. These are things that they are used to.

The educator in school A agrees with the principal:

Even with our jungle gym the parents helped to set it up. But they must help in the classroom, we have a class of 40, the numbers are too big, the parents will be able to help if we tell them what to do. They can come in and observe what we are doing and learn.

In school B parents assisting the educator in classroom activities is common practice as expressed by an educator. For example, every fortnight when carrying out baking activities and where it is difficult for the educator to obtain ingredients, the parents assist and make what is required.

An educator in the same school supports this practice and provides a different example:

In my class parents do volunteer their assistance. Like when we have water play, you can't manage with 40 children, so I divide them in that way they do help. I also ask them to make play dough. But you find that it is the same parents.

A positive observation is that with the introduction of a transformed curriculum ie Curriculum 2005, parents are being invited into the classroom. An educator in school B describes her practice: "In OBE we have parents in our classrooms, like nurses, traffic officers, they can come in and talk, like builders they come in and show the children their tools, talk about their work". Encouraging community members to come in and address learners will definitely promote parent involvement.

## **Discussion**

Comer's School Development Programme emphasises parents working in the classroom where parents have a meaningful role in the schools that are directly related to educational activities and the curriculum (cf 2.3.3). The issue of parents assisting in the classroom activities is not acceptable to educators in school C. In contrast educators in school A expressed their need for help and welcomed parents. Only school B has evidence of parents assisting in classroom. Significantly both school A and B cited the management of large classes of 40 learners as the reason for encouraging parents in the classroom. In school C the learner enrolment is a maximum of 20 learners per class. This is an ideal number in a Grade R class, especially for the educators. This status and the fact that school C is well resourced may provide reasons why educators do not need assistance. However parent involvement in curriculum issues should not be based on the needs of the educators, but rather on the value or spin off this type of involvement can have for the child's development and growth. According to Swap's Curriculum Model (Swap 1992:58), when parents are involved in curriculum activities, it promotes the continuity between the home and the school (cf 2.2.3). If educators encourage volunteers in the classroom, then parents will gain an understanding of the teaching and learning in Grade R.

### **5.6.6 Parents' views of assisting in the classroom**

Parents do not feel confident about helping in the classroom. There is a perception that teachers are trained and know their jobs and that parents do not have a right to interfere. A parent in school A believes: "Especially when it comes teaching and education, I mean we can't give advice, we are not supposed to be involved, it's like we are teaching them their job. We don't know how". The second parent adds: "But when it comes to the activities in the

classroom I think the teachers should teach, they know their job". A parent in school C is of the opinion that teachers should be in charge of the classroom. She states " ..... they have knowledge and experience".

It could be argued that these views could change, should the schools provide a training programme for volunteers.

#### **5.6.7 Perceived advantages of volunteers for educators**

Educators in school A and C are grateful for some of the ideas they have learnt from parents. They compliment parents on their talents and skills. An educator in school A comments:

They help with puppets, worksheets and charts and costumes. Sometimes parents are so helpful, they have this knowledge, and we can learn from them. Like one parent knitted five little ducks and a Humpty Dumpty for me, it was so beautiful. If you inform parents of the themes, they are helpful and you can get them involved in making things related to the themes.

In school C similar sentiments were expressed. The parent shared her expertise with the educators and other parents. An educator explained: "... like sewing, we had this mother making duvet covers and curtains for the fantasy corner. It was so beautiful".

#### **Discussion**

Sharing and learning from each other is a positive aspect of home-school relationships. The School Impact Model is based on educators learning from parents, as well as parents learning from educators (cf 2.2.3). Although educators have expressed their joy when learning from parents, there was no indication from parents that they had learnt from educators. It is clear that schools do not recognise the importance of training parents to be volunteers. They have a fixed notion of what parents should be involved in. In Early Childhood Development programmes, for example the Reggio Emilia Programme parent participation in the day-to-day interaction during classroom activities is considered essential (Gandini 1993:5).

## **5.7 LEARNING AT HOME**

The school provides information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions, and planning. Homework does not just mean work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home and the community, linking schoolwork to real life (Epstein et al 1997:8).

In the Reception Year the situation is different from the other grades in the primary school, in that “homework” comprises of activities and projects that the young child has to complete in a playful manner (cf 5.7.3).

### **5.7.1 The school’s perception of learning at home**

Schools have a very narrow perception of learning at home. From the response of the interviewees it is clear that learning at home is perceived as “homework” or a task given by the teacher to the child to complete at home. Learning at home is, however, considered very important for several reasons. For example, the principal of school B views homework as a definite link between the home and the school. He explains:

You know giving homework or learning at home is very important, I believe firstly, it’s an extension of what the child has learnt in class. It reinforces what the child has learnt in class, also it helps the parent to keep in touch with what is going on in school, the parent sees the homework and the child may go to the parent for some assistance, the parent then becomes aware of what the child is doing in school.

The principal furthermore is of the opinion that through homework the parent has the opportunity of assessing what is going on in school. He believes that parents are encouraged to know that the school is keeping his or her child busy at school and that something worthwhile is happening at school.

This is an accurate perception, as parents in the same school did evaluate the school by the quantity of the work that the children bring home. A parent complained:

Sometimes the homework is too little, sometimes they don't get homework sometimes it is too much. It all depends on the teachers. It's mainly on the teacher for the child to pick up work.

The principal of school A considers homework an important aspect as it helps the child to work independently. In contrast the principal of school C has a different perception of homework. She believes that the school has a task of teaching and that parents should not be pressurised into helping children with homework. She explains:

But I feel very strongly about the fact that parents are under such huge pressure that if we are expecting the parents to be the teacher, the relationship that should be there, should be a bond with the parents is being undone, because not every child knows what they are going to do. A lot of them (parents) don't know what to do or they don't want to do it, or they are tired and they end up screaming at the child.

## **Discussion**

The schools view learning at home very narrowly, providing tasks for learners to complete is only one aspect of learning at home. Help at home includes encouraging, listening, praising, guiding, monitoring and discussion. Homework is not just a matter of bringing work from school; it is about homes as places of learning opportunities, developed by parents in communication with educators (cf 2.3.4). It would seem that parents are largely involved in monitoring the completion of activities at home. Learning at home is an important aspect of Early Childhood Development. The Parent Orientation Programme that targeted parents of kindergarten through third grade, focused on increasing parents' understanding of the child's curriculum and helping the family to understand how parents could enhance their children's skills at home. This programme was successful and parents saw themselves as teachers (cf 2.3.1).

### 5.7.2 School policy on homework

Although the principal of school C has a different perception of homework, this is the only school that has a policy that governs homework. School A and B have a timetable that is sent out to all parents to inform them of their children's homework. The principal at school B informs parents at a meeting of their roles in helping the child at home:

We mention the working environment, that the child has a set place where he does his work, that they check on the time that their children spend on watching television, that they control the time that their children spend at home at play and at work.

In school C the homework policy is discussed at a meeting: "We at the beginning of the year, we have each grade, where we meet with the parents, the teacher explains what her routine in the class is, what the homework policy is".

Although the schools have a schedule or programme that guides the activities that are given to learners, I noticed that the policy caters for the higher grades only. In Grade R the educators provide activities for learning at home on an ad hoc basis. Only school C has a specific task for specific days. A parent from school C explains the work that her child comes home with:

They do get homework once a week. But they do bring home a puzzle every Friday and then once a term they have the "Baker Baker Day" where we are expected to bake something at home with the child.

The homework in Grade R is based on school readiness. The schools encourage independent work and reinforce concepts that are being taught. On the whole the tasks given to Grade R learners are developmentally appropriate, the tasks in all schools include:

- Cutting
- Pasting
- Counting

- Colouring
- Smelling
- Tasting
- Looking for pictures
- Collecting items
- Watching a television programme
- Reciting poems
- Singing
- Sight reading
- Drawing

These activities are appropriate at a Grade R level and educators are cognisant that they should not pressurise the learners.

In all three schools mention was made of Outcomes-Based Education and it is clear that the introduction of a new curriculum has forced parents to become more involved. Parents are more concerned about their children's performance in light of the new curriculum and are encouraged to assist their children with activities at home. The principal of school C explains how parents are involved: "Like when they have done something in OBE and they need to ask their parents about their grandparents or find out little surveys or something like that".

### **5.7.3 Parent support at home**

Educators indicated that they have a problem in that they complete the tasks for the children. An educator in school B quotes an example:

But parents do most of it for them. Like when I gave my children a project, my programme organiser is pollution at the moment and I gave my children to make something using waste materials, using cardboards and things. A child made a tree house in a tree with branches etc, but you can see clearly it is not his work.

A second educator in the same school agrees:

But even with the drawing you can see it, you know the child's work and yet the parents will deny it. Even when there is cutting and sticking, in class the cutting is not perfect, but the parents will cut and stick for them and it is perfect.

There is the other extreme where children do not do the work and educators blame the parents. An educator in school C reports:

We also have homework that just doesn't get done. It is because parents don't have the time. If you say the book must be in on Wednesday, they will come on Friday with their books. And then the child wants to know why you did not give him a star. And then the puzzle as well, we have a puzzle library which must be back on Thursday and then we can count them for Friday. It gives the children some responsibility as well, but the parents' lack of responsibility rubs off on to the children as well.

In addition to the above concern, educators see parents teaching their children at home as a real problem. They maintain parents confuse the children and they are saddled with the problem. Examples cited by educators are that parents have taught the learners the alphabet and they teach phonics and that the formation of letters in the teaching of handwriting is incorrect. They feel that parents cause confusion and create problems for them.

In two of the schools educators suggested that parents should focus on reading to their children. An educator explains how they tried to relay the importance of reading to parents: "We had a book evening but actually it was very poorly attended by parents and the woman actually said that the best thing you can do for your child is read to your child every night".

## **Discussion**

According to most parents interviewed they are eager to assist their children at home. According to educators parents tend to do too much or too little for the child. Schools tend to focus on specific activities that are tangible and are returned to school. There are various tasks that learners can engage in at home, where parents can help. Thus there is a need for

the schools to revisit the nature of activities given to learners. In other words educators need to create a balance between what learners must do on their own and also create opportunities for parents to engage in some of the activities with their children. Swap (1992:72) is of the view that the most common method for home learning is to request the parent to read to the child, have the child read to the parent or have the parent monitor the child's silent reading. Schools should design a regular schedule of interactive homework (cf 2.3.4). The report of the trail of C2005 encourages parent involvement in learning activities at home (DoE 1997c).

#### **5.7.4 The need for guidance for parents**

Educators have rightfully accused parents of teaching their children incorrectly. Parents on the other hand believe they are helping. They have indicated that they need help as the methods used in the classroom today differ from the way they were taught. Parents also articulated the need for the schools to guide them on how they can help at home. A parent in school A requests that the school should have a meeting with them. He explains:

But they can have a meeting once and invite us. We are not teachers at least they can guide us. Because if we are going to help them at home, then it is going to help the teachers a lot, because they can go faster and then teachers won't have so much of a problem. If they can get us all together and discuss it, it helps you as a parent.

Another parent in the same school refers to the teaching of alphabet and explains that she is teaching the letters of the alphabet, in the way that she was taught. The parent also acknowledges that the child is going to get confused as they are learning differently.

Although parents acknowledge that they need help, they are afraid to ask for help. They believe that if they ask, they will be unreasonable. A parent comments as follows:

We do need that but we can't demand that from them, because their work is even harder. I mean they got thirty kids, and now to give us each a programme, to make a programme it is difficult. They don't have the time.

In school B parents indicated that because they don't understand they get their older children to assist. One mother remarked: "I have a son who is always there to assist his younger brothers and sisters". These parents have problems of illiteracy and a lack of resources. A mother was very emotional when she talked about the fear that her children experience when they cannot complete their tasks successfully. She recommends that the school should have an extra class after school and allow the learners to complete their homework.

.... they won't have fear at school to say I am going to come home with the assignment and I won't be able to do it, and my parents won't be able to help me and I don't understand it and my parents don't know it.

Providing extra classes is not a solution because learners must be trained to work independently and parents need to be involved in their children's work at home. The parents in school B also indicated that they do not have magazines for pictures, newspapers for articles nor books to give or to read to their children. A parent explains:

We definitely need a library. Because the library is too far and I walk with my kids. Its difficult to walk. You know how difficult it is difficult to walk; I have to pay R4 for the taxi to take my child to the library.

A parent in school C indicated:

I do assist my child. At this stage it is manageable because then the stuff seems to be getting harder and harder after that. I actually don't teach my child at home because they learn differently, they learn in a specific way, you know like they learn the alphabet in a specific way. When I write my child tells me, mummy you know you are not supposed to write like that. You are supposed to write with a "whip" (a stroke to each letter).

Parents become frustrated when they are not able to help with schoolwork. However, a parent in school C made a salient point:

Just being there for your child is helping your child. Playing with your child is also very important, like jumping on the trampoline, playing ball, kicking a soccer ball, talking to your child, communicating with your child is very important.

## **Discussion**

As parents tend to be more involved in their children's education at home than at school (Christenson, et al 1992:33), schools need to make the effort to provide guidance to parents on how they can help at home. It is essential to build on the existing strengths that parents possess. The confusion caused by parents teaching their children incorrectly can be avoided if the school informs or trains parents of the approved methods of teaching the alphabet or hand writing used in the classrooms. Alternatively educators can enlighten parents on the problems that arise when children are taught incorrectly and discourage parents from teaching at home. Families are by far the biggest influence upon the behaviour and academic performance of children (Bastiani 1995:7). It is therefore imperative that educators work with the parents and design programmes or workshops that will develop parent capacity in this regard.

### **5.8 DECISION MAKING**

This type of parent involvement includes parents being involved in making decisions at school and developing parent leaders and representatives. Decision making as defined by Epstein et al (1997:9) means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions towards shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas. This implies that schools should have active PTA/SGB or other parent organisation, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation. Moreover, the participation of parents on class committees is also advocated (cf 2.3.5).

Generally all participants made reference to the school governing body that are established in the schools in accordance with the South African School Act (RSA 1996a). The composition of the school governing body (SGB) includes parents, educator and the principal. However

from responses it became clear that when reference to the SGB was made, the interviewees referred only to the parents who serve on the SGB and not to the other members.

### **5.8.1 Limited opportunities**

To a certain extent, parents are involved in the decision making process at schools. These decisions are limited to the school budget with particular reference to school fees and to the odd occasion when parents are asked to vote on an issue. Although schools maintain that parents make decisions, the reality is that they merely approve the decisions made by the school management and the school governing body. Parents in school B indicated:

The school governing body calls up a meeting once a year and discuss school fees. The methods of payment and what they use the money for. They discuss how parents can pay the fees in instalments. And if they have any difficulties you must go and tell. We only make decision on school fees.

A second parent concurs:

They only call us for the school fees. I was here for every meeting that they called. Only if you got a problem with your school fees, you are welcome to speak to her (reference made to the chairperson) and explain about your problem, how many children you got. Then she decides to tell you how much to pay. I think if you got any other problem, you can approach her as well.

In school B they are not consulted on what the school fees should be but are only involved in discussing the method of payment. One parent commented:

We are not involved; I think that the school fees in this school is very reasonable, compared to other schools. The school fees have not changed over the last three years. But the parents make decisions on how they can afford to pay in instalments.

In school C a parent indicated:

They (SGB) ask for your opinion, through a questionnaire. They ask for your opinion, we don't really make decisions. We merely say we agree or not, we may be asked to vote on certain issues like school fees.

The interviewee in the same school who is a member of the school governing body confirmed: "Generally the governing body makes decisions on behalf of the parents. The parents are called to a meeting when there is discussion on school fees and things like that".

The school governing body has played a crucial role in drawing up the budget in schools. Generally principals are not trained as financial managers and this is an opportunity for parents to share their expertise. The chairman of school C's governing body in sharing his expertise in financial management won the confidence of the school management team. The principal explained:

I think I have had a fantastic chairman who assisted me to get to grips with the financial aspects. You know I was a classroom teacher and then suddenly I was involved with all this money and the move from doing everything in books on to the computer and he was absolutely fantastic but I think he is just one of those people that he has given so much of time to our schools.

Schools employ a very selective way of involving parents in decision making. Parents are only consulted if it is a major issue. Two schools provided examples of instances where parents had to vote. In school C the principal discussed the surveys that were carried out at the school.

Like for instance last year we were approached by one of our cell phone companies and asked about constructing a cellular mast on the school grounds. A survey was done; the parents had the opportunity to vote. We also had surveys about sports, whether they wanted outside coaches...

In school A the parent described an example of parents' involvement in decision making:

They asked us about the driveways and cars coming up the driveways in the morning. We had a voting, only one guy disagreed so we went ahead with it. But now the parents are parking on the top, but the grass is grown and we get our shoes wet when we come down. The governing body should also check and get someone to cut the grass. Now the chairman is not there to see how the parents are struggling

## **Discussion**

The principals at all three schools maintain that the parents make decisions on school governance yet practice is different. School governance includes discipline, admission, curriculum, buildings and other related policies (cf 3.4.2). From my observation it is evident that the parents are only involved in making decisions on school fees. The school governing body, which is supposed to represent parents, does meet with the school management to discuss other issues. Thus principals argue that parents are involved in decision making.

### **5.8.2 Lack of consultation with parents**

The parents are inconvenienced and their children are disadvantaged when the schools merely inform them of decisions already taken. Some parents expressed concern about the schools taking unilateral decisions on certain issues. This situation is especially prevalent in school B where parents come from a poor socio-economic background. The parents cited examples of times when they and their children were disadvantaged because the school did not consult with parents:

We would like to know what our children are going to be ready for, in the next term or something. Like if they want to go for excursions and at that time we don't have money. Sometimes they tell us next week we are going on excursions and we don't have money and our children don't get to go for the excursion because we are not prepared, because we don't have money.

The second parent cites another incident:

Even when they decide on the sports. Sometimes they want to have it in the grounds in town. This means we have to pay for transport to attend the sport. Also we have fear about sending our children so far away. But we can do nothing.

Although parents sign the indemnity forms for their children to attend, they are anxious. If parents do not sign then their children miss an event that they are looking forward to.

After parents have been elected on to the school governing body, they tend to ignore the parents who voted for them and seldom consult them on issues. A parent in school B complained:

They need to consult with us before they make decisions. Like most of the Grade R parents are here daily, the chairperson can speak to us, even if it is in the corridor. Because we also wait here from twelve o' clock, they can come and tell us what is going on. They should do that because we choose them, like politicians they should come back to us.

The schools do not see the need of consulting parents on every minor issue, for example, excursions. The principal of school C describes the consultation process negatively:

Sometimes I get very irritated with democracy because I think it is the biggest time waster in the world, you know it takes so long for decisions to be made. The governing body that I've got at the moment are very democratic, the chairman is very democratic and he likes everyone to have a say and I find that totally irritating.

The attitude of this principal is unlikely to further the consultative process and encourage greater participation of parents on issues which affect them and their children.

## **Discussion**

When schools take unilateral decisions that have a direct impact on the daily lives of parents then parents feel angry and helpless. Although principals argue that decisions are made in consultation with parents on the school governing body, thus including the views of all parents, it is evident that parents are often not consulted. Attending the school sports is a major event for parents and if the time and venue is not suitable for the majority of the parents then the school is obliged to make changes to suit parents. The present system whereby the school governing body takes decisions without consulting parents negates the very purpose of setting up such a body. The South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a) was designed to increase the role of parents in order to democratise governance in education. Swap (1992:68) warns that all parents should have an opportunity to respond. Every effort should be made to ascertain that any sample of respondents is representative of the whole parent body.

### **5.8.3 Parents and curriculum decision making**

Almost all educators and principals interviewed seem to be of the opinion that parents are not capable of making educationally sound decisions. There is a perception that the classroom and the curriculum issues are the responsibility of the school and parents should refrain from these issues. The comments made were very strong and in some cases undermined the integrity of the parents. The principal of school C has made her position to parents clear. She comments:

But when it comes to actual school matters, you know, like the curriculum and that sort of thing my governing body has never tried to get involved. I think right at the beginning I said to them this is my territory and, you know, nobody has ever tried to overstep the mark.

The educators in school C feel the same way. An educator comments: "No, no, they can't make curriculum decisions. We follow the syllabus of the Department of Education so we can't move away anyway".

The principal in school A believes that the parents should “worry more about the maintenance with the budget which is financial, but not with the professional side”.

Ironically the parents in school A do make decisions on curriculum issues, but the decisions are made about non-examination subjects. The principal describes: “They make decisions around language teaching. You see, we have Cultural Studies, which involves the teaching of Indian languages”.

What the principal did not mention is that the parents made the decision, because they wanted their children to learn their vernacular. The parents themselves appointed other parents as teachers of the Indian languages at school. The school governing body pays this parent a nominal salary.

The principal in school B refers to the limitations of the parents and feels that they do not have expertise to make curriculum decisions. The parents in both school A and B were very vociferous in indicating that the schools should offer extra-curricular activities. Recommendations made by parents in both schools include:

- Speech and drama
- Computer classes
- Karate classes
- Sports coaching
- Dancing classes

A parent in school B explained: “We don’t have anything in our community, but in other communities they have karate clubs, and other classes and I think that they should have it here”.

In response to why parents do not organise these activities and take the ideas to the school, parents indicate that they don’t have any idea where to start and, in addition, the school will not listen to them. A parent in school B responded: “The school, you see will make it easier for the parents. For parents that are doing nothing at home, they can come and get involved, it will be nothing for them”.

## **Discussion**

Although schools may boast about having a partnership with parents, it seems as if this partnership is not based on mutual trust and concern for the learner. Educators and principals acknowledge the need for parents to assist, however, the school does not see parents as competent to be involved in all aspects of the school life. There is a clear demarcation of each one's territory that is decided upon by the school. It is agreed that not all parents have expertise in curriculum and classroom issues, however leaving them out of the process is not going to promote home-school relations. In fact it would seem that the schools feel threatened and keep parents out to protect their own turf. Seely (1989:5) claims that in a partnership model school personnel need the advice, strengths, perspectives and resources that parents can provide to pursue their common mission. Parents cannot afford to be seen as passive observers. The schools should endeavour to empower parents instead of considering curriculum issues as "out of their reach" as pointed out by one principal. However, Munn (1993:8) explains that the school governing bodies have the responsibility of making certain that the school offers a balanced curriculum. Furthermore, in Curriculum 2005, parents should be involved in the macro planning where decisions concerning the Programme Organisers are decided.

### **5.8.4 The role of the school governing body**

According to the South African Schools Act (cf 3.4.2), the school governing body should be elected by the parents and should be a body that is representative of the parents. In practice this is not the case. In some cases the parents do not know the members of the school governing body. The principals indicated that they have had meetings to elect the school governing body but the attendance was poor. In school A the principal commented:

You know when we had an election this year, we had such a poor turn out, so the parents who were on the previous SGB, each one nominated each other and came in. When it comes to this sort of thing I notice parents don't want to take responsibility of getting on the SGB. They don't want that involvement as long as someone else is doing the work for them they are happy. They don't want that commitment, giving their time, right, seeing that everything in

the school is okay. Actually we had not more than 20 parents. Now that we have the governing body in, they are appointed by the parents.

The principal of school C pleaded with parents to serve on the SGB. Her experience is described as follows:

... But when it comes to school governance part of it, they are not really interested. To get people to stand for elections for the governing body is a problem. Usually you have to approach someone and say will you do this or will you find somebody who will nominate you. I don't think we have ever had an election for the governing body since I have been here. It is an actual rarity.

In school B although the attendance at the meeting was poor, elections did proceed. The principal explains:

Well, by law the parents had to participate in an election. The parents are the ones who elect them but they elect them on popularity rather than competency. One needs to be constantly involved in the community of the school to know the intricacies of what it takes to educate the child, from the lowest level to the highest level and the difficulties that one experiences. A parent is not involved to that degree. When it comes to competency I have my doubts about it.

Some parents who have sent their children to the school for the first time feel they were denied the opportunity of an election and have to tolerate the existing governing body for three years as elections only take place every three years. A parent in school A expressed his concern:

Also she has a child here so she had an opportunity of electing the governing body, but with me now, I did not have the opportunity. I was not involved in the selection. I don't know them and how they came about. But they are there for three years and I think that new parents should be involved.

Parents also feel helpless and disillusioned with the governing body even though they elected them. A concerned parent in school C comments:

You know sometimes they can be distant from parents. About half the parents do not know who is on the governing body, and if they have a problem, then they try to find out who to go to. The school had a special meeting to have an election. Parents had to volunteer to be on it, you had to nominate people and they serve on it. There was no election as such.

In school C a parent who does not have a child in the school still serves on the financial committee of the SGB. The principal admitted that: " His children have left our school long, long ago and he is still on the Trust". It is acceptable for a parent to complete a term of office if his or her child has left the school. However, in the case of school C the parent who serves on the Trust (financial committee) still serves long after his children have left the school.

## **Discussion**

The whole process of electing a school governing body is flawed in all three schools. It is acknowledged that parents do not turn up for the meeting and that people who are willing to take on the responsibilities or who are popular automatically become members of the SGB. However, such practices are not in the interest of forging links between the school and the parents. The schools seem to be violating the procedures laid down in the South African School Act, which requires a quorum for such a meeting. For example an attendance of 20 parents in a school of 634 learners is not sufficient to proceed with elections. Principals go ahead with elections only because they want to complete the task and have a SGB in place. In addition, provision must be made for the school governing body to co-opt parents who are interested even if they were not elected at that special meeting. The Act also stipulates that SGB members should have their children attending the school to be legitimate members. It is not acceptable to have a parent who does not have a child in the school to be a bona-fide member of the SGB.

### 5.8.5 Feedback to parents from the SGB

The SGB functions without the support of the parents. With the exception of the meeting to discuss school fees, parents are not invited to other meetings to discuss issues. Parents are eager to know what is going on in school and they maintain that they are left out. A parent in school B requested:

They must call the parents to a meeting and decide on times and classes. If they communicate with us, we will communicate with them... Because we feel that only some parents are always involved but we don't even get a call. Everybody should be treated alike.

Another parent in the same school made a similar plea, suggesting that the SGB should meet with parents to listen to their problems.

A parent in school A notes a similar observation:

The school governing body should arrange to meet and discuss our problems. You know I come everyday to school, I have seen the other two parents here, but we have never spoken to each other. Today is the first day.

The situation exists in school C as well. As mentioned previously the parents in school C indicated that about 50% of the parents do not know who the members on the SGB are and when they have a problem they try to find out. An interviewee who serves on the SGB became defensive and responded as follows:

I am a member of the SGB. Recently we did consult with parents. The school wanted to erect a cell phone tower, so we called a special meeting and parents had to vote on the issue. The governing body has a meeting when required to. They meet on their own. Then some members serve on the trust committee and they meet to discuss finance.

An interesting observation is that if the parents in school B have to address an issue or a problem with the SGB, they approach the principal. Parents who serve on the SGB are supposed to raise parents' concerns with the school management team, however there is a reversal of order in that principals raise the concerns of the parents. A parent in school B describes the procedure followed: "But if we have a problem we go to the principal. If the principal wants then he will ask us for a letter and he will pass it on to the governing body".

## **Discussion**

There is a need for school governing bodies to meet regularly with parents. On the whole parents are disillusioned with the parents who serve on the SGB. They feel betrayed. It would seem that the parents who are members of the SGB become part of the school management team and distance themselves from the very people they are required to serve. Epstein et al (1997:9) advises schools to include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups in the schools and offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents. From the responses of most parents in all three schools, it is evident that there is a lack of input from and feedback to all parents.

### **5.8.6 Contact with the SGB**

Schools and parents find it difficult to contact parents who serve on the SGB. The educators in school B indicated:

They don't get involved. They cannot help. If a teacher is away, you may want to get a member of the SGB to help. Some of them they are at home but they say they are not available. Yet in the morning they are available until prayer is said, until their children are settled down, and to find fault with you as a teacher, but they are not available to do relief teaching.

The principal of school C describes the situation in her school differently:

I don't think our governing body has the desire or the time to actually devote more than what they are already giving to the school. A lot of them are overseas half the time and on business, just to find a date when everybody can come to a meeting is quite a thing. They are very busy. Most of them are businessmen who are happy to give their ideas and expertise, but other than that, leave them alone.

In school A the educators highlight the point that parents on the SGB do less than other parents:

They don't really do much, they don't assist us and I think there is no need for them and I feel the old system was better, cause we are not getting much now. The school does everything. It is only for decision making that they are involved. They are not available even with relief teaching, we don't get any assistance. We get other parents.

In response to my comment that the parents on the SGB may not be available because they are working, there was an overwhelming disagreement from the interviewees. They responded that not all are working and that those that are working are not available even to take phone calls or queries in the weekends or on the evenings. Parents in school B were emphatic and indicated that the chairperson runs a private play centre on the school premises, yet she is not available to talk to parents.

Principals cannot make on the spot decisions. The unavailability of key people like the chairman and the vice-chairperson to agree/disagree with the principal is a problem. The principal in school C reported that:

.... Because you are at the core/fore front of things that are happening on a daily basis, you got to make decisions because you got to get on with it. Some of the governing bodies we have had, had like a small management, and they said if there are decisions to be made quickly, you contact the chairman or if he is not available, you contact the deputy chairman or whatever and go ahead with it.

## **Discussion**

The unavailability of members of the SGB makes the decision making process difficult. Schools need to have some agreement on “emergency decisions” and provide flexibility to the school management to make decisions in the case of an emergency. One principal described the difficulty in trying to reach the chairman and deputy chairman to close the school when educators decided to attend a protest march. In such cases the welfare of the children is a priority and principals should be mandated to take such decisions without consultation. However, the schools should not abuse the mandate and declare routine decisions a crisis or emergency. In the same manner the SGB should put in place mechanisms that will enable parents to communicate with them when they are not available. Parents are frustrated because they do not have the opportunity of discussing issues with someone. In addition parents who elect to serve on the SGB need to be cognisant of the responsibilities and commitment that is required of a member. Being available to parents and the school is essential if one elects to serve as a member.

### **5.8.7 Limited capacity of SGB members**

Parents serving on the school governing bodies who are not competent or do not have the expertise to execute their role functions that are stipulated in the South African School Act may feel disempowered. Parents have strengths and weaknesses like all other individuals and principals have to assist them. However, in certain instances, they actually capitalise on parents’ weaknesses. For example, the principal of school C admits:

But usually what happens is that I as a principal or some other individual who has strong views are able to sway the rest of the opinion. I don’t think parents really, well, certainly not my parents want to be bothered with what they want to see happening.

Furthermore parent involvement is viewed as interference. The principal of school C goes on to comment:

They have never interfered with the running of the school; they have never tried to eh! ... possibly because they never had to. I think that at the end of the day they have to do what I want them to do anyway.

Much of the principal's management time is spent building the capacity of parents to govern the school. The principal of school B explains his frustrations:

In terms of the powers given to them they don't have expertise to use the powers. Even in the running of finances of the school, to draw up a budget it is not an easy thing for a layman to do without going into studying what it takes, and what it involves, and they have to go into a learning process as well. Sometimes we have to, well every three years we have a governing body election, and if you have a new set of people coming in, then you have to re-teach. I as a principal have to explain. Like I have a new chairperson of the governing body coming in this year, and she cannot even conduct a meeting properly, and she sits with me for hours preparing notes on conducting a meeting and that takes up a lot of my time and she leaves all the decision making to me and at the meeting she tells me to take over. I mean that is not what is required; she is supposed to conduct the meeting herself.

Obviously this will defeat the objectives with SGB as stipulated in the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a).

## **Discussion**

The school governing bodies have difficulty in executing their duties because they have not been trained. The Department of Education has held workshops for parents on school governance, however this was done to promote and explain the South African Schools Act. In order to sustain the SGBs on-going workshops are necessary. There is no provision for training of new members who are elected. Principals of schools believe that the parents need training programmes and need to inform themselves. One principal articulated: " They cannot make educationally enlightened decisions, unless they read widely...". Schools, however, absolve themselves from providing the training and see this as the responsibility of

the Departmental officials. Eckart and Wissbrun (1992:120) advise that since both parents and schools share ownership and accountability for the end product, it becomes imperative that processes be created to support parents in the school decision making.

#### **5.8.8 Staff appointments by SGBs**

In all schools observed there is a very negative attitude towards the SGB making decisions on the appointment of educators. Educators, principals and parents shared this view. There is a perception that too much power has been given to the SGB and they are not competent to engage in such an important task. A definite tension exists between the teaching staff and the school governing body on this issue. The principal of school A felt disillusioned by the fact that she has experience of 30 years and has to be interviewed by “youngsters who don’t have a clue of what teaching is about”. She remarked:

Look, even with teacher employment, personally I feel they should not be involved in appointing, putting people on promotion at school. Because most of them don’t know much about the education system.

The SGB does have difficulty in the task of appointments of educators. The principal of school B cites an example:

The governing body also makes the appointment of temporary teachers and part time teachers. If we are short of a teacher they have to approve, and they have to share in the selection of teachers as well. I remember.... when they were involved in the appointment of people to vacant posts. They struggled with it, you know, reading of the CVs, understanding the content of the CVs. There were many questions and parents would ask, can you explain this to me, what is this person talking about, what is this whole situation, what does the job entail. I’ll say they are not competent. The Departmental person has to be there throughout the short listing, interviews, reading the CVs and so on, to guide the process. That in itself says that the Department knows that the parents are not fully competent for the tasks they have been given. I certainly

don't like being interviewed by someone who does not know what it takes to teach.

Parents do not have confidence in the SGB making appointments of educators. A parent in school A expressed his concern:

They should be involved in the housekeeping of the school, buying equipment, but not changing of teachers. They should not be involved in that. Because now by doing that they may bring in a new teacher who is not good and thirty children are going to suffer. The decision should be made by the Department of Education not the governing body.

A parent in school B had similar misgivings and felt that all parents not just the few serving on the SGB, should be involved in the selection of a principal.

In school A and B it is evident that the SGBs do exert power when it comes to the appointment of educators. In school C the school governing body delegates the appointment of educators to the principal and is only involved in promotion posts. The principal describes the situation as follows:

They have that delegated to me, I will inform them that we need a new Grade R teacher... does the budget allow for it and that sort of thing and they will say to me, fine if you can find somebody go ahead. They don't get involved in the interview; it will then be me and the head of department that will interview the candidates. Obviously with the promotion post, the governing body are involved.

## **Discussion**

Educators are central to the functioning of the school and the selection of educators is a crucial aspect in school governance. The present system of appointment of educators is criticised. According to an official of the Department of Education there are numerous disputes declared on promotion posts. The reasons for the disputes vary from nepotism and

corruption to procedural matters. The SGBs should be trained and should have educational insight to undertake such an important task.

### **5.8.9 Potential conflict between management and governance**

From my observations in school A it is abundantly clear that a power struggle exists between the school and the SGB. The principal and educators feel that their positions are compromised and the parents dictate to them. They are threatened by the powers vested in the school governing body. The principal was very emotional in stating: "Right now the governing body is very involved in the running of the school. Maybe they can do school fees, fund raising and things like that but they want to be your boss".

Educators are ignored and not consulted on issues that affect them and their working environment. Educators are dissatisfied with the manner in which the SGB treats them. They believe they are not treated with respect and as professionals. One educator expressed the following viewpoint:

In our school I think they should consult with the staff first, because in our school I think they feel they have so much power, they don't really consult with the staff. He (reference to the chairman) feels that the staff and the school belongs to them, and they make the decisions on their own. Yet when it comes to fund raising we are all involved, the whole school, but yet when it comes to certain things, the SGB, one person alone makes the decision.

Another educator added:

I agree because when it comes to fund raising we work hard, we work very hard, we don't get much assistance from them.... So far they haven't made any contribution. Now they have the power, they feel they can run the school.

The parents in school A are also negative toward the SGB. A parent suggested:

Personally, I don't see the need of having a governing body, maybe a parents' council or something like that for fund raising but not to run or govern the school. The Education Department should run the school. You see, there are so many decisions that have to be made and the principal has to wait to make those decisions.

In school B the principal and educators also expressed negative feelings regarding the SGB. The principal categorically states that they are incompetent and that he has to spend a great deal of time assisting the governing body. Educators on the other hand are negative as they find that the governing body does not provide assistance to the school. An educator comments:

The SGB should assist in fundraising, sporting activities. But in the past few years they have been given too much power in governing the school. And we have a problem with the governing body itself. But unfortunately all schools do not have good members on the SGB. They are not always helpful. Like if you talk about our school they never help. They don't get involved.

In contrast the principal and educators of school C indicate that the members are wonderful, supportive and that they go "beyond the call of duty". However, there is a contradiction in what the principal and educators say and what the SGB does. For example, the principal comments at different times in the interview: "they are businessmen and they don't have time, they don't want to be bothered, they will do what I want them to do, they don't interfere, they know my territory" contradicts the statement "they go beyond the call of duty". In fact the School governing body has delegated much of their responsibilities to the principal. It would seem that the SGB is intimidated and are involved only when the school wants them to be involved.

## **Discussion**

The relationship between the school and the SGB is a strained one. The principals and educators argue that the SGB has too much power. In response to a comment that educators and the principal are members of the SGB so they also have power, the educators

commented, "We are always out voted". As parents have a bigger representation (cf 3.4.2) they have a greater say in decisions. There is a need for both parties to understand that they are in partnership and that they are not competitors. Epstein (1995:703) acknowledge that although the interactions of educators and parents and community members will not always be smooth or successful, partnership programmes establish a base of respect and trust on which to build on. Good partnerships withstand questions, conflict, debates and disagreements and provide structures and processes to solve problems and are maintained and strengthened after differences have been resolved.

#### **5.8.10 Parents of Grade R learners and decision making**

Grade R does not appear to be a priority on the school's agenda. It would seem that the school gives less importance to Grade R because this year is currently not a part of compulsory education. Principals would often focus their responses on the higher grades, and I would have to return the conversation to Grade R. Parents are sensitive to this view. A parent in school A indicated that they are not nominated or selected to serve on the governing body:

But I feel that some parents from lower grades should be governing too. They should have the opportunities as their children move to higher grades they will still be there. Most of the parents have their children in the higher standards and will leave.

The point made is valid and that parents of Grade R children are not encouraged to become involved in decision making structures could negatively affect these structures in the future.

### **5.9 COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

This type of involvement involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development (Epstein et al 1997:9) (cf 2.3.6).

### 5.9.1 A narrow interpretation of community involvement

On the whole the schools are of the opinion that they enjoy community involvement. The responses on the other hand are a clear indication that they focus on the parents of learners in the school only and not on the community at large. All three schools identified one or more of the following methods of involving the community:

- Awards Day
- Fun Run
- Concerts
- Debs Ball
- Cultural Day
- Sports Day
- Swimming Gala
- Cake Sale
- Family Braai

In general the above list of activities is only applicable to school C. The other schools, serving a less affluent community tend to have fewer activities.

However, in all cases when schools do engage in these activities, they invite only the parents of children who attend the school. They do not include the larger community, thus parents who do not have children in the school are not included. An educator in school C indicated “It is hard to get involved if you do not have a child in the school. Having a child in the school is what we have in common”. The concept of the community as interpreted and practised by schools is focussed very narrowly to the immediate neighbourhood. The term “community” refers not only to the neighbourhood where the learners’ homes and schools are located but also any neighbourhoods that influence their learning and development. It means all who are interested in and are affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the school (cf 2.3.6).

### 5.9.2 Limited social events

Social events serve a valuable function of bringing parents, family members and the community members into the school. Parents compare their school experiences that is their school's social events that involved the community to that of their children's experiences and conclude that their children are disadvantaged. A parent in school B who attended the same school draws a comparison:

You know when we were in school we should have a concert every year. But now we are lacking most of the activities at school. Like they should have shows, the kids get involved also. They can have a cake sale, a flea market where we can come and buy things.... Like for the concert they can hire the hall, there is speech and drama there, and you go to the hall, they can tell us a certain amount you have to pay. But at least the parents and all the children will be involved. When we were in school, you know our primary days over here, we should have all that.

Another parent in the same school, however, expressed a different view:

They have Sports Day, Fun Run and Cultural Days. They invite all the parents. They even prepare for the parents. They do most of the work. They will ask us to run or walk with the children. Then after the fun run they will give us bryani (dish). The school prepares the meals for us.

In school A parents feel that the school focuses on purely academic activities and pay less attention to social events. There is the view that educators should not work in the evenings and this is the reason why the school does not host social events in the evenings. One parent in school A expressed the need for the school to have activities where parents can attend.

They have an awards day, but the teachers don't like to spend extra time and have functions in the evening, like when we were in school we used to take part in concerts. But I don't blame them because the labour law comes in, but

I think they should. They should have concerts and some fun events where the teachers and all the parents are there.

An educator who has lived for 47 years as a child, youth, married woman and a teacher in the same neighbourhood has a good knowledge and understanding of the people and believes that the community would get involved if the school provided appropriate opportunities. She concluded “but you see we did not get the community involved”.

## **Discussion**

Comer, et al (1996:24) in describing Comer’s School Development Programme (SDP) point out that although the focus of the school is on the individual child, the School Development Model views the child as part of the family unit and neighbourhood, as well as part of the community. The model provides a framework within which professionals, school personnel, parents and community members can collaborate. The schools that were observed do not make a concerted effort to include families. They view the child in isolation and not as part of the family and the community. In the Reggio Emilia Programme the entire community is involved, in fact the education system for young children originated in schools started by parents (Gandini 1993:4).

### **5.9.3 Community activities restricted to fund raising**

When schools engage in activities that involve the community, these activities are initiated for the purpose of raising funds and not to establish closer links with the community. In school C the principal, educators and parents mention the Family Braai. This event is held every term and it is an event that is declared a success by all. Parents are totally involved they “light the fires, sell hot dogs” and the school is able to raise funds. Parents who do not have children in the school are only invited or included when the schools embark on fund raising. A parent in school C points out:

The school does not necessarily involve the community. They have Fun Day where everyone is invited. They go out to the community for fundraising, you know, like Feed the Babies Fund. The children bring the forms and the

parents help them collect the monies. They also go out for sponsorships to the community.

The principal in school A acknowledges that community activities are generally activities organised by the school to raise funds. She justifies: “We tend to focus on fund raising activities”.

The schools believe that they collaborate with the community because they engage in on or more of the activities mentioned above (5.6.1). However, there is little evidence in practice that substantiates this belief. Activities like the Fun Run and Family Braais are planned with the objective of raising funds for the school and not to promote community involvement. The principal in school B admits:

Then there are activities that the school conducts, largely fund raising, which we engage the community in, where they can come in and have fun and at the same time put something into the school.

All schools engage in some form of community service. In practice they sell greeting cards on behalf of charitable organisations and collect funds for the “Children’s Homes and Feed the Babies Fund”. Schools A and B engage in such activities when they are approached, however, school C has a weekly programme. A parent describes the programme:

The school helps a poor school in town. On the last day of every term the community is asked to bring jam, or peanut butter. On Tuesdays we send vegetables to school, and the school collects the vegetables and send it to the poor school. On money week they collect money for the poor school.

It is possible for school C to engage in such a programme as the parents are affluent and can afford to make contributions. Whereas in schools A and B parents cannot afford to make such donations. In fact other schools have adopted school B as a project.

#### 5.9.4 The community as a resource

Schools situated in and serving an affluent community are able to make use of a number of community resources. For example, school C has and makes use of a variety of resources like the three libraries, swimming pool, sports clubs, fire station, clinic, police department, theatres, halls and shopping malls. The principal of the school commented:

We have good facilities in the community; we have three libraries on our doorstep. We have sports clubs who meet on a Saturday morning.... They have mini cricket on a Saturday our children go there, it's wonderful. It's a very privileged community.

Moreover, the schools use the resources to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The educators explained:

The traffic officer comes to school and teaches our children to cross the road. They drive their cars to the field, and they have their lights flashing the children love it. The fire department have come and sprayed the foam. The clinic sisters have come to check on hearing and vision.

Another educator added:

If you go to the local library, the book aids, that were initiated by our librarian, and the lady at the library put out the Year of the Reader project.

In school A there are fewer facilities. The principal mentions the swimming pool, sports ground, community hall and a library. She describes how the school uses the resources available to them and how the community is involved:

We have a Fun Day and the community gets involved, they come and help like being marshals on the road, the ambulance service come and offer their help, the policeman living in the community come and help as well.

A parent in school A agrees with the principal:

But they do invite the community. Like when they have the swimming gala they don't just invite the parents, they invite the entire community. They also use the facilities like the swimming pool, the community hall and the grounds. They also had a Fun Run and a Debs Ball where they invited all the people in the community.

However, when there are limited resources in the community, schools may encounter problems. An educator in school A commented:

We had our Fun Run we needed a doctor, the whole community supports him, and we asked him but he was not available. Eventually we had to get a nurse. So the community, even when you go for sponsorships, they just turn you down.

The situation in school B is totally different. This community has no resources. They do have a Fun Run where the community participate. However, parents, educators and the principal complain that there are no resources available:

There are no facilities in this community, none that I see, there is a little park here with a swing and a see-saw, but that is only recently, in the last three years. I have been here for 15 years now and for the first 13 years there was nothing.

## **Discussions**

The schools use the resources that are available to the community. However schools need to understand that the community is broader than the neighbourhood and that a lack of resources in the immediate environment should not hinder community involvement. For example, on my way to school B I noticed the police department, a shopping centre, a market, churches, temples and a mosque. The state hospital and welfare department are about 10 kilometres from the school. The temple that is only 2 kilometres from the school has been declared a

national monument. These facilities can be utilised, it requires planning on the part of the school. The problem herein is that schools do not see the school as an institution that is a part of the larger community. They operate and function in isolation. The community resources should not only be evaluated by social or economic factors, but also by strengths and talents available to support learners, families and the school (cf 2.3.6).

### **5.9.5 Participation of the school in community projects**

It is important for schools to be seen serving the community by participating in joint projects or taking part in community events (Epstein et al 1997:8). Although school B does not have access to resources, it is the only school where community projects have been undertaken. The community that is, the nearby private hospital and a private doctor have initiated projects. The educators from the school and the staff at the hospital were involved in the Fun Day. In another community-initiated project the Parks and Garden Department had an operation clean up in this community. Educators, parents, children and all members of the community participated.

The principal on the other hand maintains that he was instrumental in getting the community involved:

Like we had a clean up operation where the community and the Health Department were involved. In fact the Health Department approached the school to get involved in some kind of a project that will be an example to the community, but I suggested why not involve the community. So we involved the entire village in the project, we had the school children going around, chanting, holding placards and so on.

Both school A and C have hosted functions for the senior citizens. These functions were organised by the school. In school A this event was hosted to mark The Year of the Aged. An educator explains:

We had the Year of the Aged. The educators made all the arrangements and we asked parents to help. We hired the hall, we got sponsorships, and we bought gifts for the old people.

The school should endeavour to host such functions every year. Epstein et al (1997:8) recommends that the schools should offer services to the community by means of art, music drama for seniors and others. In school C they also cater for senior citizens, however, only the grandparents of the learners are invited.

We have a grandparent's assembly but then we only have our own grandparents. Our choir is invited to sing at the church down the road. They have an end of the year Christmas party. They have a party for the pensioners and they invite us to come and sing to entertain the pensioners.

The principal of school C on recalling the community projects made a concluding remark: "You know I haven't really given the community involvement much thought, we generally focus on the parents who have children in the school".

An interesting observation is that school A values the respect commanded by certain members of the community and calls on them to resolve conflicts at school. The principal explained: "When there are problems, we get well known people in the community coming to help to resolve the problem". This situation is very common in KwaZulu Natal especially in the rural areas where the Indunas or Chiefs wield a great deal of power. From experience I found that their decisions sometimes overrule the Department of Education's plans or decisions.

## **Discussion**

It is evident that there is collaboration with the community. However, because schools have a narrow interpretation of community involvement, the activities focus on parents who have children in school. Epstein et al (1997:8) advises integration with the community through partnerships involving school, civic, counselling, cultural, health, recreation other agencies, organisations and businesses. When the issue of community involvement was raised in my

interview with educators and the principal, the responses were limited to activities with parents. In some cases principals admitted that they never thought of community involvement. One principal stated: “ But I think we need to get the greater community involved, because generally the parents are invited”

#### **5.9.6 The use of school facilities by the community**

Parents are grateful for the use of the classrooms at school for community activities. They view this as a favour to them by the school. A parent indicated:

They facilitate the Madressa (religious instruction) classes in the afternoons for the children. They let the classrooms out for any cultural activities, dancing classes, church groups.

The schools do allow the community to make use of the school facilities, however, in some cases the community abuses the school facilities. A principal of school B who is in favour of the community using the school with the permission of the school, explains that problems are encountered when the community does not seek permission to use the school facilities. He describes the community attitudes as follows:

The parents here feel that this is their school, so they come here and use the classrooms; some of them have key access to the classrooms. They have their own keys and use the classrooms without the knowledge of the management of the school, also they use the school grounds over the weekends, after school hours and so on. We had a fence erected around the school. They broke the fence, climbed over it just to get access into the school and they feel they own the school.

A concerned parent in the same school agrees with the principal and provides a reason for easy access to the school:

The main thing is that we need a fence badly. Before when there was a fence it was nice, even when you trespassed you were put in jail. When we attended this school, it was very good; people should just admire our school.

The school has to bear the cost of cleaning up the school although the community uses it over weekends and afternoons. In school A the community does not abuse the school, however they do not clean up after use and do not volunteer to assist in cleaning up. An irate educator expressed:

But they will use the school to run classes and things like that, and they don't pay for it. Even these organisations they will not say one day we will bring some people and help to clean up the school.

## **Discussion**

Schools and the parents need to take joint ownership of the school property. If parents are allowed to use the buildings or the grounds, it should be viewed as a right of the parents and not a privilege. On the other hand the community should behave in a responsible manner and have some degree of accountability. Educators in school B are justified when they accuse parents of "destroying their teaching media" when parents use their classroom. These problems can be resolved if both the community and the school have common goals for the school. The community is an integral part of Swap's partnership model, however an important precept of this model is that the school, parents and the community must have a shared sense of mission about creating success for all children. The challenges facing schools is to solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds and locations for collaborative activities (cf 2.3.6).

### **5.9.7 Information about community services**

Effective community involvement is hindered by several factors: (i) schools involve the community only when they raise funds, (ii) schools define community very narrowly, (iii) schools did not give much attention to involving the community, (iv) lack of community resources and (v) negative attitudes. The schools also work on the assumption that parents

are aware of the community services that are available to parents. During the interviews educators and principals did mention problems among parents, such as marital problems, alcoholism, drug abuse and child abuse. However, no mention was made of referring parents to services in the community that can assist parents. Actually it is the responsibility of the school to co-ordinate such services and make them accessible to parents. Most parents especially in school A and B mentioned that they want to learn and the school should help them. A parent in school A commented:

The school should arrange talks for the community about drugs, child abuse and cholera. The other day my daughter told me to boil the water and then drink it, I asked her why. She said because you will get cholera. Even HIV and AIDS, the parents must know.

## **Discussion**

According to Epstein et al (1997:8) the community is one of the overlapping spheres of influence on learners' learning and development in the theoretical model of partnerships. In practice schools are required to provide information for learners and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support and community activities that link to learning skills and talents. Schools should ensure integration through partnerships involving school, civic bodies, counselling, health, recreation, other agencies and businesses. In this regard all schools observed do not accommodate the families of the learners. KwaZulu Natal has the highest number of people infected with HIV/AIDS and the people most vulnerable to contracting HIV are the poor, unemployed and those that do not have access to health facilities (cf 3.6). In addition all three principals mention divorce, and the principals in school A and B highlighted problems of child abuse and alcoholism (cf 5.4.2). In view of these problems it becomes imperative to provide information of available social services that can provide support to parents.

### **5.9.8 The relationship between educators and the community**

Although parents agree that it is not essential that educators who teach in a school should be living in the same neighbourhood, they do acknowledge that it would be an advantage. They

believe that if educators lived in the community, they would be able to interact in more effective ways with the people in the community. The principal in school C who lives in the neighbourhood confirms what parents believe. She explains:

If you are travelling 50 kilometres to the school it is never going to be your school. If it's the school down the road and you go and watch the children play cricket and be of help you feel that it is your school.... You know if there isn't anything not 100% right they will phone the school and say we noticed this, like they will keep an eye on the school grounds on the weekends ...

A parent in school A pointed out that if educators lived in the neighbourhood, they will understand the values and standards of the parents better. He draws a comparison of an affluent area where people are living with "high values and standards and they don't talk to each other" and the area where the school is situated where "if anything happened to you, the whole neighbourhood is there to help".

## **5.10 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Participants agreed unanimously that when parents are involved in the education of their children, it has benefits to the learners, the school and the parents.

### **5.10.1 Benefits to learners**

Educators and principals through their experience have found that when parent are involved, their children are better achievers and "it boosts the child's confidences". The principal in school A indicated:

Children enjoy it when their parents are involved. They get so proud when their parents come in. A child was so proud that his father came in to get all the desks fixed. All the parents who help at school, their children are better achievers.

The principal in school B makes a similar observation:

The children love their children being involved, they will come up to me and say “My mummy is coming to do tuck today”, it makes them feel so special and I think it makes them feel that their parents care about their education. I actually wish parents could see the look in the child’s reaction, cause they are so happy that their mums have come. The child feels so proud and it makes them grow in confidence.

Educators in school C agree that learners are well adjusted, better achievers and very happy. An educator commented “But those parents who are supportive, usually have the most balanced, stable kids”.

An educator in school B makes a similar observation: “And I think that pupils also gain confidence knowing that their parents are involved and they are not left all alone”.

Parents also notice the difference in children when they visit the school or get involved in the education of their children. Parents from school A, B and C conclude that the child knows the parent is interested and the child knows that he is not left alone, there is someone on their side to help them.

My child gets so excited when I help on tuck days. You know they say, that’s my mum, they are so proud and I think they like school better and are more comfortable.

The kids also feel that our parents are involved, they show more enthusiasm; they say you know my mother she knows my teacher and she comes to school. They feel excited and they learn better.

Children value education and are motivated when their parents are involved. The principal in school B provides an example:

For learners when their parents get involved in the school it motivates them, because there are some learners who feel that school is forced on them. I have had an experience with a black pupil, he would rather go roaming around or

find some work, but he says “My father says school is important and I must come to school”. If parents get involved in the life of the school then the children feel that school is an important place and my parents think it is important and they are getting involved in the school.

### **5.10.2 Benefits to the school**

Educators feel that when parents are involved it is positive as they have a better knowledge and understanding of the child. They are able to handle problems with sympathy. An educator in school B stated: “We also understand the parents better, the problems they are having, sometimes we don’t know that a parent is divorced”. The principal in school B agrees:

For educators they get to know the parents, the homes that children come from, we understand children better; we know who their parents are and where they are coming from.

The educators in school A hold similar views: “Also the better you know the parents, the better you know that child you are teaching”. The second educator in school A describes her personal experience:

You have a closer relationship with the parents. It gives us a better understanding of the child’s background, the home that the child comes from. And automatically I feel if the parents come then it will enhance the children’s work and attitudes. This helps the parent and teacher to work together.

Schools believe that they need to have background knowledge of the child and where he or she is coming from and it is through parent involvement, they receive such information. They agree that the information influences the way the school approaches parents.

The school also benefits in terms of resources and financially. Educators in school C acknowledge the work done by parents and welcome such involvement. An educator acknowledges:

I think with all the teachers we are very welcoming. I think that also financially, that the school is on a good wicket, because those parents are non-working parents they are here because they want to be helpful. They do so much physical work, fetching things and carrying thing.

A parent in school C agrees in adding: “Also if parents are involved it can help the school like financially, the donations that are made and other help, shows the child you are interested”.

Parents find that the schools benefit because it reduces the educator’s workload. A parent in school B expressed:

The teachers are happy when they see that parents want to help. The workload is less for them. It makes it easier for the teachers because they know that the parent is going to help the child.

Parents in school A maintain in assisting their children with learning at home, “It is helping the school”. In addition when parents are involved it motivates teachers to do a better because teachers “will know that the parents are responsible and they feel good”.

### **5.10.3 Benefits to parents**

Parents also benefit when they are involved. Generally parents say that they get to know the educator who is teaching their child, they make friends, they learn a lot and they feel good when their children are happy. A parent in school C finds that because of her involvement “it is much easier to talk to the teacher”.

Parents are able to communicate better with their children. They indicate that when they visit the school, they are able to identify with the child’s experience when their children talk about school. For example, a parent in school C explained:

The children just love it, and also you meet their friends, and when they say their names, it is much more familiar and you get to know teachers better.

By being involved in the school parents interact with other parents. In this way social and racial barriers are overcome. The principal in school C recalls the first family braai held at her school:

I remember when we had our first family braai, we had about three parents of colour and parents didn't know how to find one another. Now when we have a family braai it is such a joy to see the whole community getting together, there's no like whites go and sit on one side, everybody is mixing happily. I think that's also helped because we have this diverse community living in the area.

Parents gain knowledge of what their children are learning at school and are better equipped to help their children at home. A parent in school A described how her involvement in relief teaching helped her to help her child at home. She provides an example: "See with my child I teach her, this is the mother letter and this is the small letter and the sounds because I help in the grade one when the teachers are away, so I know".

Educators in school B found that when parents are involved, they grow in confidence and feel more comfortable in school. In the educator's words:

Well, having the parents involved, they have closer contact with all the teachers, they feel more comfortable, so they don't feel that a person is on a little platform, you can't approach them if you have a problem or if you need an input from the teacher.

Relationships are formed and parents get to meet each through their involvement. This benefit seems most pronounced in school C. The principal of school explains how the fund raising events have drawn parents and parents, parents and teachers together.

I think that a lot of friendships are made, that I think are often lasting friendships and that's what I like about parents being involved in fund raising activities. At the end of last year we were counting up all the money for our fun day and it was about R25000. One of the principals from the other schools

walked in and said, you know if you charge each child R100 extra on the fee you would have had R25000 without any effort, and it is true. But there is another aspect to fund raising as well; the friendships that are made, people from different communities are working together. People from different communities have now become friends.

Parents share information about their children and they enjoy being involved. The parent who organises the Mother Support Group in school C discusses her insights:

I find many parents assisting me, in fact I think they quiet enjoy it. They also get to meet other parents and they share ideas about their children. Like the mother support group... we meet once a term, we have one coming up this evening so that the working mums can come as well. We do have a get together and that is to get to know the other parents. Anyone who wants to come is welcome and if they want to bring a friend, it's okay. I am the chairlady so I normally write the invitation and I get the principal to sign it.

The transformed curriculum has forced parents to be involved. A parent in school B is of the opinion that the change has benefits to parents. She made the following comment:

Actually since OBE has come in. Previously it wasn't like this, it was only during the meetings. But I think it is better because the parents are getting more involved now, they are understanding the teachers better.

## **Discussion**

There is a vast wealth of information about the benefits of parent involvement to learners, the school and to parents (cf 2.2.3.1). In the present study benefits to learners, parents and the school are also evident. The benefits however are limited and this is because the extent of parent involvement is also limited. If the school offered parenting programmes to parents, then a benefit would be that parents will have a greater understanding of and confidence about parenting. With reference to decision making, if parents were truly involved in the decision making process, then they would have a feeling of ownership of the school and

would be making inputs into policies that affect children's education. One can conclude that the existing parent programmes in schools do not achieve the maximum benefits to parents, learners and the school. Epstein (1988:60-62) found that schools that relate closely to their communities outperform other schools. Moreover, involving children from low-income families have the most to gain when schools involve parents. However, Epstein (1988:61) warns that parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long lasting and well planned.

## **5.11 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

### **5.11.1 Distance between the home and the school**

In school B approximately 50 % of the learners attending the school travel daily by bus or taxis. According to the principal they have schools in the township that they live in, but attend this school because their parents believe that it is a better school and they want their children to learn English. It is evident that because they live far away from the school, there are problems with the home-school relationship. Communication is cited as a huge problem. An educator at the school B commented: "I suppose with our black parents they work and stay far away and our messages don't get home, so parents do not come to school. The problem is a lack of communication".

However, some educators believe that the parents are not interested. The second educator expressed concern indicating that when educators leave the school, they find children still in school. It then becomes the responsibility of the educators to arrange transport for the learners. This situation is not acceptable to educators and they conclude that the parents are "irresponsible and disinterested".

### **Discussion**

The lack of communication between the parents and the school is a barrier to parent involvement in the case of school B. The distance between the learners' home and the school is a problem. Firstly the learners have to get up early travel to school and return late in the afternoon. The learners spend a great deal of time waiting for transport. Parents have the

same problem and do not attend meetings. On my visit to the school I found that the children were playing on the grounds and some of them were outside the school gate. The principal indicated that the taxi does not have a fixed time to pick up the children and this makes it difficult for the school, as teachers have to keep an eye on the children even after they are dismissed. The Department of Education has a policy governing the radius that schools should use when admitting learners. However, at the same time the Department of Education stipulates that no child may be refused admission if there is available space. Thus schools are faced with a dilemma and admit learners who do not live in the area. This situation is, however, not in the best interests of children.

### **5.11.2 Negative perceptions of parents**

Educators and principals are of the opinion that some parents are not interested in the education of their children. One educator remarked that parents see the school as a crèche; they leave their children with the knowledge that they will be taken care of. In the words of an educator:

... and with my black parents they don't even try, like when you give them something they either bring it back or they don't. They don't attend meetings, they don't collect resources.

Another educator in the same school emphasises the point: "Especially with my black parents, we have to phone them to say look your child is still in school. Those are the ones who come to school without consent forms".

The parents' economic status is seen as the reason for the lack of interest. In the words of the principal in school A:

You see we have the group who are the sub-economical group, and we have the others that are okay. You find that they are more involved and the others don't care. They are not involved in the actual education of their children.

Educators in school A reported that they have never met some parents and they are of the view that parents “don’t care at all”.

The principal in school B makes the same conclusion: “This is largely a low socio-economic environment and I don’t want to generalise or come to any conclusions, but from my experience it seems that people living in that kind of area generally seem to be disinterested”. The principal of school A feels that “it is apathy and some of them just don’t care, they know their children are bad and they just don’t want to do anything about it”. To deduce that parents are disinterested because they are poor is being judgemental. This is an incorrect assumption and very characteristic of stereotyping that exists in schools. Epstein (1995:703) rightly points out that irrespective of parents’ socio-economic status, all parents want their children to succeed (cf 2.3.1).

### **5.11.3 Dual career families**

In all three schools the educators and principals indicate that because both parents are working, communication with parents as well as parent involvement is a problem. In addition parents do not have the time to assist their children at home with tasks that have to be completed. The school is sympathetic and indicates that both parents need to work to support their families. The principal in school C rightly observed:

The biggest problem is that most of the parents work, there are very few mothers who are not working any more and parents are under huge stress just to support their families, you know just to keep them financially supported. I think that it is just another stress when they have to come to school.

From the interviewees’ responses it is clear that the number of working parents have increased. An educator in school C makes the following observation:

But I still come back to working parents, before there were not like actually working parents but now they are doubled, you find her leaving the child and just rushing through the door. We actually have mums that are working; there are lots of working mums who get involved via a phone call.

In many cases both parents work and the parents do not have a support system. The school provides baby sitters only at very important meetings. An educator recalls:

You know the book evening was so enlightening and only one parent in the whole of Grade R attended. It must be quite difficult, especially when they come home, they bath their children, and not everybody has a family support system where their grannies are involved.

The problem of non-attendance at meetings in school B was attributed to both parents working. Parents explained that some of the parents work, so the school has the meetings in the afternoons and on weekends.

#### **5.11.4 Parents' fears**

It would seem that some parents do not interact with the school or become involved because they are afraid. This situation is especially prevalent in school A. All interviewees in school A had something to say about parents being afraid. The principal of school A mentioned: "Some of them could be scared, they have to come and talk to the principal, some of them are very simple they are afraid".

Educators in school A:

I think that parents are afraid, and at a meeting we do approach them and tell them what is required. Like with relief teaching they are afraid they think: how am I going to cope with the class? So I am sure they are available but they are afraid.

Parents do not come forward to assist or to speak to educators because of their circumstances. A parent in school A contributed the following as factors that hinder parent involvement: "Also some parents are poor and are embarrassed and they don't have transport, they are not well educated and don't come forward to help because they are afraid".

The educators and the principal in school A have rightly concluded that some parents are not involved because they are afraid, however, they seem to accept the situation without concern. If schools reach such conclusions, then it should be the first step to finding a solution to the problem.

#### **5.11.5 Grandparents as caregivers**

In school A and B parents leave their children with the grandparents, many of whom are illiterate. The children are picked up on a Friday and go to their parents for the weekend. An educator in school B describes the situation:

Especially the grannies most of them are grandparents, the parents don't live here or are working. The children are dropped off with the grandparents in the morning and they go back to their homes in the afternoons or they are dropped off on a Monday and picked up on a Friday. The grandparents cannot read the notices we send home.

The principal of school A indicated that a lot of parents "depend on their parents for help and support, they are living with their parents or they leave their children with their grandparents".

The grandparents take care of the children but are unable to fulfil further obligations of attending parents' meetings or other such events organised for the parents. They are not able to help the children with activities that children engage in at home because many are illiterate.

#### **5.11.6 Inadequate teacher training**

When I asked educators if their training had helped them to cope with parent involvement, the first reaction was "Oh that was a long time ago" and they merely laughed. All educators indicated that aspects of parent involvement were theoretical and very different to the reality. They did not benefit from the courses offered in training. In school A the educators were very critical of the training received:

I was trained through a correspondence college, we did the course but there is nothing you can use and apply in your classroom. The work done was just a piece of paper.

Another found some aspects of her training beneficial: "My training did not help me but the workshops that we had, was more practical and that really helped".

Although the educators in school C expressed the same feelings, they have an advantage in that one educator had a degree in psychology and another worked in an assessment centre. Both educators admit that they learnt through maturity and experience. The third educator in school C believes she learnt more from her colleagues. She describes her teacher training experience as follows:

I am learning more from my colleagues, than I learnt at college. I am not putting them down but they teach you more the theory, and then you go out on practice and come back, but then you don't have practical on how to deal with parents.

In school B the educators identified a need for help in this area:

You see today's parents most of them are leaving their children with their grandparents. And in this school we have lots of them. We have single parents, children in foster care, divorce and even abuse. The grandparents are illiterate. These issues complicate issues. We need training and skills to cope with these situations.

## **Discussion**

There is a dichotomy between theory and the practical situation with regard to parent involvement. The theory that is offered in training courses is frequently not relevant and cannot be applied in practice and in some instances there is a non-existence of theory in courses. Teacher development programmes need to provide educators with skills that will assist them in working with parents. According to these educators, the training provided is

inadequate. In chapter three (3.6) a detailed discussion of contextual factors that impact on parent involvement was presented. Educators themselves have identified these factors and have acknowledged their need of skills to cope with these factors. Leitch and Tangri (1988:73) found that few educators received training in parent involvement in the courses that were offered in their training institutions. Most educators depend on their experiences in dealing with parents. In view of the shift to an Outcomes-Based Curriculum and the move to making Grade R a part of compulsory education, there is a need to equip educators with skills and knowledge to cope with this paradigm shift.

It is therefore necessary to provide short courses that will deal specifically with skills required to cope with parent involvement. The present Norms and Standards for Educators (RSA 2000a) document makes provision for educators engaging in 80 hours a year in some form of professional development. In addition the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) (RSA 2000b) should design courses and provide learnerships on parent involvement, for the re-skilling of Grade R educators. Although the educators are qualified they need training that is relevant to be effective in the present climate. The higher education institutions should ensure that parent involvement courses are offered.

## **Discussion**

The factors mentioned as barriers to parent involvement has also been documented in literature. In many cases both parents work outside the home, making it difficult for parents to attend meetings. Time and circumstances may prevent even interested and concerned parents from participating in school activities (Jackson & Cooper 1989:31). Educator's negative attitudes towards low socio-economic backgrounds prevent effective parent involvement programmes (Chrispeels 1992:367). Low-income parents have been labelled as disinterested. Racial differences can also be viewed as a barrier between disadvantaged parents and schools (Moles 1993:35). Educators' references to the black learners in school B may be seen as a subtle form of racism. The comments on the black learners were generally negative. Swap (1993:16) warns that children who are racially, linguistically or culturally different from their educators may experience discontinuities in values between home and school or may lose self-esteem as they see little of their own culture in the curriculum. In addition it must be noted that although parents who work are less likely to participate in

activities at school buildings, they are just as likely to be involved in their children's education at home than non-working parents (Dauber & Epstein 1993:60).

#### **5.11.7 Lack of support from the Department of Education**

All principals found that they do not get adequate support from departmental officials as a result they have little time to devote to issues like parent involvement. They are inundated with issues of repairs to buildings, finding means of running the school with a limited budget, complaints from parents, educators and the SGB and handling other professional matters. The principal in school A reported:

Today's situation is like being a manager. Like anyone running a concern. Before we should run the professional development at the school. Now you have to run you have to see to every aspect. It is a very stressful situation. You have to be a very strong person in the situation otherwise the pressure gets you down, because you've got complaints from the teachers, from the parents, from the governing body, from the learners, you know you are accountable for everything in the school. At least before the Department should help, now you are accountable for every little thing. If I am sitting doing office work, I have to leave it and run and check the buildings, go and check the gardener, ... there is no dignity in doing the job anymore. It is a difficult task.

The principal in school B recalls his experience when he was an educator:

I chatted to some colleagues recently and I said, you know when I was a teacher when I walked passed the principal's office I found him reading the newspaper and I found that happening two or three times a day. But today you just can't do that, the demands placed on us are extreme... Today with the new financial burden placed on our schools and the new system that is used to run the schools, we are dependent on ourselves and not the department anymore. Previously when the principal needed thousand exercise books, he would phone the department and say I need so many exercise books, today we

cannot do that. We have to go through our funding and see if we have budgeted for this and if you have not, then we have to explore ways and means of obtaining the commodity. This kind of thing is happening all the time in fact we are fully involved and the time at our disposal is not enough. Previously you just managed the teaching and how the learners did but today it's a whole lot more.

The principal expressed similar views:

At times it is very, very frustrating particularly when you are trying to get answers and assistance from the Department of Education and I think that is actually my major problem. The Departmental officials are not helpful, they frequently don't respond and the correspondence is never acknowledged. But when you take the broader implication out of the picture, actually running the school is a very stimulating challenge.

Parents are also disillusioned with the Department of Education's lack of support to schools.

A parent articulated his concern as follows:

The Education Department should run the school. I also feel that the Government must show a greater interest in the education of our children. Today we have to buy everything right from a pencil. They need to change the budget, because it is supposed to be free education. They must take over the governance as they did in our time. The parents are getting involved but the state is moving away.

## **Discussion**

The Department of Education has run workshops to train SGBs. However, there is no support to sustain their efforts or to guide them. Principals also attend workshops, however their workshops focus on professional matters and management issues. Moreover, the time allocated for these workshops is insufficient. The Department of Education does not offer continuous in-service training programmes. Similarly, Epstein (1988:4) claims that state

education agencies in the United States have mainly offered symbolic and verbal support for the importance of parent involvement, but little financial support for staff and programmes needed to improve parent understanding, teacher practices and family and school connections. The Norms and Standards for school funding (DoE 1988c) has placed extra responsibilities on the principals and they need financial training to manage the limited budget.

## 5.12 CONCLUSION

Parent involvement in the education of their children has changed over the last few years. It is a positive change in that parents are becoming more involved than previously. Educational policies and legislation (cf 3.4.2) have contributed to this development. There are differing views regarding the change. Parents believe that times have changed, the world has become more competitive and the younger parents are more interested. A parent in school A offered the following explanation:

Our parents never used to worry; they should just wait for our reports at the end of the year. But now parents want to be there all the time for their children. The younger parents are more involved. We want to make sure that our kids are well educated. That they must get good jobs, like we are making sure that they are well secured for the future.

A parent who has served and still serves on the SGB indicated that she found more parents assisting now than they did previously. She shared that “It is much more positive and there is always room for improvement”.

The key themes presented in this chapter indicate that all schools engage in some form of parent involvement. It is also evident that not all schools involve parents in all types of parent involvement to the same extent. Parents are not really coping with their jobs of parenting and schools do little to support parents in their parenting role. In all three schools there are different means of communicating with parents, however there are many challenges to effective communication. Few parents volunteer their assistance to the school and generally the schools decide on the areas where parents should be involved. Parents of Grade

R learners manage to assist their children at home, however they need more guidance and support from the school. Schools have a very narrow perspective of the community and therefore their practice of collaborating with the community is to some extent limited. Parents and educators recognise the benefits of parent involvement. It is also clear that there are many challenges or barriers to effective parent involvement. A more detailed synthesis of the findings together with recommendations will be presented in chapter six.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter six provides an overview of the investigation. The study aimed at providing a thorough background to the different types of parent involvement as outlined in the Epstein model. A qualitative investigation into parent involvement in Early Childhood Development was carried out against the information presented in chapter three that dealt with the provision of Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal and the role that parents have played in education. A synthesis of the key themes and findings as well as recommendations on promoting effective parent involvement in Early Childhood will be presented in this chapter.

#### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION**

Parent involvement is approached and experienced in many different ways. In addition a variety of approaches or models exists. The theoretical stance of role players towards home-school relations is a modifying factor influencing the outcomes of these relations. This is because the degree to which educators and parents are influenced by a specific stance will influence the nature and extent of collaboration between the home and the school.

##### **6.2.1 Epstein typology of parent involvement**

Epstein provides three perspectives on family-school relations, namely separate responsibility of families and schools, shared responsibilities of families and schools and the sequential responsibilities of families and schools (cf 2.2.1). In addition her model recognises that although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, other practices reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators in children's learning and development. These, Epstein refer to as the overlapping spheres of influence (cf 2.2.2). A crucial characteristic of the Epstein model is that at any time, in any school, and in any family, parent involvement is a variable that can be increased or decreased by the practices of

educators, parents, administrators and learners. The six types of parent involvement as espoused by Epstein include: parenting (cf 2.3.1), communicating (cf 2.3.2), volunteering (cf 2.3.3), learning at home (cf 2.3.4), decision making (cf 2.3.5) and collaborating with the community (cf 2.3.6). Each of the six types of parent involvement induces many different practices of partnership and poses specific challenges that must be met in order to involve all families and redefine some basic principles of involvement. Finally, each type of involvement is likely to lead to different benefits for learners, parents and the school. In realising the aim of the study of providing a thorough background to the different types of parent involvement as outlined in the Epstein model, the views of other researchers working in the field of home-school relations are used to support the Epstein model.

### **6.2.2 The provision of Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal**

In order to appreciate present day provision of Early Childhood Development in South Africa as outlined in the Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development (DoE 2001b), a historical background of the preschool provision before 1994 (cf 3.2.1) and Early Childhood provision post 1994 (cf 3.2.2) have been provided. The recognition of the importance of providing for the Reception Year (Grade R) and the plan to phase in Grade R provision in the Foundation Phase is an initiative that is most welcomed. As the investigation is located in the province of KwaZulu Natal, the provision of Early Childhood Development in this province has been discussed in detail (cf 3.3).

There has been an evolution of parent involvement in South Africa. Prior to 1990 education in South Africa was characterised by schools that were ethnically segregated and the ultimate control of funds and policy on governance was retained by white central governments. Statutory parent bodies in white schools were wholly representative bodies and had extensive powers, while those in black, Asians and so called coloured communities included nominated members and had limited power (cf 3.4.1). During the period from 1990 to 1994 policy options for the restructuring of education in South Africa were set in motion. Good relations between the school and community were highlighted and seen as an important element in improving the quality of education (cf 3.4.2). Since 1994 the education system in South Africa has experienced one of the most far reaching programmes of reform and transformation ever seen and a dramatic paradigm shift is noted in parent involvement

practices in education (cf 3.4.3). Parents have played a major role in Early Childhood Development provision in KwaZulu Natal (cf 3.5). Family structure and social factors such as poverty, the pandemic HIV/AIDS and illiteracy have an impact on parent involvement in ECD in KwaZulu Natal (cf 3.6).

### **6.2.3 The research design**

The literature study carried out in chapters two and three gave a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of a comprehensive parent involvement programme as typified by the Epstein model and provided insight into the provision of ECD and parent involvement in the ECD phase (cf 1.5.2). Thus the literature study provided a conceptual framework for a qualitative study of the existing principles and practices of parent involvement by educators and parents in the Reception Year against the framework of the Epstein Model (cf 1.6).

A sample of three primary schools was selected to participate in the investigation. The schools were chosen because of their accessibility and the willingness of the principal and staff to be part of the research (cf 4.6.2). Access to schools was gained following the protocol of the Department of Education (cf 4.6.3.1). In-depth interviews with principals and focus group interviews with educators and parents were conducted (cf 4.3.6.3). Data gathered during interviews and the period of observation have been integrated into the findings (cf 4.6.3.2). The analysis of data began and continued during data collection (cf 4.6.3.4). The reliability and validity of the study have been ensured (cf 4.6.3.6 and 4.6.3.7). The key themes are presented in chapter 5. A synthesis of the key themes and recommendations will be presented in the following discussion.

## **6.3 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Epstein model provides a practical framework to evaluate and improve parent involvement. As mentioned in Chapter one (cf 1.6) the investigation looks at the perceptions of educators of the different types of parent and community involvement as set out in the Epstein Typology. In chapter five the findings were presented according to the six categories of the Epstein model in order to facilitate cross-referencing to literature. The synthesis of the

findings and recommendations will therefore be presented under the six types of involvement as espoused by Epstein.

### **6.3.1 PARENTING**

Parenting involves assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, providing family support, programmes on nutrition, health and other services and suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each stage and grade level (cf 5.4).

In this investigation, it emerged that there is a need for parent education programmes. Educators and principals could identify the areas in which parents of Grade R learners require assistance, however, they depend on an informal and ad hoc system of supporting parents in their roles (cf 5.4.2; 5.4.4). Parents themselves find it difficult to raise their children and describe their parenting tasks as stressful (cf 5.4.3). Parents also have the perception that children are given too much freedom and choices at school, which lead to behaviour problems and negative attitudes (cf 5.4.5).

#### **Recommendation**

Schools need to design special parent education programmes that cater for the needs of the parents. For example stimulating workshops dealing with specific topics will assist parents with parenting skills. The parent programmes should differ from one school to another, as the needs of the parents vary. As the first teachers of their children, parents have the primary responsibility for children's learning. Educators have an obligation to help parents to be role models for their children. Generally the first encounter with a school and with educators is in the Reception Year when children first enter the school. If effective parent education programmes are offered at this stage then it will help educators in the long term. In fact the ideal situation would be to arrange education programmes for prospective parents that is parents who will be sending their children to the Reception Year. Relevant issues like watching television, following instructions, discipline, time management, nutrition, listening and talking to children and other information pertaining to the five to six year old child could be discussed. If programmes are designed where both parents and educators are

“participants”, it will remove the perception that parents are being lectured to and that they are not good parents.

### **6.3.1.1 Socio-economic factors**

In the schools investigated, the structure of the family ranges from the nuclear family, single parents, divorced parents, and families where grandparents are caregivers. In many cases divorced, separated and single parents are forced to live with their parents as they are unemployed and this leads to overcrowded conditions, drug and alcohol abuse (cf 5.4.6). Single parents are most aware of their limitations (cf 5.4.6; 5.3.3; 5.1.2.2). There are negative stereotypes of parents in the lower socio-economic group (5.11.2), dual career families (5.11.3); and of grandparents who are caregivers (5.11.5). The complex nature of the families and social factors has militated against effective parenting.

### **Recommendations**

There is a need for schools to provide support programmes for families with special needs. Although there is some evidence of the three principals supporting parents on a personal basis, this strategy deals with the symptoms of parents' problems. There is a need for schools to engage in more concerted and strategic efforts. For example schools should ensure integration through partnerships involving the school, civic authorities, counselling, health, recreation and other agencies and businesses. Schools should endeavour to link families in need to the relevant support services like social welfare, rehabilitation centres and employment agencies. With reference to dual career families the working hours of parents will determine the nature of their involvement in activities of the school. The school can assist these parents in arranging after school care and special volunteer programmes over weekends. Epstein (1987a: 29) comments that “family friendly” programmes and services take into account the needs and realities of family life in the new millennium.

In this regard Swap (1992:57) states: “Often teachers think of low-income/ low-status families as being ‘deficient’ and many dwell on family problems while ignoring family strengths”. Epstein (1987a: 131) informs us that regardless of their family arrangements or characteristics, most parents care about their children's progress in school and want to know

how to assist their children. Good practice will mean providing greater attention to disadvantaged families without making them feel different from the rest.

### **6.3.1.2 Parent involvement in Grade R**

Parents are supportive in the Reception Year but they become less involved as the child progresses during the year and moves to higher grades. An interesting finding is that educators in the Reception Year find the involvement of parents “non-negotiable” but as the learners progress during the year, educators seem less committed to involving the parents (cf 5.3.1).

#### **Recommendation**

It is important for schools to build on what they have, in other words if educators find that parents are involved in the Reception Year, then it is important to devise strategies to sustain such involvement. For example, if efforts to involve parents typically start to drop as early as grade two or three, then schools need to question their parent involvement practices. Epstein (1995:703) found that partnerships tend to decline across the grades, unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level.

The schools need to establish structures to support parent involvement. Special parent committees for the Foundation Phase in which the Reception year is located can be set up. This committee can focus on issues that are relevant to the Reception Year. Parent involvement is not the parents’ responsibility alone; nor is it the schools; or teachers or community’s responsibility alone. All groups need to work together for a sustained period of time to develop programmes that will increase parents’ understanding of the school and their own ability to assist their children.

### **6.3.2 COMMUNICATING**

Communicating involves designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and learners’ progress (cf 5.5). Some form of

communication and contact between the home and the school is evident in all schools in this study. The majority of the respondents reported that they have received written newsletters, notices, progress reports and use message or notebooks as well as personal communication links, such as meetings (cf 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.5.3). The extent and level of communication differs from school to school. Effective two-way communication is hindered by certain perceptions. When the school initiates the contact and parents do not respond, schools view parents as disinterested and apathetic. On the other hand when parents visit the school regularly then they are seen as invading the educators' privacy and as a disruption to the educators' contact time (cf 5.5.3; 5.5.7). None of the schools had a policy on parent-teacher contact time. Communication between the home and the school seemed to be based on needs rather than as an essential component of the child's education and development.

### **Recommendation**

There is a need for schools to develop a policy that stipulates the times when parents may visit the educators. Such a policy will help to get rid of the negative perceptions of parents' visits. It is however important for schools to tailor policies to suit the local needs. Epstein (1993: 61) found that a policy on parent involvement as well as school and teacher practice, are strong predictors of parent involvement in school and at home.

In Early Childhood Development programmes personal interviews between educators and parents and home visits are considered crucial communication strategies. Schools are therefore encouraged to schedule interviews at least once per term and home visits at regular intervals. Henderson (1987:60-61) found that programmes offering home visits were more successful in involving disadvantaged parents than were programmes requiring such parents to visit the school.

The schools need to revisit the purpose and nature of the parent meetings. School meetings could be made more effective if the needs of the parents are considered and issues based on their needs are discussed. A survey to determine the needs of the parents will be a useful exercise. The quality of dialogue at meetings will be determined by the extent that parents are allowed to express their views. It is therefore necessary to develop strategies to encourage all parents including those who are afraid and embarrassed to participate in

discussions. Effective communication is based on relationships between parents and educators in which each respects the other's contribution and expertise and such contacts are rewarding (Swap 1992:69).

### **6.3.2.1 Specific problems regarding communicating**

It is clear that both parents and educators value communication between the home and the school (cf 5.5.2; 5.5.6). Both educators and parents seem to initiate contact when there are problems (5.5.4; 5.5.5). Parents' communications with educators focus on the child whereas their communications with principals tend to be school related (5.5.8; 5.8.5; 5.8.6). Schools have particular difficulties in communicating with diverse families and parents who live far away (5.11.1).

### **Recommendation**

It is essential that educators communicate with parents on a regular basis and not only when there are problems. Educators need to conduct positive communication to establish good relationships to draw on, if they need families to help learners solve academic or behaviour problems (Epstein 1996:226). It does not auger well for the school if the only communication between the school and the home concerns problems.

Schools are challenged to help parents from non-traditional families and families that live far away. Educators need to find strategies to reach all parents. Telephone calls or home visits to such families are a positive place to start. The value of home-visits cannot be overemphasised. Moreover, personal communication creates an openness between educator and parent. If parents and teachers do not talk or do not know each other, they may wrongfully see each other as uncompromising and not even try to engage in a dialogue to discover mutually beneficially options (Mc Dermott 1997: 33). The principals are a key factor in establishing an element of trust and co-operation with parents. As parents tend to trust the principals and communicate more openly with them, this provides the perfect opportunity for the principal, who is at the helm of the school, to promote and encourage partnerships with parents.

### **6.3.3 VOLUNTEERING**

Volunteering involves recruiting and organising parent help and support. It refers to parents who come to school to support learners' performances, sport, or other events, or to attend workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (cf 5.6)

The findings of this study indicate that a limited number of parents are involved as volunteers to a limited extent (5.6.5). Parents do not feel confident about assisting in the classroom and they believe that it is the educators' job to teach (cf 5.6.7). Educators are of the opinion that parents do not have the expertise to make curriculum decisions (5.8.3), on the other hand they welcome assistance of parents watching over children in the classroom, because they have large classes (5.6.6). The most common practices of parent volunteers include maintenance, repairs, relief teaching (child minding), collection of waste materials for activities and accompanying learners on excursions (cf 5.6.1; 5.6.4; 5.6.5).

#### **Recommendation**

Schools are not averse to having parents volunteering their services. They therefore need to provide some form of training to parents, so that the assistance provided will have a meaningful impact on the child's development. Moreover, there is a need to extend the number of parents active at school. For example the school can invite parents to participate in training for specific volunteer activities. Schools also need to broaden the areas in which parents can volunteer assistance. If parents are restricted to repairs, maintenance and other mundane tasks, then they are bound to feel inadequate. It is important for parents see the outcomes of their services. This will motivate parents and will help to develop their confidence. In the Head Start Early Childhood Development programme in the US where parent volunteers are greatly involved, it was reported that parents who volunteered in the programme enrolled to further study and develop themselves as individuals (Papalia & Olds 1993:322).

Inviting parents to participate in curriculum activities is strongly recommended. Educators need to involve parents when they are planning at a macro level. Outcomes- Based Education advocates consultation with parents at the macro level of planning (DoE 1997b).

According to Swap (1992:58), in Early Childhood Development bridging the gap between the home and the school is an important goal when parents are involved in curriculum activities, it promotes continuity between the home and the school. By getting involved in the classroom it will provide insights and empower parents on how to help their children at home.

#### **6.3.4 LEARNING AT HOME**

Learning at home involves the school's provision of information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning (cf 5.7).

Most parents interviewed indicated that they are eager to assist their children at home and would like the school to help them in managing activities at home (cf 5.7.5). The activities provided should be appropriate to the age group of children and educators should provide specific strategies to promote the total development of the child (5.7.3). Parents on the other hand in their enthusiasm describe efforts to help "teach" children the alphabet and handwriting (cf 5.7.5). Educators argue that children become confused and this impedes the work of the educator, as they have to undo the learning that takes place at home. Educators further accuse parents of completing the learners' tasks that they should merely supervise (cf 5.7.4).

#### **Recommendation**

In the Reception Year children learn through play. There is a wide variety of learning activities that parents can provide without confusing the child. For example, activities like talking, listening, reading, telling stories and reciting poems can be designed as learning activities at home. Educators are challenged to create a balance between what learners must do on their own at home and also create opportunities for parents to engage in some of these activities with their children. If the request by parents for guidance and support from educators is met, educators will be able to explain to parents why parents should not "teach" in a more formal sense. On the other hand parents who feel competent to engage in more formal learning activities, can be exposed to the strategies used by the educator in class.

Parents' assisting with learning at home is not new to Early Childhood Development (Taylor 1995:20). However, educators need to plan for the majority of the parents. Epstein (1987a: 127) rightly points out that although only some parents can be active at school, almost all parents can be involved with their children's learning at home.

### **6.3.5 DECISION MAKING**

Decision making includes parents being involved in making decisions at school and developing parent leaders and representatives. This means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions towards shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas (cf 5.8).

The study found that although principals feel that decisions are made in consultation with parents, in practice parents are often not consulted (cf 5.8.2). Schools tend to take unilateral decisions and argue that parents are included as they have their representatives on the school governing bodies. While parents agree that they should have greater involvement in decision making, they disagree that the SGB makes decisions on behalf of the parents (cf 5.8.5). Parents' decision making right is often limited to decisions about school fees (cf 5.8.1).

#### **Recommendation**

Parents should be considered partners in the education of their children. True partnership implies shared decision making and working toward common goals. Epstein (1995:701) reminds us that partners recognise their shared interest in and responsibilities for children, and they desire to work together to create better programmes. Schools are therefore challenged to include parents in making decisions on other issues other than school fees. For example parents can make decisions on aspects like code of conduct, attendance, dress code, school functions and religious observances.

Schools should not be selective when including parents in the decision making process. For example, the date and venue for the sports day is considered a routine event to educators, however, for parents this is a major event. If the time and venue is not suitable to the majority of the parents, the school should endeavour to accommodate all parents. By

including parents in decision making schools will promote the development of parent leaders and representatives.

#### **6.3.5.1 The functioning of SGBs**

In these schools, the school governing bodies that were established to democratise governance in education are not functioning in accordance with the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996a) (cf 5.8.7). This study found that the SGBs are not representative of the parents they serve (cf 5.8.4) and they do not interact with parents as required to (cf 5.8.5). The SGBs are not always competent to appoint educators (cf 5.8.8) and cannot always execute core functions related to governance (cf 5.8.7). Schools sometimes feel threatened by the powers vested in the SGBs (cf 5.8.9).

#### **Recommendation**

It is necessary to build capacity of the SGBs. The Department of Education should provide ongoing training for SGB members. Superintendent Education Management (SEMs) have been appointed by the Department of Education to support school management (RSA 1999a: 15). A key role of the SEMs should be empowering SGBs and monitoring the election of the school governing body. The school itself should provide support in the form of workshops on areas like conducting meetings, drawing up of a budget, reading curriculum vitas, conducting interviews and policy formulation. There is a need for schools to commit to corporate governance and avoid a power struggle between conflicting ideas. If the school focuses on problem solving rather than fixing blame and defending, constructive parent involvement will be more attainable.

#### **6.3.6 COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

This type of involvement involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development (cf 5.9).

The concept of the community as interpreted and practiced by schools is focussed very narrowly on the immediate neighbourhood (cf 5.9.1). Schools do engage in community activities and projects (cf 5.9.1; 5.9.5). However, activities are generally designed and initiated to gain financial support from the community (5.9.3). The community uses school facilities and in some cases, this causes problems (cf 5.9.4).

### **Recommendation**

The term “community” as understood by the schools should be redefined. Schools should focus on not only the neighbourhood where the learners’ homes and schools are located but also any neighbourhoods that influence their learning and development. There is a need to identify and integrate resources and services from the community with the schools’ programme. Parents should also be assisted in making use of the resources available.

Schools and the parents need to take joint ownership of the school property. If parents are allowed to use the buildings or the grounds after school hours, this should be viewed as a right of the parents and not a privilege. Schools should draw up an agreement with communities and organisations that use the school facilities. In this way both parties will be aware of the conditions for the use of school facilities.

In summary it is recommended that schools provide support for parents in their parenting roles, set up committees to address Grade R issues, develop policy on home-school communication, offer training to assist parents on learning at home, specific volunteers activities and governance issues and to extend parent involvement to include the broader community not just the immediate neighbourhood.

### **6.3.7 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Various barriers to effective parent involvement were cited in the study. Distance between the home and the school (cf 5.11.1), negative perceptions of parents (5.11.2), dual career families (5.11.3), parents’ fears (5.11.4), grandparents as caregivers (5.11.5), inadequate teacher training (5.11.6) and lack of support from the Department of Education (5.11.7) have

emerged as barriers to effective parent involvement. Some barriers have been synthesised and discussed under the six types of parent involvement above.

### **Recommendation**

The Higher Education sector that is responsible for the training of new educators need to take cognisance of the importance of parent involvement, and requirements for a teaching credential could include at least one course in family and school connections and the use of parent involvement in teaching. In the case of educators who are already in the field there is a need to build capacity and offer courses to provide educators with skills that will assist them in working with parents. The present Norms and Standards for Educators document (RSA 2000a) makes provision for educators to engage in 80 hours a year in some form of professional development. This time could be used to enrol for such courses. According to the Skills Development Act (RSA 2000b), the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), in the case of education, the Education, Training and Development and Practices (ETDP) should design courses and provide learnerships on parent involvement, for the re-skilling of Grade R educators.

The mission statement (KZNDEC 2001a: 1) of the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture is “To create an effective and efficient education system by developing and nurturing professional expertise and administrative competence...”. To achieve this the KZNDEC has committed to promoting sound management as expressed in Batho Pele (People First), good governance and education management development programmes (KZNDEC 2001b: 3). Thus there is a need for the KZNDEC to honour its commitment and provide support to principals. Regular visits to schools by the officials are recommended. Support workshops on general management issues and strategies to cope with the present day demands of education will build capacity and assist principals who are stressed.

### **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study explained the experiences and practices of educators and parents in the Reception Year in the Foundation Phase in the light of the six types of parent involvement as espoused by Epstein.

The benefits of each type of involvement to learners, parents and the school in the Foundation Phase emerged from this study. It might therefore be worthwhile to do the same type of study in the intermediate and senior phases.

One of the main shortcomings, which came to light during this study, is the lack of skills of educators in the field to work with parents (cf 5.11.6). This suggests a shortcoming in the preparation of educators for the task in their training. There is a need to improve this situation and it is suggested that a study be undertaken to develop a suitable course by means of action research, which will then fulfil this need. This course could be adapted to train educators in the field by means of workshops.

A finding of this study lifts out problems arising from the phenomenon of parents volunteering their help and support at school. This phenomenon has so many facets, which are not clear and give rise to uncertainty around its organisation and implementation that it warrants further research.

## **6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

All investigations carried out have strengths and limitations. The limitation of the present study is that a small sample of educators and parents was used to investigate parent involvement in Early Childhood Development in KwaZulu Natal. Therefore the present qualitative findings, cannot be used to generalise to the larger population of parents, educators and principals in the Reception Year.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

Parent involvement in Early Childhood Development is characterised by different levels of interaction between educators and parents. However, all educators, families, and community groups do not engage in all activities on all types of involvement simultaneously. It is evident that schools do engage in parenting, communicating, volunteers, learning at home, decision making and collaboration with the community. Involving parents in each type of involvement has certain challenges, which have been highlighted in the findings. A positive

feature is that both parents and educators welcome parent involvement and view this as an important aspect in the education and development of children.

It is also clear that parent involvement has evolved over the years. The extent of parent involvement has increased in the last few decades. The government has also recognised the importance of involving the parents and communities and has passed legislation that compel education structures to involve parents. In addition the government has also recognised the importance of Early Childhood Development in South Africa and has tabled plans to phase in the provision of the Reception Year as the first year of compulsory education. The launch of the Education White Paper 5: Early Childhood Development in May 2001 lends impetus to this study. The present investigation, which focussed on the Reception Year, is able to make recommendations on parent involvement to educators who will be involved in the phasing in of the Reception year from 2002.

The development of a partnership is a process, not a single event and all key stakeholders including parents, educators and the community need to commit to developing school/family/community partnerships. Nkone and Makete (1992:11) conclude that parent involvement and commitment in education have not only become the current household phrase; it is and shall always remain the mission statement of all educational institutions throughout the globe.

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PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATAL  
PROVINSIE KWAZULU-NATAL



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE  
UMNYANGO WEMFUNDO NAMASIKO  
DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS EN KULTUUR

NORTH DURBAN REGION

ISIFUNDAZWE SENYAKATHO NETHEKU

NOORD-DURBAN STREEK

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Enquiries:	Dr D W M Edley	Reference:	2/12/2/3	Date:	2 April 2001
Imibuzo:	360-6247	Inkomba:		Usuku:	
Navrae:		Verwysing:		Datum:	

Ms R Bridgemohan  
CES: Ordinary School Education  
Provincial Curriculum Unit  
Truro House

Dear Ms Bridgemohan,

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : NORTH DURBAN REGION**

1. Your letter addressed to the Director: Provision of Education dated 29 March 2001, refers.
2. You are hereby granted permission to conduct research along the lines of your proposal, subject to the following conditions:
  - a. No school/person may be forced to participate in your study;
  - b. Access to the schools you wish to utilise is to be negotiated with the principals concerned by you;
  - c. The normal teaching and learning programme of the schools is not to be disrupted;
  - d. The confidentiality of the participants is respected.
3. This letter may be used to gain access to the schools concerned.
4. May I take this opportunity to wish you every success in your research.

Yours faithfully,

Dr D W M Edley  
Regional Co-ordinator: Research

**GENERAL INFORMATION : PARENTS**

**To be completed by the participant prior to the interview.**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:

Age:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Ages of children:

Do you have any foster children/children of relatives living with you? :

**DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT**

Where do you live? :

Who shares the home with you? :

Who is the breadwinner of the family? :

What qualifications do you have? :

**GENERAL INFORMATION : EDUCATORS**

To be completed by the participant prior to the interview.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:

Age:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Ages of children:

Where do your own children attend school? :

Where do you live? :

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of teaching experience:

Have you attended any workshops/courses on parent involvement? :

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PRINCIPAL**

**To be completed by the participant prior to the interview.**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:  
Date of birth:  
First language:  
Where do you live? :

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:  
Years of experience as educator:  
Years of experience as principal:  
Years of experience in this school:

**INFORMATION ON THE SCHOOL**

Name of school  
Total number of learners:  
Total number of educators:  
Number of classrooms:  
Number of Grade R educators:

**INSERVICE TRAINING**

How often are you able to attend courses/workshops to improve your skills? :  
How often are staff members able to attend such workshops/courses? :  
Has anyone attended a course on parent involvement? :

**INTERVIEW GUIDE PARENTS**

**This guide is to be used only to ensure that the relevant topics are covered. The questions are only examples of what may be used to stimulate dialogue.**

**A] INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

- Describe what it is like being a parent of a Grade R learner?
- What do you understand by the term “parent involvement”?
- Who should initiate parent involvement: the school or the parents?

**B] PARENTING**

- Describe your task as a parent.
- As a parent what aspects of parenting would you like help in?
- Do you think that the school should help parents on the issue of parenting?
- In what way?
- Are your parenting styles different to the way you were brought up? Why do you say so?

**C] COMMUNICATING**

- How do you find out about what is happening at school?
- How do you find out about your child’s progress at school?
- Have you attended any meetings at school? How many per year?
- How does the school make contact with you?
- With regards to meetings held for parents what are your views/comments on the meetings?

**D] VOLUNTEERING**

- Describe any volunteering activities in school that you are involved in?
- Are parents asked to help at school? In what ways?
- Do you think the school arranges enough opportunities for parents to become involved in the schooling of their children?
- Can you suggest ways/strategies for the school to involve parents as volunteers?

## **E] LEARNING AT HOME**

- Does your child come home with work to do in the afternoons?
- Are you able to help your child with the tasks? Explain.
- How do you help your child at home?
- Has the school offered you any support on how you can help your child with homework?

## **F] DECISION MAKING**

- Does the school provide opportunities for parents to make decisions concerning the activities in the classroom?
- In your view do you think parents are capable of making decisions about the activities in the classroom? Explain.
- All schools are requested to have school governing bodies. What are your views on these governing bodies?
- Does the governing body meet with parents to discuss issues?
- What areas of the school life do you think parents should make decisions on?

## **G] COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

- Do you think it is important for an educator in a school to be living in the same neighbourhood? Why do you say so?
- How does the school involve members and organisations of the community in the life world of the school?
- Do you interact with members or organisations in this community?
- Have learners been taken by the school to visit any community sites.
- If you were given the task of “establishing links with the school and the community” what would you do? Explain.

## **H] CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Do you think parent involvement could be of benefit to the learners, school, parents and educators?
- In what way?
- In what ways can parent involvement be improved?
- Has there been a change in attitude to parent involvement over the past few years?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE EDUCATORS**

**This guide is to be used only to ensure that the relevant topics are covered. The questions are only examples of what may be used to stimulate dialogue.**

**A) INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

- Describe what is it like being an educator in the Grade R class.
- What do you understand by the term “parent involvement”?
- Who should initiate parent involvement - the school or the parents?

**B) PARENTING**

- How would you describe a good parent?
- How would you describe the relationship between Grade R parents and their children?
- Are parents supported in their parenting roles?
- Do you think that offering help to parents on parenting aspects will assist parents in their job of being parents? Explain what can be done.

**C) COMMUNICATING**

- In what way does the school communicate with parents?
- In what way are parents able to communicate with the school?
- How often do you contact parents?
- How do you contact them? What in your opinion is the most effective way?
- When are parents able to speak with you about their child?
- How often does this occur?

**D) VOLUNTEERING**

- Do you include parents as volunteers in your classroom?
- Does the school approach parents for assistance? Please explain how.
- Have parents come forward to offer their assistance?
- There is this feeling that parents would like to volunteer assistance but do not know how to do this. What are your views on this?
- In your planning do you see room for involving parents? How can you do this?
- What can they do as volunteers to assist the school?

**E] LEARNING AT HOME**

- What is the school's policy on homework or children engaging in tasks at home?
- On viewing the completed tasks or from feedback can you say whether parents have been involved? Why do you say this?
- What advice would you give parents on how to help their children's learning at home?

**F] DECISION MAKING**

- How do you include parents in decision making?
- Name the areas/aspects in the life of the school where parents are involved in making decision?
- What are your views on School Governing Bodies?
- Do you think that parents are provided with adequate opportunity to make decisions?

**G] COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**

- Do you live in the neighbourhood?
- How long have you lived in the neighbourhood?
- What community services are available to you in this area?
- Does the school have social functions for the community? Name these functions and how often are they held?
- What are the roles of educators/parents at these functions?
- Has the school involved the community in any school project?
- Explain how the community gets involved in the activities of the school.

**H] CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Do you think that parents and the school working closely together can benefit the learners, school, educators and parents?
- In what way?
- In what way did your basic teacher training equip you to work with parents?
- How would you like parents to be involved in the education of their/children?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE PRINCIPAL**

**This guide is to be used only to ensure that the relevant topics are covered. The questions are only examples of what may be used to stimulate discussion.**

**A] INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

- Describe what is it like being a principal.
- How do you see your job of management?
- How would you define parent involvement?

**B] PARENTING**

- To what extent are parents in this community involved in the lives of their children?
- In your own view, do you think that parents in this community are coping with the current challenges of parenting?
- From your interaction with parents what type of assistance do you think parents need in their job of being a parent?
- Does the school offer any support to parents in parenting styles and skills?

**C] COMMUNICATING**

- What are your views on communication between home and school?
- In what way does the school communicate with parents?
- Are these strategies/methods used effective? Explain
- Does the school have a policy on communication between home and school?
- As a manager what have you done to promote communication between the home and school?

**D] VOLUNTEERING**

- What is the situation regarding volunteers?
- Does the school approach parents for assistance? Please explain how.
- Have the parents come forward on their own to offer assistance?
- As a manager, are you in favour of having volunteers in school?

## **E] LEARNING AT HOME**

- Does the school have a policy on homework? Who were the stakeholders involved in drawing up this policy?
- What are your views on giving learners homework.
- From your experience, how involved are parents in helping their children at home?
- What would you rate as an important aspect/s of a parent's interaction with their children at home?
- How will you support parents to help their children?

## **F] DECISION MAKING**

- Has the school established a School Governing Body (SGB)
- Were the parents involved in the process - please explain.
- How are parents involved in the decision made on what is taught in the classroom?
- Comment on the concept of corporate governance
- What are your views on SGBs and the powers vested in them?

## **G] COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY**

- Do you live in the neighbourhood?
- Does the school make use of the community facilities? Please explain.
- What are your views on the "school should reflect the culture of the community?"
- Has the school enjoyed any partnership projects with the community? Explain.
- Comment on how the school involves the community in their programmes.
- As the school manager how would you promote closer links between the school and the community?

## **H] CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Do you think that parents and the school working together can benefit learners, school, educators and parents.
- In what way?
- How can we improve parent involvement in schools?
- How would you define a partnership between the school and parents?

**INTERVIEW BETWEEN RRB AND THE PRINCIPAL FROM SCHOOL C**

RRB Can you describe what is it like being a principal?

PRI At times it is very, very frustrating particularly when you are trying to get answers and assistance from the Department of Education. And I think that is actually, the-my major problem. The Department officials are not helpful, they frequently don't respond and the correspondence is never acknowledged. But when you take the broader implication out of the picture, actually running the school is a, is a very stimulating challenge, it is totally different, especially as every single day is absolutely different. You cannot predict what's going to happen. Eh , I am very fortunate as in the different places I have worked, the parents are very supportive. I have a wonderful staff, we very seldom have problems. The teachers are well prepared, they are enthusiastic and hard working. Mm ..... actually it is a pleasure coming to school.

RRB Okay (interrupted by the principal who continues)

PRI The other thing that I wanted to tell you is that the principals in the area work very closely together and we have an excellent relationship. They are supportive. If you have a problem you phone them, they phone others and so that actually where our support comes from in the area, the principals in the area provide support to each other.

RRB How would you define parent involvement?

PRI Well, I think there are quite a few aspects to parent involvement. There is eh ..... the more formal side where there is fee payment and that sort of thing. There is the governance of the school side of it, then there is eh support of the school just in the things they say about the school, you know the general chit chat that goes on in the car-park and then the actual support of their children whether they positive towards their

children, whether they have a good attitude toward the school, that sort of things, I think that it is at different levels.

**RRB** To what extent are the parents involved in the lives of their children?

**PRI** It is difficult to give a straight answer, because there are some that are totally overindulgent, overly protective, eh..... almost stifling the development of their children in their eagerness to help and support them, and there are those who are completely neglectful to an extent where we have to give their children food. As a general comment, I would say that parenting skills are very, very poor. Actually parents don't have a clue on how to bring up children. You know they all have a thinking that they have got to be their children's friends. Their discipline is very lax. They don't really know how to respect their children and how to demand respect from their children and as a result they don't know what to do. They will come and ask. I have had numerous parents whose children are 6 and 7 who say "my child would not listen to me, I just don't know what to do". Our school actually offers the STEP course and a few years ago we had like four different groups that run simultaneously, but now they think they know it all that they actually are clever.

**RRB** What does STEP stand for? Tell me more about this course

**PRI** Systematic Training for Effective Parenting. It was a nine week course. We invited all the parents and they could also bring friends if they wanted to. Quite a few teachers were actually the facilitators and in all of these course there were tapes and then you discuss it and it gave parents the opportunity to see that they were not the only ones with problems, that there were others who had the same problems, whether it was about spending time eh or anything, you know some parents go into a real tizz if there is a problem, it becomes a major issue. At that time parents thoroughly enjoyed it. And a lot of parents who were actually having marriage problems came, and that was interesting, they were looking for help but they did not know how to actually ask for it. But they found that by attending some of the parenting course they were able to look at their own relationship problems. And quite a few parents said that although the course was

designed for dealing with children, they said that they found it helpful in their relationships at work. The course was offered again but there was virtually no response.

RRB In your view do you think that parents need help in parenting skill?

PRI Yes, the biggest thing I think they need help in is discipline, you know I think they at a stage where they have heard that corporal punishment is out but they don't like giving their children a slap, but they don't know what to replace it with, and consequently they are looking for ideas. We often say that they need to focus on the positive and to try and reward the positive, you know say I am so pleased that you were a good girl today, something like that and then children tend to respond in a similar way. I think another thing is TV watching, they don't know how to differentiate between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable for little children. And I think if they watch some of the programmes that their children were watching, they would be horrified. The TV has become very much a baby sitter. You know you get home from work, you have to cook the supper, help the older children with homework, they say just go and watch TV and they don't have a clue as to what the children are watching.

RRB What are your views on communication between the home and the school?

PRI Well, we try to have as much communication as possible. Because we try to emphasise that we cannot do this alone, the parents cannot do it alone, it is a joint venture. So we have, I try to be available to parents as often as I am able to. If they need to see me I will fit them in. With the teachers they have little note book and if it is just something like you know if the child did something. Then they make a little note in the notebook, so that the teacher knows because it can have quite an impact on the child. Like this morning a parent wrote a note that the child was late again and it was his fault. So he got sent to me, so that could say to him this is unacceptable, you are making your mother sad, you are a big, clever boy you should be able to get ready on your own and that sort of thing. So that he knows that we know, he cannot come to school saying they had a puncture and I think that is very important that the children know that the school and the parent are working together. Frequently children take stories home or they bring stories

to school and if you try to verify them we find that they sometimes very far from the truth. So we try to have that eh.... The teachers have parent interviews which are very useful, a lot of things that come out of those interviews are not necessarily school related but they have a huge impact on the child's development and how they coping at school, but as I have said it is very important to have that one on one interview. And then they have a green card, did I tell you about it?

RRB No

PRI Oh! Okay, they have a green card in which the teacher notes every time she has contact with the parent and just a brief summary of what was said, because you know what happens at the end of the year when you recommend they need more time, then the parents come and say they have never ever heard of this before, it's the first time this is being told to them. The teachers then bring the green card and says "actually we had an interview in April, then in June" you know its all been recorded and it's a valuable record for the teachers as you go up higher into the next grade, its actually very important, and you know if there has been a death in the family or something like that, they just note it, because sometimes the teacher that the child had the year before will forget to tell the next teacher all those little details, so if it recorded which child has very different needs or if there are problems then the next teachers know and I think that is very valuable.

RRB Are there any other forms of communication that you would like to talk about?

PRI Oh! Yes, we have the newsletter, which goes out, this keeps you informed of what happens and what is coming up and then we have the mother support group, we only have this once a term when they meet. They usually invite a speaker like a psychologist or the occupational therapist or sometimes it might be somebody which might not be school related, which gives them an opportunity to meet one another and feel that they are part of the school, because I think that it is very important that the parents feel that the school is their school as well.

RRB You have many ways of communicating so do you experience any problems at all?

PRI Yes, the biggest problem is that most of the parents work, there are very few mothers who are not working any more and parents are under huge stress, just to support their families, you know just to keep them financially supported I think that it is just another stress when they have to come to school. When we have a meeting which has something to do with the children, you know directly with the children then we have excellent attendance. The teachers will report that only one or two parents did not arrive in a class on an open day, the others will be there. And it is usually those who you **really have to see (loud)** that do not arrive. And just recently we also have a problem with parents who make appointments and don't keep them, and I have actually written in my newsletters that , that is totally unacceptable and that if you can't make it then you must phone so that the teacher does not sit here till 4 o' clock in the afternoon waiting for the parents to come. Also if there is like a governing body meeting, not a governing body election meeting or an AGM, it is poorly attended. So what we have been doing recently is, you know in OBE the parents have to be involved in assessment, we have been saying this is a night where you can come and fill in your assessment sheet of your child's work. Just to get them here. Yet if we have a concert or something like that they will support their children one hundred percent, they will take them there, but when it comes to school governance part then they are not really interested. To get people to stand for elections for the governing body is a problem, usually you have to approach someone and say will you do this or will you find somebody who will nominate you. I don't like we have ever had an election for the governing body since I have been here. It is an actual rarity (laugh).

RRB Okay, can we move..... **(interrupted by principal)**

PRI Oh! I didn't tell you we have a family braai once a term. When we had our winter walk we had a lunch time braai. We have lots of fund raising and parents become involved, like you know Ren that was here she is wonderful and they really give their time their effort their everything, when we have a gala we approach parents and say please will you

help with the programme, I noticed if you use a direct approach, they usually quiet happy to help, than if you ask who will help.

RRB Actually you have started talking about volunteers, tell me more about how parents are involved as volunteers.

PRI What we do is at the beginning of the year we have a sheet, a letter that gets sent out to the parents to say these are kind of things where you could help, like covering books in the media centre or gardening or sewing or helping with the movie evenings like we have one this evening and then you will find that parents will say, yes I am quiet happy to do it and then you need to approach them directly and say you have put your name down on for movie evening that is on Friday and then they will come forward to do it.

RRB Do the parents come forward themselves to say they want to help?

PRI Rarely. We have parents that have the ability to help us, but we approach them directly, like we've got a guy who is an electrician, when we have a problem we will phone him and happily he will come in and do it. We have a tuck morning we don't have a tuck shop and we have a tuck morning once a month on a Friday, its like a special treat, and the mums do help with that. Eh! ... for our fun day , we say would you actually help with the braai and then they will happily do it, you know they will be in charge of looking after the beer garden, we have our first fun day meeting on Tuesday night to plan for the fun day in the third term and there you will see few people will arrive. But if you ask them directly will you be in charge of the cake store, ya sure (**laugh**) what must I do? I don't know what it is?

RRB Do you think it is because they want to help but do not know how to help?

PRI Well, certainly at our school when they get that letter at the beginning of the year, its got every aspect, so you see they know where we need help. I think we could not survive without their help, its wonderful. Also to a certain extent, I know members of the governing body say, this is an important meeting there is a possibility of a fee increase

next year, to try and get them there cause you want them to understand why the fees are going up or something like that.

**RRB** With regard to learning at home does the school have a policy on homework?

**PRI** Yes, but it is actually quite a difficult thing because some schools have moved away from what the policy was when I was in the classroom, where even the Junior Primary children are given far more homework and parents are expected to teach at home. Something that I actually feel quite strongly about, that we went to training college to train to teach children, but we still have the policy of having minimal written homework at home, that they learn their bonds and tables, but they all have reading every single night and the other things that they will have will be incidental, like when they have done something in OBE and they need to ask their parents about their grandparents or find out little surveys or something like that. But I feel very strongly about the fact that parents are under such huge pressure that if we are expecting the parents to be the teacher, the relationship that should be there, should be a bond with the parents is being undone, because not every child knows what they going to do. A lot of them don't know what to do or they don't want to do it, or they are tired and they end up screaming at the child, but that is just my personal feeling, something I feel quite strongly about that what they take home they should be able to do. Also we have the odd instance where the teachers sends work home, even though it is like JP work and they don't know and they teach the child a different method to what the teacher does and this causes so much confusion. But we, at our school we have a policy that if a child is lacking and the parent wants to help, the teacher calls the parent in and explains the method that is being used in the classroom so that there is a willingness for it to be done, the mums actually says I will like to do something to be help, the teacher shows exactly what is going to happen and the mother is just there to supervise and show the child what to do.

**RRB** Are you then saying that parents need help on how to help their children?

**PRI** Definitely, even in reading, we at the beginning of the year, we have each grade, where we meet with the parents, the teacher explains what her routine in the class is, what the

homework policy is. Then we have group reading and then now the children in grade one are introduced to fun reading, which is in each class there is a selection of books, where they can choose cause very often the interest and ability levels are miles apart so the child can choose a book that they are really interested in, and it might be a little too difficult for them to read, so we actually have an evening for the parents and explain to them how to assist children, you know the paired reading or where a child reads a page to them or it may even be a day where you just read a whole book to them. We also tell them that if the child is not interested there are other books. One child may be interested in a book and the other child may not, it is the same for them sometimes they may choose something and when they get home they realise that it is really not their cup of tea, so don't labour the point and say it wasn't such a good book, the child can choose something else tomorrow. I think most parents really, really want to help their children, sometimes it is misguided and they find they need guidance from the school but I think most parents have their children's interest at heart and they want to help but they just don't know how.

**RRB** What about decision making at school how are parents involved?

**PRI** Mmh..... Well they are, like for instance last year we were approached by one of Siemens cell telephone company and asked about constructing a cellular mask on the school grounds. A survey was done, the parents had an opportunity to vote, they had an information evening so that we could hear about it. We also had surveys about sports, whether they wanted outside coaches, up until this year the teachers have done all the coaching and now we have outside coaches assisting in sport. Then we have the SGB.

**RRB** Previously you mention something about the elections, tell me more.

**PRI** Well, we had a core of parents, they were the old, I think they called it the PTA. We had the original core of the governing body and then each three years we had re-elections and then and (silent) mmh ..... I think we had an evening where (name not clear) came and explained to parents that the role of the governing body was far more significant than the old parent committee the parent body that was involved in fundraising.

RRB So, how do you view the new role of the parent body?

PRI Okay, I will be perfectly honest, there are some aspects where I think it is absolutely wonderful, for me personally when I took over as head, I think that I have had a fantastic chairman who assisted me to get to grips with the financial aspects. You know I was a classroom teacher and then suddenly I was involved with all this money and the move from doing everything in books on to the computer and he was absolutely fantastic but I think he is just one of those people that he has given so much time to our school. His children have left our school long, long ago and he is still on the trust. An absolutely fantastic person. There have been individuals who have been wonderful, like the architect who has designed the pre-school organised the building and that sort of thing. But when it comes to actual school matters, you know like curriculum and that sort of thing my governing body has never ever tried to get involved. I think basically right at the beginning, I said to them this is my territory and you know nobody has ever tried to overstep the mark. Sometimes I get very irritated with democracy because I think it is the biggest timewaster in the world you know it takes so long for decisions to be made and because you are at the core/fore front of things that are happening on a daily basis, you got to make decisions because you got to get on with it. Some of the governing bodies we have had, had like a small management, and they said that if there are decisions to be made quickly you contact the chairman or if he is not available, you contact the deputy chairman or whatever and go ahead with it. The governing body that I've got at the moment are very democratic, the chairman is very democratic and he likes everyone to have a say and I find that totally irritating. I think at the end of the day they have to do what I want them to do anyway (laugh). Our governing body has never ever used their power. They have never interfered with the running of the school, they have never tried to eh!.... possibly because they never had to, you know like disciplining teachers or something like that. But what I have gathered is that some schools have a problem in that regard. Ours have never actually...they are very busy. Most of them are businessmen who are happy to give their ideas and expertise, but other than that leave them alone.

RRB But then don't they appoint teachers.

PRI Yes, but that they have delegated to me, I will inform them that we need a new Grade R teacher... does the budget allow for it and that sort of thing and they will say to me "fine" if you can find somebody go ahead. They don't get involved in the interview, it will then be me and the head of department that will interview the candidates. Obviously with the promotion post, the governing body are involved, because that is all legislated but for an ordinary teaching post they will not get involved. I don't think our governing body has the desire or the time to actually devote more than what they already giving to the school. A lot of them are overseas half the time and on business, just to find a date when everybody can come to a meeting is quiet a thing.

RRB Do you think parents are capable of making educationally sound decisions?

PRI I think they could. But usually what happens is that I as a principal or some other individual who has strong views is able to sway the rest of the opinions. I don't think parents really, well certainly not my parents, want to bothered with that they want to see it happening. They do not make decisions about what happens in the classroom.

RRB Do you live in the community?

PRI Yes, for as long as I have been in this school.

RRB Tell me about this community and the school.

PRI We have good facilities in the community, we have three libraries on our door step, we have sports clubs the Crusaders who meet on a Saturday morning, there are old Boys club, tennis clubs, there are church halls, eh! It's a very privileged community, we've got swimming pool, there's theatre facilities, there's shopping facilities. We use the Crusaders sport club, they have mini cricket on a Saturday our children go there, its wonderful. We use one of the schools in the area and we are very supportive of one another, we share like you know, one school may borrow the stands or use the hall, the schools are totally supportive and helpful.

RRB What are your views on the school should reflect the community that it serves?

PRI I think it is right. I believe in community schools because I think that's the only way people can feel that they belong. If you are travelling 50 km to the school it is never going to be your school. If it's the school that is just down the road you can go and watch the children play cricket and be of help then you will feel that it is your school. I favour the idea of community schools. My school has a very good relationship with the community, they are very supportive and you know if there isn't anything not 100% right they will phone the school and say we noticed this, like they will keep an eye on the school grounds on the weekends and our caretaker once caught two.. where on two occasions he alerted us about suspicious looking guys, and we called the police and they were able to catch criminals before they could break into the homes. We have a fun day, but other than that basically we only get the community involved when we ask them for fundraising (laugh). But I must be honest I haven't really given the community much thought, we generally focus on the parents. We have a grand parents assembly but then we only have our own grandparents, and our choir is invited to sing at the Methodist church down the road, they have an end of the year Christmas party. They have a party for the pensioners from KwaMashu and they invite us to come and sing to entertain the pensioners. Where we are supportive, in like if the churches if they have a fete, we advertise for them, also for the scouts and guides and other schools, but we don't do like commercial ventures.

RRB Do you think that parents and schools working together has benefits?

PRI Definitely, as I have said we have like the guy that helps with the finances, the architect that designed the school, not only did they work, but I think that a lot of friendships that are made, that I think are often lasting friendships and that's what I like about parents being involved in fundraising activities, at the end of last year we were counting up all the money for our fun day and it was about R25000 and one of the principals from the other schools walked in and said, you know if you charge each child R100 extra on the fee you would have had the R25000 without any effort and it is true. But there is another aspect to the fundraising as well, the friendships that are made, people from

different communities are working together and you suddenly think well that wasn't so terrible. People from different communities have now become friends. I remember when we had our first family braai, we had about three parents of colour and parents didn't know how to find one another. Now when we have a family braai its such a joy to see the whole community getting together, there's no like all the whites go and sit on one side, everybody is mixing happily. I think that has also helped because we have this diverse community living in the area. The children love their parents being involved, they will come up to me and say "my mummy is coming to do tuck today" it makes them feel so special and I think it makes them feel that their parents care about their education, I actually wish parents could see the look in the child's reactions, cause they are so happy that their mums have come. The child feels so proud and it makes them grow in confidence.

RRB We have come to the end of the interview, would you like to make a concluding comment?

PRI I would actually wish that every child could go to a loving home, where it didn't matter if they had two parents, but they were just loved, just being told how wonderful they are, how special and unique they are rather than being broken down.

RRB Thank you very much for your time.