

Chapter 2

Parental involvement in education

“Long ago the notices which said, “No parents beyond this point” have disappeared. They are welcomed into schools. They are seen as potential partners in education” (Cullingford & Morrison 1999:253).

2.1 Introduction

Traditionally public education has been the preserve of centralised bureaucracies that have mostly excluded non-professional participation in shaping educational policy and practice (Dimmock, O'Donaghue & Robb 1996:17). The role of parents was proscribed by the school and limited to such activities as helping with homework, dealing with discipline problems, joining the parent-teacher association (PTA), contributing to fundraising events, and visiting teachers at the school at times organised and specified by the school (Christenson, Rounds & Franklin 1992a:39; Jantjes 1995:300). This sort of involvement has, since, been condemned by educators as contrived and superficial (Zellman & Waterman 1998:370).

Since the onset of the 1960's and 1970's arguments for wider parental involvement in education began to receive attention (Dimmock *et al* 1996:6). The case for parental involvement is now widely accepted in many countries (Epstein 1991:347; Wehlburg 1996:126; Dimmock *et al* 1996:17; McKenna & Willms 1998:19). The eighth United States of America (USA) education goal in Goals 2000 states that, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (United States Department of Education 1994 in Miedel & Reynolds 1999:380).

Many governments now have legislation to ensure that parents are more intensively involved in their children's education (Wehlburg 1996:126; Dimmock *et al* 1996:17). The reasons for this are threefold. Firstly there has been an ideological shift towards the idea that parents are entitled to play an active role in their children's education rather than simply being bystanders (Mkwanazi 1994:25; Downer 1996:43; Wolfendale 1999:164). Secondly, a great deal of evidence suggests that parents, learners and teachers all benefit from increased

parental involvement (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371). Lastly, it is believed that increased parental involvement may help alleviate some of the problems faced by communities in which the material, emotional and/or educational needs of children are not being met, and promote equity and equality among these disadvantaged communities (Dimmock *et al* 1996:6; McKenna & Willms 1998:22). Parental involvement is believed to be a particularly suitable way to address these problems as it is far easier to manipulate than other sources of inequality such as family income or ethnicity (Desimone 1999:12).

In this chapter parental involvement in education will be defined and discussed.

2.2 Definitions of parental involvement and parental participation

Parental involvement and parental participation are used synonymously in a great number of studies (Reeve 1993:4). Furthermore, both terms are often used to describe a wide variety of parent behaviors some of which take place at the home while others take place in the school (Wehlburg 1996:125). This range of behaviours includes activities as diverse as working in the school canteen, fulfilling children's basic needs, providing clerical support for teachers, attending social activities, supervising children on school excursions, helping with homework, making important decisions on the nature of the curriculum, and so forth (Reeve 1993:2).

The Australians have classified parent activities into two types. Those which involve parents voluntarily supporting the school are defined as "parent involvement", while those which consider the parents to be partners in their children's education and give parents a direct role in decision-making at classroom, school or state level are defined as "parent participation" (Reeve 1993:4-5). Nevertheless, there is a great deal of disagreement on what parent

participation actually means, especially on the type and amount of power parents should really have. There are very few advocates of parent participation who truly see parents as equal partners in their children's education (Reeve 1993:10).

Parental participation, for the purposes of this dissertation, is defined as nothing less than the equal partnership between parents and the school. Under this definition parental participation is a comprehensive and inclusive term that includes all types of parental behaviours both at the home and in the school that relate to a child's education, and it includes decision-making as equal partners. Parental involvement is more limited and refers to the involvement of parents in one or more parent activities but not to a full partnership between the parents and school. By this definition the majority of programmes have focused on parental involvement and very few have attempted true parental participation (McKenna & Willms 1998:36).

Even with this understanding of the difference between parental involvement and parental participation, the terms are still vague because they include so many different parent activities, resulting in the fact that parental involvement may mean quite different things to different people (Wehlburg 1996:125). Thus, it is necessary to define parental involvement more operationally by dividing it into different categories.

2.3 Categorisation of types of parental involvement activities

As mentioned, a wide variety of parental behaviours have been ascribed to the term parental involvement. Researchers have divided these behaviours into a variety of categories.

Factor analysis led Ho and Willms (1996:132) to conclude that parental participation includes four dimensions: home discussion; school communication; home supervision; and school participation.

Grolnick and Sloweiaczek (1994:237) theorised three categories of parental involvement. Firstly, behavioural involvement which includes activities at the school and participating in educational activities at home. Secondly, personal involvement which helps children affectively and creates positive attitudes towards schooling and positive self-concepts. This category includes all behaviours that show care about the children's affective experiences in and out of school. The third category is intellectual involvement and this refers to cognitively stimulating activities such as reading books and discussing current events.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987:429), theorised a two-way split into home-based activities and school-based parent involvement activities.

Gordon (1976:7-8) breaks parental participation into five types of involvement: the traditional type of parental involvement, parents as by-standers or the audience; the parents as decision makers; the parents as classroom volunteers; the parents as paid paraprofessionals or teacher's aides; and the parents as learners and teachers of their own children at home.

Factor analysis by Gettinger and Guetschow (1998:38) grouped parental involvement activities into two roles. Roles in which parents have direct contact or involvement with their children, such as reading to them, and roles in which involvement is indirect with less direct benefit for the children specifically, such as attending open-house meetings.

Epstein (1987b:5) identified 5 types of parental involvement that are critical to positive child outcomes. Type 1 was the basic obligations of parents, which included child support, parenting style and the provision of suitable home conditions for learning. Type 2 was the basic obligations of the school and focused on communication. Type 3 was parental involvement at the school and included volunteering to assist teachers and administrators, and attending learner performances and other events, at the school. Type 4 referred to parent involvement in learning activities at the home. The 5th type of parent involvement was in government and advocacy and referred to the parents' roles as decision-makers at the school, district or state level. Later a 6th type of parental involvement, collaboration and exchange with community organisations, was included (Epstein & Dauber 1991:291). Since this time Epstein (1995:704) has refined the definitions of these categories and renamed some of them.

All of these authors have provided evidence suggesting that their particular categories of parental involvement play critical roles in child outcomes. Unsurprisingly, many of these categorisations overlap, and all provide greater insight into the phenomenon of parental involvement. However as Epstein's typology of six types of parent involvement is the most widely used and accepted (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995:317; McKenna & Willms 1998:19) it shall form the framework of this chapter.

Thus, for the purposes of this dissertation parental involvement in education is defined as the parents' involvement in one or more of Epstein's (1995:704) six renamed categories. Namely, parenting (basic obligations of the parent), communication (basic obligations of the school), parent involvement at the school, parent involvement in learning activities at the home, decision-making (government or advocacy), and/or collaboration and exchange with community organisations.

2.4 The benefits and practice of Epstein's six types of parental involvement in education.

2.4.1 Introduction

A great many studies have shown positive child outcomes as the result of parental involvement programmes across a wide range of populations (Wehlburg 1996:125; Izzo, Weissberg & Kaspro 1999:834; Ma 1999:61). While positive child outcomes have included improved academic achievement, this is just one of the many positive results of parental involvement for the child (Epstein 1995:707). Other positive child outcomes are: a more positive attitude to school; greater school readiness; greater motivation; fewer behaviour problems; more regular homework habits; a lower drop-out rate for school as whole as well as in some specific subjects; a lower rate of placement and fewer years in special education classes; and lower grade retention (Epstein 1987a:128; McKenna & Willms 1998:22; Lazar & Slostad 1999:206; Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple & Peay 1999:422). Educators have also described a role for parental involvement in the prevention of suicide in adolescents (Mullins 1999:8).

In addition a number of benefits for the teacher have been shown such as reduced work load, improved relationships with both parents and learners, fewer discipline problems, a more positive attitude to teaching, less stress, and higher ratings by parents in terms of interpersonal skills and overall teaching abilities (Epstein 1987b:5; Swap 1993:10; Lazar & Slostad 1999:209).

Parents have also been shown to benefit from parental involvement programmes, which result in better parent-school (Comer & Haynes 1991:272) and parent-child relationships (Overett & Donald 1998:353). Parents are also more confident in their ability and right to play an effective positive role in their children's education (Olmsted 1991:224-225; Overett & Donald 1998:355;

Whiteford 1998:66), have a better understanding of what is happening in the school (Epstein 1986:288) and show greater satisfaction in the type of education their children are receiving (Stouffer1992:6).

In this section, Epstein's (1995:704) six types of parental involvement are defined, and their benefits and practice discussed. Most authors agree that the more comprehensive the programme, the more types of involvement it includes both in the home and at school, the greater the benefits (Ascher 1988:113; Heleen 1992:6; Christenson *et al* 1992b:192). Nevertheless, these six types of parental involvement will be discussed separately for three reasons.

Firstly, many studies have focussed on only one or a few types of parental involvement and have, thus, revealed only the benefits of those particular types. For example Levine's (1998:377) programme focussed on parent education workshops, while Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) studied parent involvement in school activities.

Secondly, even the more comprehensive programmes of parental involvement such as those of Comer and Haynes (1991:273) and Hara and Burke (1998:14) are almost never fully comprehensive and often include quite different sets of parental involvement activities. Consequently, it is difficult to compare these programmes when they are considered as a whole.

Thirdly, a great deal of evidence supports the contention that different types of parental involvement have different effects (Epstein 1987b:5; Ma 1999:75) and that parents who show high levels of one type of involvement do not necessarily show high levels of other types of involvement (McKenna & Willms 1998: 22). Further, fully comprehensive parental involvement programmes are not easy to implement (Epstein 1991:348-349). Thus, it is important to know exactly which types of parental involvement activities are most beneficial so that educators can

choose the most appropriate activities to implement. In addition, evidence suggests different parental involvement activities may have different effects over time (Ma 1999:76).

Nevertheless, while the benefits of these six types of parental involvement are considered separately in the following sections, it must be remembered that many parental involvement activities combine aspects of more than one type of parental involvement (Epstein 1995:707).

Unfortunately, the benefits of the six types of parental involvement are not always fully realised as a result of the ways that parents, teachers, and schools practice them. Research on the ways these types of parental involvement are commonly practiced is also discussed in this section.

2.4.2 Parenting

Epstein (1987a:121-123) states that it is the parents' basic obligation to provide for their children's needs such as food, shelter, health and safety. Parents must prepare their children for school and continue parenting throughout childhood and adolescence. Parenting includes an appropriate parenting style, parental supervision, and home conditions that will enable children to become self-confident, self-reliant, responsible individuals who display appropriate behaviour and are able to learn (Epstein 1987b:5). The parents must also supply the children's school related requirements such as school supplies and a place to work (Epstein 1987a:121).

A great deal of evidence suggests that parenting is a particularly beneficial form of parental involvement (Zellman & Waterman 1998:379). Furthermore, it is virtually impossible for teachers to change parents' socioeconomic status (SES)

and other related family background variables, such as marital status or ethnicity. However, research suggests that it is possible to help parents improve their parenting which has, in many cases, been found to have a greater effect on school achievement than family background variables (Schleicher 1992:28; Jantjes 1995:295-296; Zellman & Waterman 1998:379). Dornbusch and Ritter (1992:123) state, "What parents and families do is even more important than what families and parents are".

Epstein (1986:280-281) found that over 97% of the parents she surveyed reported that their children had school supplies and over 90% said their children had a regular place to do homework. A positive relationship has been found between parents that provide school-based learning materials and books for their young children at home and learner achievement (Shaver & Walls 1994:90).

Jantjes (1995:297-298) observed that improving home environment increased learner's school achievement, parents' confidence to consult teachers, and their understanding of their children, and resulted in closer relationships between parents and school staff. Such improvements in home environment have been shown to have lasting effects (Keeves in Jantjes 1995:299).

Zellman and Waterman (1998:370) found that a positive parenting style was more important for the children's reading achievement and lack of learning problems than the extent to which parents were involved at school. Researchers have argued for some time that parenting style moderates the impact of parent involvement by influencing the degree to which the child is open to the parent and the nature of the parent-child interaction (Zellman & Waterman 1998:379). Parenting through anxious pressure on the child relates negatively to child achievement (Georgiou 1999:425). There is a great deal of evidence that children are more successful in school when their parents adopt an authoritative parenting style and accept, nurture, encourage, and are emotionally responsive

to their children (Dornbusch & Ritter 1992:120; Christenson, Rounds & Gorney 1992b:187-188).

High parental expectations and aspirations have been shown to have positive effects on a number of educational outcomes including scholastic achievement (Christenson *et al* 1992b:183; Sitole 1993: 68; Fan 2001:27). Fan (2001:57) found parents educational aspirations to have a strong positive effect on learners' academic growth regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity. This researcher theorises that these aspirations may translate into educationally beneficial activities and behaviours throughout a child's life. Parental expectations have been found to be a more powerful predictor of high school completion than socioeconomic status (Ainley 1995:35).

Zellman & Waterman (1998:378) found that parenting enthusiasm contributes significantly to the mother's involvement at school but not to the child's reading achievement or degree of learning problems. They conclude that enthusiasm may operate as a motivator of parental rather than child behaviours. It is however, quite possible that parental enthusiasm may result in some other positive child outcome such as a more positive attitude to school.

Children whose parents attribute their achievement to the children's own effort have been found to have better academic results than those whose parents attribute their achievement to luck, ability or other people (Georgiou 1999:424).

Home supervision which includes structuring children's time for homework, modeling children's learning, encouraging children to read at home, and limiting children's time to watch television, also results in a number of positive child outcomes (Christenson *et al* 1992b:185-186). On the other hand, Ma (1999: 25) found home supervision to have no effect on learner dropout rate for high school mathematics.

Parenting skills can be targeted in workshops. Attendance of parents at school-based parent training and information workshops has been positively correlated with positive learner academic achievements (Shaver & Walls 1998: 95) and other benefits to the learner and parent (Smith 1993:19; McKenna & Willms 1998:31).

2.4.3 Communication

Both school to home communication, where teachers inform the parents about school programmes and children's progress, and home to school communication, where parents contact teachers about their children's school life, have been correlated with positive child outcomes (Epstein 1995:706). They are believed to be of benefit to all participants in the education process (Swan & Newhouse 1998:19). In fact, no parent involvement programme can succeed without effective communication between the home and school (Friedman 1973:118).

Effective communication includes the use of formal and informal letters, report cards, memos, telephone calls, the use of the internet, parent-teacher meetings, home visits, workshops, and parent-teacher association meetings (Sitole 1993:5; Jones 1988:9; McKenna & Willms 1998: 31; Trahan & Lawler-Prince 1999:66).

Teacher communications can increase many forms of parental involvement (Watkins 1997:12). Research suggests that parents actually want more information about what their children are doing at school and how to support them (Crozier 1999:322).

However, most of the communication between parents and teachers occurs with parents whose children are experiencing some kind of behavioural or learning problem or with parents who have already shown an interest in helping their

children (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76; Ho & Willms 1996:138). Unfortunately, few teachers want more contact with parents of children without problems (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76). Epstein (1986:281) found in her survey that a large number of parents were not involved in some of the most common, traditional communications of the school. More than one third had no conference with the teacher during the year and almost two-thirds never communicated with the teacher by phone. She found that while over 95% of teachers reported communication with parents, this communication was not deep, frequent, or detailed.

Furthermore, the communication that occurs between parents and schools often flows in only one direction, from the school to the parent (Epstein 1986:281). Teachers and schools frequently fail to appreciate that parents have their own expertise and unique knowledge of their children and thus, have a great deal to contribute to their children's education (Peressini 1998:578).

2.4.4 Parental involvement at the school

Parental involvement at the school includes assisting teachers in the classroom, on class trips or at class parties. Also included is parental assistance in the cafeteria, library, playground, computer lab and other areas where adult supervision is required, and assisting in fund raising, community relations and political awareness (Epstein 1987a:125). As a result this category is sometimes referred to as volunteering (Epstein 1995:704). However, parent involvement at the school also refers to parents' attendance of student performances, sports or other events at the school (Epstein 1987b:5).

Many studies have provided evidence that the presence of the parent as a volunteer in the classroom results in positive child outcomes at all levels of

education. Tijus *et al* (1997:7) found that parental involvement in pre-school classes enhanced the children's cognitive development. Ma's (1999:75) analysis suggested that parent volunteer work greatly reduces mathematics dropout in high school. Ho and Willms (1996:137), on the other hand, showed it to have a negligible effect on mathematics achievement in Grade 8 although it had a modest effect on reading achievement. Peressini (1998b:323) stated that, "Encouraging parents to become active in the mathematics classroom is a powerful way of helping them understand the changes in their children's mathematics education".

Miedel and Reynolds (1999:379-402) did a longitudinal study on parental involvement in preschool and kindergarten in activities at the school which included volunteering in the classroom, attending events at the school, attending school meetings or assemblies, going on field trips, and having parent-teacher conferences. They found that the number of these activities that the parents participated in was significantly associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention, and fewer years of Special Education.

Dornbusch and Ritter (1988:76) found that high school children had slightly higher grades if their parents attended school functions. Even simply attending events such as drama and athletics had this effect (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76). Parents explained the positive relationship between their attendance and children's school grades as being due to them actively demonstrating that they value education and due to their having a better understanding of the school situation (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76).

Research by Epstein (1987a:125) suggested that having some parents at the school positively influenced teachers' interactions with other parents as the volunteers demonstrated parents' willingness to help, with the result that

teachers were encouraged to ask other parents to help their children with home-based learning activities.

However, several researchers have found little or no relationship between learner achievement and involvement at the school (Finn 1998: 23).

Research in Canada has indicated that most volunteering in schools occurs in the early grades (Ho & Willms in McKenna & Willms 1998:33) and tends to be limited to activities such as assistance with group teaching, library resource work, remedial teaching, clerical work, and supporting special education (Kompf & Dworet in McKenna & Willms 1998:33).

Epstein (1987a:125) noted that only about 4% of the parents in the American primary schools she studied were highly active at the school. The vast majority, 70%, never took part in parental activities at the school. She found that while most parents believed school involvement was important, relatively few felt they could assist at school. She points out that most parents cannot come to the school buildings to assist teachers or attend meetings during the school day.

2.4.5 Parental involvement in learning activities in the home

Parental involvement in the home includes helping with any learning activities by conducting discussions, reading to the child, playing educational games, and tutoring the child in specific skills (Epstein 1987a:126). These activities may be coordinated and directed by the teacher or initiated by the parent with or without the teacher's knowledge (Epstein 1987a:126). Involving the parent in learning activities in the home has been found to have the greatest positive impact on learner academic success of the six areas of parental involvement (Epstein 1987b:5; Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller 1995:129; McKenna & Willms 1998:22;

Desimone 1999:22; Izzo, *et al* 1999:835). Greenwood and Hickman (1991:279) claim that one half to two thirds of learners' achievement is accounted for by home, rather than school, variables. However, although parental involvement in the home is more beneficial than parent involvement at school (Finn 1998:20), the positive effects on the child of parental involvement are more comprehensive when the parents are involved both at home and at the school (Christenson *et al* 1992b:192). Involvement in the home has also been shown to have a greater impact on positive child outcomes than socioeconomic variables (Ho & Willms 1996:137).

Research by Ho and Willms (1996:137-138) led them to conclude that involvement in learning activities in the home, particularly home discussion, had the strongest relationship with academic achievement, while volunteering at the school or attending parent teacher association meetings had little effect on academic success. Home discussion also had a stronger effect on academic outcomes than monitoring of homework and supervisory activities. A number of other authors (Christenson *et al* 1992b:184-185; Muller 1998:347; Desimone 1999:23) have also provided evidence for positive effects of home discussion on learners' achievement. Home discussion includes verbal encouragement and guidance, mealtime conversation, and the discussion of the school programme and activities (Christenson *et al* 1992b: 184-185; Ho & Willms 1996:131).

Although the effectiveness of parental involvement in literacy activities has been being called into doubt (Sylva & Evans 1999:283) a great many studies support the idea that home reading activities increase reading achievement (Epstein 1987b:5; Christenson *et al* 1992b:192; Finn 1998:22). Moreover, teachers tend to try to involve parents in reading activities at home more than they try to involve them in other subjects (Epstein 1987b:5). Research suggests that paired reading may be a particularly effective way of involving parents in improving their children's language skills (Topping 1995:33-52).

Overett and Donald (1998:347-353) found that a paired reading programme involving parents and other family members resulted in significant improvements in learner reading accuracy and comprehension, and reading attitude. They also found evidence for the idea that positive relationships between the children and their parents were being nurtured, and that the mediation skills learnt by the parents were being widely practiced. All family members enjoyed the results. This finding is in line with those of many other studies which have found significant positive effects on children's word recognition, comprehension and attitude to reading as a result of parental involvement in paired reading (Topping 1995:12-39).

Even without parental training, simply reading to children from when they are very young establishes the fun and value of reading for them (Ballantine 1999:171).

Homework provides parents with an excellent opportunity to be involved in their children's education and stay informed in terms of what their children are learning at school (Cutright 1989:101). However, there have been some studies that have shown a relationship between negative learner outcomes and parents checking and helping with homework (Perkins & Milgram 1996: 197; Desimone 1999:24; Georgiou 1999:425). This may be because parents are more likely to check or help with homework if a child is already performing poorly at school (Desimone 1999:24). Alternatively, since many of these studies were done on adolescents for whom being helped with homework everyday may be developmentally inappropriate, this may account for the negative findings of these studies. Moreover, helping with homework has been found to be highly related to pressing and controlling types of parental styles and a pressing parenting style has been shown to have a negative relationship with child achievement (Georgiou 1999:424). The anxiety that is characteristic of this

parental style may motivate parents to help with homework but may also reduce the child's confidence in his ability, especially if the help was unsolicited (Georgiou 1999:425).

Nevertheless, a great deal of research suggests that parental involvement in well-designed interactive home learning activities improves learners' performance, attitudes, and behaviour (Bauch 1988:81-82; Epstein 1995:706-707; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995:315; Villas-Boas 1998:367; Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:187-189). Epstein (in Jones 2001:19) contends that the greatest impact on student achievement comes from family participation in well-designed at-home activities and this is true "regardless of the family, racial or cultural background or the parents' formal education".

Parents have been found to be interested in, and even enjoy, helping with homework and knowing what their children are doing at school (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Burow in Balli 1998:142). However, many parents do not know how to go about helping their children with homework (Trahan & Lawler-Prince 1999:65). Parents have complained that such help can drain their energy and patience and that inadequate skills can hinder their efforts (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* in Balli 1998:142). Watkins (1997:12) found that few parents were effective in helping their children. Thus, parents need to be shown how to help their children at home (Trahan & Lawler-Prince 1999:65). An understanding of their child's homework style and the provision of home conditions to match it, also increases the positive effects of parents involvement in homework (Perkins & Milgram 1996:201). Further, much homework is poorly designed with little thought given to involving parents effectively (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:182). To effectively involve parents homework must be well designed and purposefully intended to include parents (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:186).

Carey (1998:317-318) notes that specially made up home packages for learners and parents to work on together have been found to help learners master academic goals, become more confident and enthusiastic in specific subject areas, and have greater self-esteem. Parental enthusiasm and confidence are also increased. These home packages consist of manipulatives, books, games, puzzles, and/or other activities that are based on one or more school subjects. Such packages can be sent home by teachers with the child (Carey 1998:318) or made available in lending libraries (McCarty 1998:369).

Parental involvement in home learning activities is usually stronger during the early grades and is usually associated with literacy activities (McKenna & Willms 1998:34). Epstein (1986:282) found that more than 85% of parents spent 15 minutes or more at home helping their child when asked to do so by the teacher. Furthermore, parents said they would be willing to spend considerably more time helping their children at home if they were told how to. However, Epstein (1986:282) found that fewer than 25% of parents received frequent and systematic requests and directions from teachers to assist their children with specific skills.

2.4.6 Decision-making

Parents who play an active role in decision-making get a greater sense of ownership of the school, have better connections with other parents, and are more aware of education policies (McKenna & Willms 1998:23). In addition, a better fit between the needs of the children and school policies, curriculum and practices is expected, leading to improved learner attitudes to the school and better schooling outcomes (Ascher 1988:114; Epstein 1995:706; McKenna & Willms 1998:23). Numerous studies suggest, however, that because parent advocacy and decision-making are only weakly related to teaching and learning

they do not improve learner achievement or at least not directly and not in the short term (Brandt 1989:24; Lemmer 2000:61).

If parents are true partners in education they will be able to make decisions about things such as how the school spends its money, school discipline, staffing, curriculum, school policy, teaching strategies, school routines, and allocations of learners to different types of schools and programmes (McKenna & Willms 1998: 25).

Mkwanazi (1994:25) states that, "A central element of what constitutes meaningful parental involvement, is involvement of parents in the governance structures of the school". She states further that, "Any kind of involvement of parents in education that excludes involvement in these areas cannot be defined as "significant" parental involvement".

There is, however, still a great deal of debate in education circles about how parents should be involved in the overall governance of the school and precisely how much power they should have (Mkwanazi 1994:24; McKenna & Willms 1998:23). Some educators feel that limits must be placed on the parents' powers to make decisions while others believe a full partnership is essential (Reeve 1993:10; McGrath & Kurlikoff 1999:77).

Unfortunately, while the departments of education of various countries and provinces have attempted to increase parent involvement in decision-making (McKenna & Willms 1998:27), it is the most difficult and challenging type of involvement to organise and implement (Peressini 1998b:324). In virtually all cases parents have an advisory position or, at best, very limited direct input into decisions (Parr, McNaughton, Timperley & Robinson 1993:35; McKenna & Willms 1998:27; Lazar & Slostad 1999:208), and cannot be deemed true partners by any stretch of the imagination. School organisation and management has tended

to remain hierarchical and authoritarian, and has stayed firmly in the hands of educators (Comer 1987:14).

This type of parental involvement is the type that the fewest parents participate in and parental involvement in this area is generally not encouraged by the school (Ascher 1988:5). Teachers frequently see themselves as the professionals or experts with parents having little to offer in matters of curriculum, pedagogy and school governance (Parr *et al* 1993:35; Ainley 1995:35; Jonson 1999:122).

Participation of parents in parent-teacher associations, governing bodies and other decision-making school councils does not necessarily mean that parents are actually getting to make decisions (Ashton & Cairney 2001:151). For example, research in Australia has shown that parental involvement in school councils has had little impact on the curriculum and may be only tokenistic (Ainley 1995:38; Ashton & Cairney 2001:145).

Even when parents do get to make important decisions, doubts have been raised about how representative of the parent body those parents on decision-making councils actually are (Dimmock, *et al* 1996:9). Epstein interviewed by Brandt (1989:27) reports that the parents that are on these bodies rarely communicate with the parents they supposedly represent to solicit ideas or reports committee plans or actions. Further parents may become involved simply to promote their own agendas and ideologies without considering others (Black 1998:51). Doubts have also been raised about the benefits of participative decision-making involving parents and others. Participation may not always promote collaborative decision-making or even better quality decisions (McGrath & Kurlikoff 1999:77).

Thus, research has been done to determine the characteristics necessary for successful decision-making groups such as ensuring that these groups are representative and that they advocate the active involvement of as many parents

as possible (Comer & Haynes 1991:272; Stouffer 1992:8). Although parents in some communities wish to make decisions (Hanafin & Lynch 2002:45), it may be necessary to inspire others to want a decision-making role. McClelland and *et al* (in Crozier 1999:320) found few parents, irrespective of class, wanted much active involvement in decision-making and committee work.

2.4.7 Collaboration with the community

The school community is embedded in, and overlaps with, the extended family, the church, local businesses, volunteer organisations, and neighborhood communities, and the school's success depends on their support (McKenna & Willms 1998:35). Communities can have powerful effects on children's development by raising funds, serving as advocates for children's rights, providing learning opportunities outside the school, providing general social support, and providing recreational, social and health services (Epstein 1995:702; McKenna & Willms 1998:35). In return schools can share their facilities with communities, as do most Canadian schools (McKenna & Willms 1998:35). Further, schools can do services for the community such as organising family plans for troubled families, offering a police liaison programme (Stouffer 1992:8), canvassing on behalf of community organisations, and organising neighborhood clean-ups and art or music programmes for the elderly (McKenna & Willms 1998:35). In some countries the concept of a community school is reemerging (Epstein 1995:702). This refers to a place in which programmes and services for learners, parents and others are offered before, during and after the usual school day (Epstein 1995:702). Nevertheless, on the whole connections between schools, families and other community groups have been few and inconsistent (Chapman 1991:356).

Partners for Youth, a Canadian community programme, aims to improve the self-esteem of youths who have poor academic achievement or are at risk of dropping out due to problems with peer or family relationships, drug or alcohol abuse, or problems due to early sexuality. This community programme, funded mainly by private donors and businesses and staffed by volunteers, involves providing challenging adventure based activities to build up self-esteem, and trust. This programme has benefited both the community and its source schools (McKenna & Willms 1998:35).

2.4.8 Summary

While a great deal of research supports the beneficial role of parents' involvement in their children's education, the wide variety of different activities studied, and varied ways in which their effects have been measured, makes generalization difficult. Nevertheless, research indicates that involvement of parents in learning activities in the home, particularly in terms of home discussion and well-designed interactive homework, has the greatest positive impact on academic success. Parenting, especially a positive parenting style, also has a strong positive effect on children's academic outcomes. Further parenting and involvement in learning activities in the home can be improved and have been found to have a greater effect on school achievement than socioeconomic status variables, which cannot be changed.

Although parental involvement in decision-making, collaboration with the community, communication, and parental involvement at the school, generally have little direct effect on learner academic achievement, some of the activities that fall under these four types of parental involvement have been found to improve learners' academic success. Moreover, they may result in many other positive learner outcomes including a more positive parent and learner attitude

to the school, better homework completion, and improved learner behaviour. Further, parental involvement of any type cannot occur without effective communication and that true parental partnership requires that the parents play a significant role in decision-making and advocacy.

Thus, many researchers recognise the benefits of implementing a comprehensive parental involvement programme. However, studies conducted in a variety of schools indicate that adequate parental involvement of all types is rare and requires considerable effort.

2.5 How parental involvement works

2.5.1 Introduction

In order to make decisions on how to go about promoting parental involvement to maximise its benefits for learners, parents and teachers it is necessary to understand how it works (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371). A variety of theories have been proposed and evidence for these theories forwarded (Ma 1999:62-63).

2.5.2 The learners

Some authors theorise and provide evidence for the idea that parental involvement improves children's academic performance by helping them gain cognitive skills (Tijus *et al* 1997:7). The children gain cognitive skills through activities such as their parents helping with homework, and providing more educational resources, resources for skill development, and cognitive stimulation (Tijus *et al* 1997:7).

However, Grolnick and Sloweiaczek (1994:249) have provided evidence for the belief that parental involvement affects children's school performance by affecting the children affectively, in terms of their attitudes and motivation, and not directly cognitively. These authors believe that children are more successful in school because they interpret their parents' visits to the school and engagement in school activities as indications that they consider their children to be important. Further, these parents are modeling the idea that the individual has the power to control outcomes and create change. Children may, as a result, see school outcomes as more controllable. In addition, children who have been exposed to, and participated in, educational activities in their homes with their parents may feel better able to master or control similar activities at the school.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:319-322) believe that parents who help their children in activities such as homework enable and enhance their children's education in three ways. Firstly, by modeling that educational activities are worth their time and effort. Secondly, by reinforcing the goals of education when they praise their children for correctly completing homework. Thirdly, by providing direct instruction, which promotes factual learning and cognitive abilities, by drilling their children on homework problems and asking open-ended questions. Balli (1998:145) found further evidence to support these assertions.

The harmonious relationship that results from parents and teachers working effectively together to educate the child is also likely to benefit the child (Ford, Follmer, & Litz 1998:311).

Research by Miedel and Reynolds (1999:382) has also shown that parents involved in parent involvement programmes are more aware of their children's school performance and progress, and had more frequent contact with teachers. They suggested that as a result parents may be more aware of the children's

problems and intercede before special education or grade retention becomes necessary.

2.5.3 The parents

As mentioned many programmes of parental involvement have led to increased parental confidence, enthusiasm and involvement (see 2.4). Many authors believe that this often results from the fact that the programme empowers parents who, as a result of it, no longer see themselves as inadequate mediators of their children's learning but realise they can play an important role therein (Overett & Donald 1998:348). Furthermore, research suggests that as a result of such programmes parents may be empowered with insight as well as specific mediational skills (Overett & Donald 1998:355). Such programmes have improved communication between parents and teachers (Epstein 1987b:5) and resulted in increased parental trust in, and acceptance of, the school (Swap 1993:10). This results in a more positive and satisfying relationship between the school and parent (Swap 1993:10-11).

2.5.4 The teachers

Research indicates that parental involvement programmes also make the teacher's job easier and more successful (Epstein 1991:348). Further, teachers benefit due to the support and appreciation of parents and their enthusiasm for problem solving and teaching generally is rekindled (Epstein & Dauber 1991:297; Swap 1993:10).

2.5.5 Summary

Parental involvement seems to work by a combination of reinforcing children's direct learning and academic skills and by helping to provide them with the confidence and desire to use these skills. Parental awareness of what is occurring at school may also result in earlier intervention and avoidance of problems. Parents and teachers benefit from improved relationships with each other and parents are empowered both in terms of their belief in their own abilities to help and also in terms of being provided with the skills they require, through parent involvement.

2.6 The determinants of parental involvement

Epstein and Becker (in Sitole 1993:88) designed a questionnaire to measure three broad categories of parental involvement: parent attitude to the school; contact initiated by the parent; and contact initiated by the school. This questionnaire is important, as analysis of the items in it reveals that two of its sections are the determinants of how and to what extent parents are involved in their children's education.

The items in "school initiated contact" refer to the efforts the school makes to initiate parental involvement. For example, by inviting parents to the school or by sending home news about things happening at the school.

The items in "parent initiated contact" refer to the extent to which parents take the opportunities the school gives them to be involved. For example, whether they actually do attend events they are invited to at the school. These items also refer to the extent to which the parents involve themselves in activities that they

can choose whether to be involved in or not, regardless of whether the school requests their involvement. For example, helping with homework.

Consequently, the ways in which parents are involved is determined by what efforts the school makes to involve parents and whether parents take the opportunities they have to be involved.

Despite widespread international understanding of the benefits of parental involvement, levels of involvement in many schools are actually very low (Barnard 1990:2; Mkwanazi 1994:24). A number of factors have been found to influence whether parents do take the opportunities they have to become involved and what efforts the school makes to involve parents.

2.7 Factors influencing the degree and type of parental involvement

2.7.1 Introduction

A wide variety of factors have been found to influence how, and in what ways, parents are involved in the education of their children. Some of these factors relate to the nature of the parents or the family background, others to the nature of the child and still others to the teacher or school in question.

Understanding the factors that determine how, and in what ways, parents become involved should assist in the development of effective parent involvement programmes (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris 1997:538).

2.7.2 The family background

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994:238) state in respect to parental involvement, "...because of parents values, time commitments, and availability of resources they may choose to, or be forced to, devote their time and energies to domains differentially".

2.7.2.1 *Socioeconomic status and parental education level*

Socioeconomic status and parent education level are closely associated. Education level is often used as an indicator of socioeconomic status (Entwistle & Alexander 1992:80). Parents from poor communities, often those from minority communities in the West, are increasingly the focus of parental involvement programmes (Overett & Donald 1998:347; Sitole 1993:1). Firstly, because learners from these families tend to achieve less well (Watkins 1997:6-7; Shaver & Walls 1998:94) and, secondly, due to the high levels of child neglect found in these communities (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371).

Some studies have shown that parents from poorer communities and those with lower levels of education tend to be generally less involved in their children's education (Baker & Stevenson 1986:156; Grolnick *et al* 1997:544; Ho & Willms 1996:133). However, Scott-Jones (1987:283) argued, that contrary to this stereotype, parents with a low socioeconomic status and levels of education become involved in their children's education in many positive ways.

Baker and Stevenson (1986:40) found mothers of lower socioeconomic status and education to have poorer management skills, less knowledge of their child's schooling, and less contact with the school than mothers with high socioeconomic status and education. However, no difference was found in terms of homework or general academic strategies.

Further, while Ho and Willms (1996:137) found a statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic status and school communication, home discussion and school participation, these effects were small and explained less than 10% of the differences in these types of parent involvement that occurred between families. Moreover, they found family socioeconomic status to have virtually no relationship with the level of home supervision.

These two studies suggest that even when differences in the general level of parental involvement exist, these differences are due to differences in only some types of parental involvement. In fact, other studies have found no relationship between socioeconomic status and general level of parental involvement (Hickman *et al* 1995: 129; Shaver & Walls 1998:94; Fan 2001:56). Nevertheless, a very large body of evidence supports the proposition that parents of lower socioeconomic status are, indeed, less involved in a few types of parental involvement.

Hickman *et al* (1995:129), despite finding no relationship between socioeconomic status and parental involvement generally, found parents of lower socioeconomic status to be less involved in two out of seven possible areas of involvement that they assessed, namely, school based parental involvement and a category that includes parenting. Grolnick *et al* (1997:546) found that families with a low socioeconomic status had lower cognitive and school involvement. However personal involvement, the more affective type of involvement, was not effected by socioeconomic status, and occurred equally at all socioeconomic levels (Grolnick *et al* 1997:546). Shaver & Walls (1998:95) found that socioeconomic status had no significant role in terms of attendance at school-based workshops in the district that they studied.

This lower involvement of parents with a lower socioeconomic status may be due to increased pressures due to financial constraints and other accompanying

negative factors (Davies 1991:381). They may be less equipped to help due to their lower education level (Scott-Jones 1987:283) or they may view the school with suspicion and/or remain distanced as it often promotes a different (middle class) culture from their own (Friedman 1973:123; Laosa 1980:763; Crozier 1999a:316). Crozier (1999a:316) points out that working class parents tend to view schools (middle-class institutions) as separate from their everyday cultural and social world and that the teacher-parent role comprises a division of labour. She also noted that teachers tend to adopt the same strategies for promoting parental involvement irrespective of parental need, class, or individual circumstances and while these methods may be well-suited middle-class parents they do not work well for working class parents. Hoover-Dempsey *et al* (1987:430) suggest that parents with higher socioeconomic status may better realise the importance of their children's education and may feel more confident in their right to be involved in the school.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, schools find it difficult to involve parents (Cullinford and Morrison 1999:261). Nevertheless, parents from all backgrounds can be involved productively when teachers motivate them (Epstein 1986:293; Shaver & Walls 1998:95). Teachers who try to involve parents work out ways to involve parents of all educational levels (Epstein 1987b:4). The teachers and school's attitude and approach to this involvement is crucial (Watson, Brown & Swick 1983:178; Dauber & Epstein 1989:18; Epstein 1995:703).

2.7.2.2 Race and ethnicity

A multitude of studies have shown that parents of different race or ethnicity are concerned about their children's education and are willing to take an active role in it (Morris & Taylor 1998:229). However, they may favour different types of parental involvement. Asian parents have been found to focus on out of school activities such as music lessons or discussion with their children about the school

programme. African American parents, on the other hand, favour school-site activities (Kerbow & Bernhardt in Zellman & Waterman 1998:371).

Conflicting evidence on the level of parental involvement found in different racial-ethnic groups has been presented. Some studies have found minority parents to be less involved even with socioeconomic status controlled (Zellman & Waterman 1998:375). This may occur as a result of a lack of sociocultural congruency between the home and school which disempowers minority parents and precludes their involvement in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan 1991:21). However, Kerbow and Bernhardt (in Zellman & Waterman 1998:371) showed that when socioeconomic status is equal, minority parents are often involved in schools at a higher level than non-minority parents are. In a cross-cultural study Asian mothers were found to be more active than American mothers in their children's education (Stevenson & Stigler 1992:54-60). This greater involvement has been correlated with far higher mathematics achievement of Asian children (Stevenson & Stigler 1992:93).

Other studies have shown differences in levels of involvement between parents of different racial and ethnic groups in some types of parental involvement. Ho and Willms (1996:137) found that Hispanic parents had slightly higher levels of home supervision and than Whites, but were similar to Whites in respect to school communication, home discussion and school participation. Black parents had the same level of school participation as White parents but higher levels of the other three types of involvement, while, Asian parents had higher levels of supervision at home but lower levels of the other types of involvement.

The effectiveness of different types of parental involvement may also differ according to the race-ethnicity of the parents and children. Desimone (1999:20) found that parental volunteering at the school was a good predictor of achievement for White learners but was not a significant predictor for

disadvantaged minorities. PTA involvement, on the other hand, was a strong predictor of grades for Black children but was insignificant where the grades of White and Hispanic children were concerned although it was a significant predictor of increased reading scores for all three groups (Desimone 1999:20). She also found differences in the effectiveness of home discussion and parenting styles according to the race-ethnicity of the participants (Desimone 1999:23). This suggests a need for researchers to determine what type of involvement works best for their target population and why.

2.7.2.3 Employment status

Working parents are less likely to interact with the school (Epstein 1988:58). Conflicting work schedules have been found to be a major barrier to parental involvement (Gettinger & Guetschow 1998:49). However, contrary to expectations, Herrich and Epstein (1990:187) found that parents who worked full time tended to work on more home activities with their children than parents who worked part-time or did not work outside the home. Thus, working outside the home was not the main determinant of parents' involvement in home learning activities.

In fact where parents are unemployed as a result of circumstances rather than their own choice, the stress of unemployment, and the urgent problems to survival it presents, leaves parents little time or energy for involvement (van Wyk 2001:126).

2.7.2.4 Marital status

Even with socioeconomic status controlled, single parents and step-families have generally been found to have a lower level of involvement at the school than married parents (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76; Epstein 1995:703; Ho & Willms 1996:137; Grolnick *et al* 1997:546). Epstein (1987a:130) found that while single parents were less involved at the school they spent more time helping their

children at home, than married parents. Ho and Willms (1996:137) found that home discussion and school communication did not vary with marital status. Grolnick *et al* (1997:546) note that involvement at the school may be the most difficult type of involvement for single mothers and that therefore schools may find it useful to target other activities that do not require daytime availability.

Stress has been found to particularly undermine the involvement of the parent in single parent families (Forgatch, Patterson, & Skinner in Grolnick *et al* 1997:539).

It is important for schools to remember that single parents are a diverse group in many important respects such as their level of education, size of family, family resources, and confidence in their ability to help their children (Sitole 1993:73). As a result one cannot simply conclude that children from these homes will be disadvantaged and schools should not be biased against either these parents or their children (Sitole 1993:73). Epstein (1995:703) notes that while research indicates that single parent families tend to be less involved at the school on average, that this can be overcome if the school makes the effort to organise opportunities for the parents to volunteer at various times and places to support their children.

2.7.2.5 Parent gender

Mothers, and other female caregivers, are usually more involved in their children's education than fathers, regardless of family structure or marital status (Christenson *et al* 1992a:37; Standing 1999:58).

2.7.2.6 Parents' perceptions of their educational role and that of the school

The parents' perception of their role contributes to the type and amount of involvement shown by them (Russell 1991:286-287). Grolnick *et al* (1997:539) note that parents are more likely to become involved to the extent that they believe strongly that parents have a role in the teaching-learning process.

Parents who believe in the value of their contributions (Grolnick *et al* 1997:545) and especially when they believe these to have a direct effect on the achievement of their children (Christenson *et al* 1992b:179), are also, more likely to be involved in their children's education. This has been defined as parent efficacy (Morris & Taylor 1998:219).

In general parents will choose those types of involvement in which they believe they can be successful. Thus, parents' perceptions of their specific knowledge and skills will influence the type of involvement the parents choose (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1995:317).

One high school had a very large increase in parental attendance at school events simply as a result of informing parents in a newsletter that parental attendance was associated with higher learner grades (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76).

However, many parents feel that the school is the domain of the teacher and the place for education (Wehlburg 1996:127). Crozier (1999a:315-319) found that working class parents tend to perceive teachers as the professionals "who know best" and place great trust in them to fulfil their roles. This results in passivity and inhibits them from playing a greater role in their children's education. Further, some parents may regard education as the sole responsibility of the school (Russell 1991:286; Olmsted 1991:229; van Wyk 2001:126). Many parents feel that their role is fundraising rather than active participation in schools and classrooms (Newport 1992:47). Even when they recognise the importance of their role, some parents have themselves experienced such inadequate schooling that they do not believe they can be effective mediators of their children's learning (Mkwanazi 1994:27; Rasekoala 1997:27; Overett & Donald 1998:348). Further many parents are reluctant to help their children because they are not sure how to help (Eldridge 2001:68).

Parents need to be made aware that their voluntary and genuine involvement has a decisive bearing on developing their children's potential and they need to be guided to fulfill this role (Heck & Williams 1984:28).

2.7.2.7 Barriers to parental involvement

A number of other factors can form barriers that discourage parents from becoming more involved in their children's education.

A negative parental attitude to the school may put parents off communicating or cooperating with the school (Robson & Hunt 1999:186). Some parents do not trust the school to have their children's best interests at heart, which may result in hostility to teachers (Lawson 2003:99-100). This may result from the parents own negative school experiences (Swan & Newhouse 1998:19) or the negative experiences of their own child or other peoples children at the school (Lawson 2003:100). This may be especially true, if a child is continually in trouble and the school is continually presenting parents with negative experiences as a result (Friedman 1973:122). Despair and pessimism regarding educational outcomes for their children also results in some parents being less involved in their children's education (Rasekoala 1997:26).

An important barrier to communication between the parents and school is language differences (De La Cruz 1999:297). Parents who cannot understand school communications may feel helpless and useless (Friedman 1973:122). The use of jargon may alienate even same language speakers to the school (Friedman 1973:122; Rasekoala 1997:26).

Lack of time due to work commitments, community commitments or having several children to look after, also has a detrimental impact on the level of parental involvement (Crozier 1999a:320). Time constraints and inflexible work schedules have been found to be the most significant barriers to parental

involvement in several studies (Gettinger & Guetschow 1998:46; Morris & Taylor 1998:226; Villas-Boas 1998:371). However, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:318) argue that these demands and responsibilities primarily effect the parents' decision about how to become involved rather than whether to become involved. It is important that schools bear the parents' commitments in mind and schedule events to suit the time preferences of their parents, which may differ according to the ages of the learners and the culture of the parents (Brown 2000:11). Badly timed events are likely to be poorly attended (Brown 2000:10).

Parents may also avoid questioning teachers about issues that concern them as they may fear that this may have a negative impact on the teacher's attitude to their children (Morris & Taylor1998:221).

A lack of transport (Olmsted 1991:229) and late notice for meetings (Moles 1982:46) may also discourage parents from attending events at the school.

2.7.3 The learners

Research has shown that learners want the support and involvement of their parents (Crozier 1999b:123). However, various characteristics of the individual child influence the degree and type of parental involvement practiced by his parents.

The needs of the child may influence the form of parental involvement (Zellman & Waterman 1998:375). As mentioned there is evidence that parents tend to help those children who need help with their homework (Watkins 1997:12). Zellman and Waterman (1998:375) found that many parents who were highly involved at the school did not help their children with homework. They also found that high child IQ was a significant predictor of parent non-involvement in homework, probably because the child did not need help.

Research also suggests that how parents perceive their children's characters may effect their level of involvement. Parents who see their adolescents as difficult tend to be less involved in their education (Ho & Willms 1996:138; Grolnick *et al* 1997:545) except, unsurprisingly, in respect to school communication (Ho & Willms 1996:138).

Parents have been found to be more involved in terms of home discussion and school communication with girls than with boys (Hickman *et al* 1995:130; Ho & Willms 1996: 137-138). Hickman *et al* (1995:130) also found the parents of girls to be more involved in advocacy. Muller (1998:348-353) found that parents of high school boys and girls were involved in significantly different ways. Daughters experience more restrictions and nurturing and involvement is more focussed on the home, while, the parents of sons are more likely to intervene and engage in school involvement outside the home. In contrast to this finding, other studies have found no difference between the levels of involvement for parents of boys or girls (Grolnick *et al* 1997:546-7). However gender may moderate other factors that predict involvement (Grolnick *et al* 1997:546-7).

It has also been proposed that rather than the parent initiating parent involvement as many models assume, it may be the child who initiates it. Academic excellence or taking an advanced school programme may encourage parents to get involved (Ma 1999:78). Further, children who are more confident at school may push their parents to become more involved at school and in the home (Grolnick & Slowiaczek 1994:249). Ma (1999: 78) states that it is possible that parents initiate some aspects of parental involvement, such as home supervision, while learners initiate others, such as home-school communication.

2.7.4 The teachers and school

The school and teachers' efforts to involve parents, rather than parental education level, income level, work place or marital status, are largely responsible for the level of parental involvement (Epstein 1995:701-702; Christenson *et al* 1992b:179). Dauber and Epstein (in van Wyk 2001:121) state that school programmes and educator practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of partnerships between the school and the family. Schools and teachers that encourage parental involvement and offer opportunities for it have higher rates of parental involvement (Epstein 1995:706). Parents also feel more positive about their abilities to help when encouraged by the school (Epstein 1995:706-707).

Epstein (1991:348) states, "In the final analysis, it is the hard work of principals, teachers, and other school staff members that will determine whether and how families understand the schools, their children, and their own continuing influence in their children's learning and development".

2.7.4.1 *Teacher efficacy*

Teacher efficacy is defined as the teacher's confidence in his ability to teach and the ability of his learners to learn, as well as his access to a body of professional knowledge when needed (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 1987:429). Teacher efficacy has been found correlate with higher levels of parental involvement with respect to attendance at conferences, volunteering, home tutoring and teacher perceptions of parent support (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 1987:429).

2.7.4.2 *Teacher training in parental involvement*

Teachers vary widely in their beliefs on the effectiveness of parental involvement in terms of positive child outcomes (Epstein 1995:702). Some teachers believe that parents are willing and interested to help and that it is time effective to

involve them (Epstein 1995:702). However, a survey conducted in the United States showed that few educators attributed their practices of parental involvement to knowledge gained in their formal training (Epstein *et al* in van Wyk 2001:127).

Unfortunately, teacher training often does not emphasise or even include the parents role in their children's education, the importance thereof, and ways to approach and involve parents (Epstein 1987b:8; van Wyk 2001:127). As a result many teachers do not feel that it is important to involve parents (Mkwanazi 1994:29; van Wyk 2001:121). Furthermore, not all educators even understand what parental involvement is (van Wyk 2001:127).

Even when parental involvement forms a part of teacher training it may not equip teachers properly to involve parents (van Wyk 2001:127). Tichenor (1998:255) found that student teachers believed that teachers do not involve parents in their children's education mainly because they lack the necessary knowledge and preparation.

A lack of understanding of the true nature of parental involvement may result in teachers having a negative attitude towards parental involvement (Lazar & Slostad 1999:207). Teachers may consider the children's education as entirely their professional domain and not welcome or encourage the involvement of the parent (Wehlburg 1996:128). Moreover, some teachers feel that parental involvement will be a source of conflict between parent and child; that parents will not wish to, or be able, to carry out their commitments; and that parental involvement disempowers teachers (Epstein & Becker 1982:105-108). Teachers may even fear parents (Epstein & Becker 1982:109) as they may feel that the parents may blame them for their children's problems (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 1987:419). The time investment required for productive parental involvement and the lack of external rewards for efforts to involve teachers may also put

teachers off from being more involved (Epstein & Becker 1982:104; Hara & Burke 1998:18).

Moreover, as a result of a lack of training, teachers do not feel especially competent in many aspects of involving parents such as developing better parenting skills (McKenna & Willms 1998:36). Teachers sometimes feel uncomfortable with some parental involvement activities such as volunteering in the classroom (McKenna & Willms 1998:36). This emphasises the need for pre-service and in-service training of teachers in general and specific techniques to invite parents into their children's education (Wehlburg 1996:127-128).

It is especially important that teachers are educated to have a positive attitude to parental involvement and to parents themselves especially since increased parent power has resulted in increased criticism and calling into account of teachers, decreasing teachers' enthusiasm for parental involvement (Culligford & Morrison 1999:254; Crozier in Crozier 1999a:324). Moreover, Barnard (1990:2) states that successful parent involvement requires mutual teacher-parent sensitivity and empathy for the daily frustrations, problems, challenges and expectations that are part of the teaching situation. An atmosphere of mutual trust, acceptance and respect as well as effective communication must characterise the parent-teacher relationship. Teachers must acknowledge and validate parental contributions and reduce their claim to authority (Anderson 1998:336). Crozier (1999a:325) found that the longer a teacher had been at the school they studied, the more indifferent and cynical their attitude to parents and the less effort they made to relate to them. Thus, in-service as well as pre-service training in parental involvement is essential.

As the head-teacher is a major agent for change in the school and communicates his vision of parental involvement to the teachers and parents (Downer 1996:45), it is essential that head-teachers also receive in-service training.

Ideally the head-teacher should coordinate, manage, support, and acknowledge parent involvement by the teacher (Epstein1987a:133).

Teachers who attend courses on parental involvement have been found to have better attitudes to parents and feel more comfortable and competent in terms of planning and implementing parental involvement (Morris & Taylor 1998:219-228; Tichenor 1998:254).

2.7.4.3 *The nature of the school*

Schools differ in the types of parental involvement they emphasise (Epstein 1987a:132). Epstein (1987a:132) found that urban schools in Maryland, in the United States, used more parent involvement techniques and had more favourable attitudes to parental involvement than suburban or rural schools. She found that while these urban schools conducted more workshops, the suburban schools focussed on parent volunteers in the classroom, and rural schools were highest in their use of home visits.

It has been found that schools with a lower socioeconomic status have lower levels of parental involvement in terms of parent attendance at conferences, volunteering, and teacher perceptions of parental support (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 1987:429; Ho & Willms 1996:138). However schools of different socioeconomic status were not found to differ in terms of home tutoring and home instruction (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 1987:429).

Epstein (1988:58) recommends, however, that one not generalise about which type of schools have more or less parental involvement, as schools within the same category, whether government or private, pre-school or high school, serve different populations with different histories, and have different skills and philosophies of involving parents. As a result disadvantaged schools with exciting

parent involvement activities and elite private schools with virtually no parent involvement were not uncommon in her study.

2.7.4.4 *The theoretical stance of the school, teachers, parents and other educators*

a) Introduction

A variety of researchers have proposed theories on the relationship between the parent and the school and on what their respective roles are and should be. Clearly the theoretical stance adopted by the education authorities, schools, head-teachers, and the teachers and parents themselves, either consciously or unconsciously, will have an enormous impact on the how much, and what type, of parental involvement is envisioned by these stakeholders and on resulting educational practice. Lemmer (2000:62) notes that the most notable of these theories are those of Coleman (1987), Epstein (1995), Swap (1992, 1993), Gordon (1977) and Comer(1987). In addition, that of Reeve (1993:6-10) also provides useful insights into the relationship between schools and parents. Van Wyk (1996:41) notes that no single empirically based model exists and that while there is evidence for each of these theoretical frameworks, further data is still required.

b) Theories of parental involvement

(1) Coleman (1987:32-33) asserts the historical change of the parents' workplace from the home to outside the home, particularly, more recently, that of the mother, and the concurrent shift to mass education outside the home has resulted in the family not fulfilling its role in the socialisation of the child properly. Coleman (1987:36) states that families and communities provide the building blocks, the social capital that makes learning possible. The school also acts to socialise the child in different ways but this is built upon the socialisation that takes place in the home, is less important than it, and does not compensate for a lack in it. As a result a new institution with resources that produce

attitudes, efforts and conception of self is required to provide the necessary social capital for the next generation that the home is no longer providing (Coleman 1987:38).

(2) Gordon (1977:74-78) proposes three different ways in which the family and school can be related to each other and effect each other. In the **Family Impact Model** the school reaches out to the home through home visits or other communication techniques and educates parents on effective parenting and effective support of their children's education. This model assumes that there is a body of knowledge that is essential for effective learning and that teachers know and teach it, and parents learn and apply it. A number of programmes have been designed on these lines such as Gordon's Parent Education follow through Programme (van Wyk 1996:47). Difficulties with this model may arise from disagreement between experts on the best ways for parents to support their children; the possibility that alien values are being imposed on parents and; whether or not these efforts address superficial rather than root problems (Frisby 1992:134).

The **School Impact Model** refers to the parents' impact on the school (Gordon 1977:76). In this model the teacher's learn from the parents as well as the parents learning from teachers and as a result the school becomes more in-tune with the culture of the home resulting in a better working relationship between parents and children and, consequently more effective learning. A number of programmes employ this principle and educate parents to make decisions, such as Head Start and Chapter 1 (Frisby 1992:134). Concerns arise over whether school personnel may have difficulty accepting parents in this role and whether parents will use their power constructively (Frisby 1992:134).

In the **Community Impact Model** the resources of the community are focussed on facilitating the school-home partnership (Gordon 1977:77-78). This

comprehensive programme results in a less “piecemeal” and sporadic programme of parental involvement although the resources required to carry out such programmes may seem overwhelming. Push-Excel is an example of this type of programme (Frisby 1992:135).

(3) Swap (1993:28-59) proposes 4 models of parental involvement. The goal of the **Protective Model** is to reduce conflict between parents and the school by protecting the school from the interference of parents (Swap 1993:28-29). This is done by separating the parents and school’s functions and by delegating the responsibility for children’s education entirely to this school with the mutual consent of both parties. Parents should not make decisions or collaborate about their children’s schooling as this is entirely the school’s responsibility (Swap 1993:29). Clearly this model has the disadvantage of rejecting the wealth of resources available from the home as well possibly increasing conflict between the home and school and it ignores the wealth of evidence that supports the idea that parental involvement has many positive outcomes for the child.

In Swap’s (1993:29-38) **School-To-Home Transmission Model**, the goal is to enlist parents to support the objectives of the school. Parents play a greater role in their children’s education than in the previous model as this model acknowledges the continuous exchange between the home and school and the parents’ important role in enhancing their children’s achievement. Parents must transfer the ways of being, thinking, knowing, writing and talking that characterise successful people in the dominant culture, the culture of the school. Parent education programmes are often developed to help parents be more effective. In this model the school is seen as more knowledgeable about correct parenting. Although parents may be involved in decision-making, there is a very unequal distribution of power and the school is still very much in charge. It is the school personnel who define goals and programmes. As the goal is for parents to understand and support the school, two-way communication is not sought after.

While programmes based on this model have increased children's school success they tend to under value the culture of the parents and their ability to contribute to their children's education. As a result parents may become disillusioned over time.

The **Curriculum Enrichment Model** (Swap 1993:38-46) stresses mutual respect between parents and educators. The values and cultures of both educators and parents are respected. The assumption is that families have important expertise to contribute, and that implementation of a curriculum that both parents and educators have contributed to, will improve continuity between the home and school and improve learner achievements. This model values the goals and beliefs of the non-mainstream culture as well as learner success in the mainstream culture (Swap 1992:61). This model focuses on curriculum and instruction and is, thus, not comprehensive (Swap 1993:39). In this model teachers must be responsive to a child's culture (van Wyk 1996:54). Though appealing, this model is difficult to put into practice (Swap 1992:63-64).

In Swap's (1993:47-59) **Partnership Model** parents and educators work collaboratively to achieve a single unifying mission (generally success for all children). This model welcomes parents as indispensable assets and resources in the successful education of their children. It is a comprehensive programme focussing on all areas of a child's education and emphasises two-way communication, mutual goals, parental strengths, problem solving with parents, and community involvement. Local autonomy and control and a revised curriculum are central to this approach (Swap 1992:65). The Comer approach and Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence are examples of comprehensive partnership models (Swap 1993:47-59).

(4) Comer's school development programme attempts to promote development and learning by drawing all the participants of education together by building

supportive bonds (Comer & Haynes 1991:272-273). Parents and teachers are empowered to work in partnership with the school and the developmental needs of the whole child are addressed in the process resulting in school success for the child. This model requires the formation of a School Planning and Management Team, a Mental Health Team, and a Parent Program. These work cooperatively to support all the participants needs. This approach requires a comprehensive school plan, staff development activities, and a monitoring and assessment programme, that are focused towards the social and academic goals and activities of the school. Finally, this model relies on three guiding principles: consensus decision-making; a no-fault approach to problem solving; and genuine collaboration (Comer 1987:15-16). Nevertheless, the parents' authority is subordinate to that of the principal and staff (Comer & Haynes 1991:271). This programme is currently being implemented widely in the United States (van Wyk 1996:56).

(5) Epstein maintains that educators see the relationship between schools and parents in three different ways. Either they have separate responsibilities, shared responsibilities or sequential responsibilities (Epstein 1995:701-702). In the sequential perspective parents teach their children until school going age after which the child's education is the responsibility of the school. Epstein notes that if schools see learners as students they are likely to see the families as separate to the school. The families will then be expected to do their job and leave the child's education to the school. This is the **Separate Spheres of Influence Model**.

If the educators see their learners as children, they are likely to see the family and community as partners in the children's education and thus, have shared responsibilities and **Overlapping Spheres of Influence** (Epstein 1995:701-702). Epstein states that ideally schools, families and communities should have overlapping spheres of influence creating school-like families, and family-like

schools and communities that together with parents create school-like opportunities. In this situation shared responsibilities and the generalisation of skills required by parents and teachers is emphasised. Epstein's model illustrates that the degree of overlap between these three spheres in any school is variable with time and it can be increased or decreased by the practices of teachers, administrators or children (Christenson *et al* 1992a:36).

(6) Reeve (1993: 6-10) contends that parents may be seen as consumers, clients, producers of education's raw materials, resources for schools, or co-educators. The most important activity for **consumer parents** (Reeve 1993:7) is to select an appropriate school for their children, one that supports the values and beliefs of the home and provides a service that reflects the parents' view of a good education. Schools operating on this assumption would find communication with parents important to ensure that parents understand the benefits of the product they have chosen and do not reconsider the placement of their children in the school. Parents may also be asked to respond to surveys and questionnaires that will enable the school to develop its image according to these results and parents may act as consumer representatives on boards or school councils. This view of parents is primarily found in private schools although increasing choice of government schools in some countries makes it applicable in these schools too. Schools that follow this image of parents seek to maximise support by responding to what they perceive to be the dominant views of the parents which frequently leads to emphasis on factors such as uniform, and discipline rather than on key educational issues.

The image of **parents as clients** (Reeve 1993:7-8) sees them as autonomous professionals. Educational knowledge and expertise are considered to be the province of teachers, head-teachers, and people in the educational bureaucracy. Parents are seen as having information about their children, which may be of use to the teacher. The client's role is to accept the decisions of the professionals

but, as part of good professional practice, the professionals must ensure that the client understands these decisions and must be responsive to client views when this is consistent with professional judgement. Schools that take this approach value good school to home communication as well as surveys to test parents' responses and they emphasise individual parent-teacher interviews to make use of the parents' knowledge of their child.

The view of **parents as the producers of the raw material of education** (Reeve 1993:8) sees parents as responsible for both inherited and environmental practices that influence a child's development prior to the start of formal education. Parents are held responsible for the quality of the learner. Valued activities for parents according to this approach are education in parenting and school readiness skills and involvement in transition activities in the first weeks of school.

The view of **parents as a resource for schools** (Reeve 1993:8-9) sees parents as voluntary workers to the benefit of the school, teachers and learners. Activities for parents include: improving school grounds and buildings; clerical tasks in school offices, libraries and classrooms; fundraising; production of teaching materials; listening to reading; and coaching sports. This view sees parent involvement as synonymous with community work in schools.

Lastly, the view of **parents as co-educators** (Reeve 1993:9-10) recognises the significance of the parents' function as co-educators in the pre-school years and in parallel with school activities especially in the primary years. Parents are seen to have a body of knowledge about their children's experiences, which may be helpful to teachers. People who hold this view often regard children's learning as the ongoing interaction of the experiences arranged by the school and those of the home. Schools and policy makers that hold this image of parents emphasise additional tutoring by parents, supervision of homework, and parents as

facilitators in terms of providing their children with educationally desirable experiences. Parents' representation on school councils is favoured, however, there are few connections between this activity, which tends to involve only a few parents and the other activities which involve many parents. Moreover, planning, evaluation, and decision-making on educational issues are still usually considered the province of the school staff except in the case of a limited number of parents that may be included in school governance structures.

2.7.5 The government

Many governments now include parental involvement as an important part of their educational policy and many have mandated various programmes of parental involvement at either state/provincial or national level (Reeve 1993:2; Wehlburg 1996:126; McKenna & Willms 1998:21). Nevertheless, research has shown that generally levels of parental involvement are very low or involvement is restricted to superficial activities in most schools (Christenson *et al* 1992a:33). In order for the goals of these policies to be met there must also be clarity on the content and implementation of these programmes (Peressini 1998a:558) and they must be adequately funded (Epstein 1991:348; Hara & Burke 1998:18). However, national calls for parent and community involvement are often couched in vague terms that remain on the abstract level (Peressini 1998b:320) and programmes are usually not adequately funded (Chapman 1991:356; Epstein 1991:348; McKenna & Willms 1998:22).

When adequate funds are made available, success may follow. In 1987 the Illinois State Board of Education in the United States established a grant programme which involved the awarding of sizeable, multi-year competitive grants directly to schools themselves (Chapman 1991:355-358). These grants were designed to fund programmes that would bring together schools, families,

businesses and other social service agencies in order to improve learner outcomes (Chapman 1991:355). These programmes were found to be highly successful with more than 80% of the schools accomplishing over 90% of their goals including academic improvements as well as improvements in areas such as discipline and school attendance (Chapman 1991:358).

Furthermore, parental involvement places extra demands on teachers and head-teachers (McKenna & Willms 1998:37). Thus, in order to motivate educators to initiate and carry-out parental involvement, educational policy needs to include ways to give teachers the time they require to receive the training they need in parental involvement and to ensure that teachers are recognised for their successes in this area (McKenna & Willms 1998:37).

2.7.6 Summary

A wide variety of factors relating to the parents, the child, the school and educators, and the governments themselves determine to what degree and in what ways parents become involved in their children's education.

Parents of lower socioeconomic status and single parents tend to be less involved in at least some types of parental involvement. Parents of different race-ethnicity are involved in different ways and it seems likely that their choice of preferred activities will vary according to the nature of their specific community. Working parents tend to be more involved in the home but less involved at the school, however, parents who are unemployed, but not by choice, may be less involved generally. High parental efficacy is also required for effective parental involvement. A negative parental attitude to the school, language differences, and lack of time or transport may form barriers to parental involvement.

Parents are more likely to help with homework if their child needs help. Confident children and those that achieve academically or take advanced courses may encourage their parents to be involved in their education. Moreover, parents are more likely to be involved if they do not perceive their children as difficult. Parents may be involved in different ways or to different degrees with children of different genders although evidence for no difference in these respects has also been forwarded.

The most important determinant, of parental involvement, however is the attitudes and practices of the teachers and school. High teacher efficacy, and thorough teacher training in parental involvement, are required for effective parental involvement. Unfortunately, the majority of teachers are not given sufficient training in parental involvement and as a result they lack the knowledge, skills, confidence and attitudes required to implement parental involvement effectively. Both intensive pre-service and in-service training in parental involvement are required for all educators. If this training is not given educators and schools may adopt, either consciously or unconsciously, a theoretical stance that is detrimental to the practice of parental involvement.

Schools and educators that adopt a stance similar to either Gordon's Family Impact model, Swap's Protective model or School-to-Home Transmission Model, Epstein's Separate Spheres of Influence, or any of Reeve's first four models would either prevent parental involvement entirely or at best limit it to only one or a few types of involvement. Comprehensive parental involvement, even though not guaranteeing full partnership for parents, can only hope to be achieved if the school and educators adopt a theory similar to either Gordon's School Impact Model, Swap's Partnership Model, Comer's Approach, Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence, or Reeve's view of parents as co-educators.

Finally, whether the government has a clearly defined and spelt out policy on parental involvement, makes adequate funds available for its implementation, and provides incentives for educators to make the necessary extra effort to involve parents, will have a large impact on how widely and effectively parent involvement programmes are implemented by schools and teachers.

2.8 The focus of parental involvement research

The majority of parental involvement research has focussed on pre-school or early primary, education (Wehlburg 1996:126). This is because children are believed to be particularly susceptible and amenable to education and maximally sensitive to home influences at a young age, and thus, it is believed that programmes will have the greatest effect if aimed at this level (Entwisle & Alexander 1992:73). Nevertheless, quite a bit of research has been done on senior primary education and secondary education and it suggests that the benefits of parental involvement continue up to and throughout high school (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:75; Flaxman & Inger 1991:5; Ho & Willms 1996:137; Ma 1999: 61).

Furthermore, such programmes are particularly needed in higher primary grades and high school as this is when parents tend to stop being spontaneously involved in their children's education and there is a decline in teacher practices to involve parents (Epstein 1986:279; Herrich & Epstein 1990:167; Stouffer 1992: 5; Izzo *et al* 1999:817).

Lower spontaneous parental involvement at these levels may be because parents may have more difficulty understanding and finding ways to help with the more difficult work or they may not realise that they are still needed (Muller 1998:352; Lazar & Slostad 1999:208). Parents have been found to believe that the teachers

of their older children did not want parents to help at home, and parents reported that they received fewer ideas, in this respect, from teachers in the upper elementary grades (Epstein 1987a:129). Parents may also feel more removed, and geographically be more removed, from higher-level schools (Muller 1998:352). Further, older children offer more resistance to parental involvement (Stouffer 1992:5; Ainley 1995:40).

Moreover, teachers tend to have less personal relationships with their learners in the upper primary grades and high school due to the shift at these levels of teachers into subject specialists and this may discourage them from requesting parental support (Epstein 1986:279). Schools may also become progressively less open to parental involvement as the children move to higher grades (Muller 1998:352).

Nevertheless, nearly all parents, at all levels, remain interested in their children's schooling and success, and would like directions and information from schools on how to help their children (Epstein 1987a:129; Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76). This, combined with the abundant evidence of the continued benefits of parental involvement in the higher primary grades and throughout high school indicates the importance of continued research into parental involvement, and the necessity of implementing parent involvement programmes, at these levels.

2.9 Criticisms of parental involvement programmes

2.9.1 Doubts as to whether parental involvement benefits children

A study by White, Taylor and Moss (1992:91) concluded that involvement of parents in early intervention programmes does not produce benefits for children.

However, analysis of White *et al* (1992:91-125) review by Miedel and Reynolds (1999:381), throws serious doubts on this conclusion.

In their review White *et al* (1992:91-125) focussed mainly on studies in which the parent teaches the child developmental skills. This creates measurement concern as it is unclear exactly what parental activities were being investigated and whether outcomes that were consistent with the goals of these activities were measured (Miedel & Reynolds 1999: 381). Further White *et al* used an extremely narrow measure for the success of the programmes, positive changes in IQ. Other literature suggests that subject grades, grade retention rates, special education placement, school attendance, learner citizenship and social values are more appropriate measures to determine the impact of parental involvement programmes (Ascher 1988:120; Miedel & Reynolds 1999: 381).

These criticisms of White *et al* combined with the considerable, growing body of research that insists on the benefits of parental involvement to the child, leave little doubt that parental involvement has many positive child outcomes including academic achievement. The vast majority of researchers support this contention (Epstein 1995:706; Hickman *et al* 1995:126).

2.9.2 The negative impacts of parental involvement

Although almost all the research on parental involvement indicates that it is beneficial to the child, some types of parental involvement such as helping with homework and pressurising the child have been found to have negative impacts on the child's academic achievement (Grolnick, Ryan & Deci 1991:515; Georgiou 1999: 412). The many studies that show that helping with homework is beneficial to the child, however, suggest that helping with homework is not actually detrimental to the learner as such, but rather that it is harmful only

when this help is offered in ways that are inappropriate or damage the child self-esteem (see 2.4.4).

Furthermore, Overett and Donald (1998:353) found evidence of negative interactions between parents and their children as the result of parental involvement. These include things like negative comments, cross looks, being shouted at, and being hit. They noted that this was particularly true when family members other than the parents were involved. Thus, it is essential that parents, and other family members, are not simply told to be more involved. Rather they must be taught what to do, how to do it, and when to do it, and warned of danger signs that may suggest they are doing more harm than good. This also indicates the importance of parents being willing partners in the involvement programme and of having realistic goals, acceptable and flexible time constraints, and repeatedly stressing a focus on informal, enjoyable and positive interaction (Overett & Donald 1998:353).

Classroom volunteers can also have a negative effect on children's academic achievement if they do not have the skills and training to teach the subject matter (McKenna & Willms 1998:36).

Allowing parents to make decisions in such away that the parents decisions hold precedence over those of the school staff, such that the staff are no longer able to exercise their professional judgement, has also been found to result in some questionable and even harmful education practices (McGrath & Kuriloff 1999:78). Some very negative and destructive relationships between parents and school staff have also resulted (Black 1998:53). This suggests a need for informed parents and collaboration between parents and teachers in terms of decision-making as well as a need for parents and teachers to trust each other.

Edwards and Warin (1999:336) feel that parents are often required by schools, with minimal training, to teach their children numeracy or literacy skills in formal ways which require a level of teaching professionalism that parents lack. This results in considerable discrepancies between approaches recommended to parents and actual practice (Edwards & Warin 1999:336).

2.9.3 Summary

There is little doubt that parental involvement usually results in positive child outcomes. However, the evidence presented by these studies indicates that if carried-out poorly parental involvement can be harmful to the child. Clearly an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust between parents and educators must prevail for successful parental involvement. Parents must be trusted to make decisions and must know when to trust the teachers' professionalism. While Edwards and Warin (1999:334) seem to underestimate parents' abilities, there is little doubt that parents should not be asked to assume a formal teacher's role in the home but should rather be assigned informal, enjoyable, and manageable activities. It is also essential that parents are given adequate training such that they are able to fulfill their role competently and recognise when they are doing more harm than good.

2.10 Criticisms of research on parental involvement

2.10.1 A lack of generalisability and stringency

Unfortunately, while a great deal of research has been done on parental involvement, and even though many educators embrace the idea enthusiastically, there is still a lack of understanding on the part of schools,

teachers and governments on precisely how to involve parents effectively (Epstein 1995:703; Zellman & Waterman 1998:371). This is mostly due to lack of generalisability and stringency in the methods used for research into parental involvement, which limits the usefulness of this research and makes it hard for schools to decide on, and implement, a specific programme.

Programme outcomes have frequently not been stringently evaluated (Zellman & Waterman 1998: 371). For example, many of the studies that report positive academic outcomes do not control for prior academic performance and thus may overestimate the effects of parental involvement (Ma 1999:75).

Furthermore, research has also often not shown precisely what accounts for the impact of parental involvement on child outcomes (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371). Even those studies that actually correlate specific parent behaviours with child outcomes provide limited insight into why parent involvement might matter (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371).

Moreover, the choice of a particular programme is made difficult by the fact that various authors mean different things by parental involvement, which is a rather undifferentiated concept including a wide-variety of parental behaviours (see 2.2). Thus, it is difficult to ascertain what types or amounts of parental involvement make a difference (Gettinger & Guetschow 1998:39). Ma (1999:78) gives the example of volunteering used in her study, which could refer to any of a few volunteering behaviours, which may have different effects on learner outcomes. Thus, it is often unclear precisely which components of parental involvement affect schooling outcomes of children (Ma 1999:61).

Furthermore different researchers have seldom used the same instruments to evaluate their programmes (Ascher 1988:112). Sometimes principals are interviewed, other times parents are observed or teachers questioned (Ascher

1988:112). Moreover, the populations studied have been demarcated in very different ways, some by school, others by grade, still others by district (Ascher 1988:113). This makes it very difficult to compare their results.

It is also not clear whether deliberate structured programmes of parental involvement will achieve the same results as naturally occurring involvement (Zellman & Waterman 1998:371).

However, research methods are becoming more stringent. There are, for example, a growing number of studies that have demonstrated the benefits of parental involvement while controlling for children's previous school performance (e.g. Overett & Donald 1998: 349; Izzo *et al* 1999:819, Ma 1999:75). This, combined with clearer definitions of parental involvement, as well as clear descriptions of precisely what the author means by various types of parental involvement (e.g. Jantjes 1995:304; Georgiou 1999:416) make it possible to recognise and predict, to some extent, the effects of certain types of parental involvement on the child (Epstein 1995:706). However, these need to be confirmed for different populations (Epstein 1995:706).

2.10.2 Causation vs. correlation

While most authors believe that parental involvement is responsible for a variety of benefits to the child, there is still some debate over whether the relationship between parental involvement and positive child outcomes, particularly achievement, is causational or only correlational (Georgiou 1999:411). This is because most studies have been correlational and not experimental (Gettinger & Guetschow 1998:38).

Very few experimental or quasi-experimental studies, such as those of Overett & Donald (1998:349) and Reynolds (1992:146), have been done. This makes it difficult to determine the precise relationship between parental involvement and positive child outcomes. Ma (1999:77-78) points out, for example, that it was possible that the learners in her study participated in advanced mathematics classes because the volunteer work done by their parents at the school demonstrated that school is important and motivated them. She notes, however, that it was also possible that it was because the students enrolled in advanced mathematics courses that their parents became more involved.

Nevertheless, the correlational evidence of a great many studies and the quasi-experimental evidence of fewer studies suggests that parental involvement has a direct effect on child achievement and causes various positive child outcomes. This view is widely accepted by researchers in the field (Epstein 1995:706).

2.10.3 Summary

While research into parental involvement has suffered from a variety of methodological problems that have made generalisation difficult, this research is increasingly becoming more stringent and comparable. Furthermore, the sheer mass of research makes some generalisations possible. While most evidence is based on correlational studies, the results of quasi-experimental studies are supportive and researchers in the field accept that parental involvement results in a variety of positive child outcomes.

2.11 Chapter summary and implications for the design of a parental involvement programme in Swaziland

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that parental involvement results in many important positive learner outcomes (see 2.4). Thus, it would be beneficial to develop a parental involvement programme in Swaziland. Epstein's very widely accepted categorisation of parental involvement into six types seems to be a particularly useful way of examining parental involvement and the benefits thereof, in order to ascertain which types of parental involvement activities the Swazi programme should emphasise (see 2.3).

Research indicates that parenting style and especially parental involvement in learning activities in the home have a greater impact on children's academic achievement than communication, involvement at the school, decision-making, and community collaboration (see 2.4.8). Consequently, since improved academic achievement is likely to be an aim of a Swazi parental involvement programme, this programme should emphasise parenting and parent involvement in learning activities in the home. In addition, the learning success of children has been found to correlate more with these factors than with family background variables (see 2.4.8). This is particularly encouraging since parenting and parental involvement in learning activities in the home are far easier for educators to change than family background factors (see 2.4.8). As the other four types of parental involvement are also beneficial to learners a Swazi programme should include all six types of involvement (see 2.4.8).

The main two determinants of how parents are involved in their children's education are the efforts the school makes to involve parents and whether parents take the opportunities they have to be involved (see 2.6). A number of family background factors such as the parents' socioeconomic status, marital status, race-ethnicity, employment status, gender, and perception of their roles,

have been found to effect whether, and to what degree, parents take the opportunities they have to be involved (see 2.7.2). Further, a negative parental attitude, language differences between the home and school, and a lack of time and transport form barriers to parental involvement (see 2.7.2.7). In designing a parental involvement programme for Swaziland it is necessary to establish what effect, if any, these factors have on the level of parental involvement, in order to identify less involved parents and ensure that all parents become involved in their children's education. As a result a number of hypotheses (see 4.2.2) that relate parent and family background characteristics with the extent to which they initiate parental involvement will be tested. The parents' beliefs, attitudes and perspectives on parental involvement, the ways they are currently involved in their children's education, and barriers to parental involvement must also be examined.

Individual characteristics of the child can also effect the level and/or type of parental involvement (see 2.7.3). However, the most decisive factor in determining the type and level of parental involvement is the effort the school and teachers make to involve the parents (see 2.7.4). This in turn is dependent upon the teacher's efficacy, training in parental involvement and theoretical stance. Thus, this study will determine precisely what level and type of involvement Swazi teachers and schools currently initiate. The teachers' attitudes, feelings, beliefs and perspectives on parental involvement will also be investigated so that a programme can be designed to address any of these aspects that may be limiting parental involvement in Swaziland.

Consequently a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative research will be used to gain a more complete picture of parental involvement as it currently exists in Swaziland with the aim of designing an effective programme to the benefit of Swazi learners, teachers and parents. The methods and methodology of this study will be discussed in Chapter 4.

This study focuses on urban Swazi senior primary schools since learners at this level still benefit greatly from parental involvement, but this is the level at which most parents' spontaneous involvement tends to decline (see 2.8). Swaziland has its own unique system of education (see 3.2). In addition, conditions in Swaziland, while similar to those in South Africa in some respects, are quite different from those in most other countries where the majority of research has been done (see 3.3). Further, the policies and actions of governments have a large impact on whether parental involvement is implemented at schools (see 2.7.5). Consequently, Chapter 3 addresses the education system of Swaziland, and the parental involvement policies and research done in Swaziland and South Africa.