Chapter 3

The education system in Swaziland and parental involvement in Swaziland and South Africa

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3.1 Introduction

"Parent involvement in schools reflects a country's national values and political ideology, its traditional practices and its approach to educational theory" (McKenna & Willms 1998:20).

Swaziland has its own unique culture and system of education. In order to understand parental involvement as it currently exists in Swaziland, and to create a practical and effective parental involvement programme for the future, it is necessary to have some understanding of the Swazi culture and Swaziland's education system.

Moreover, a country's official policy on parental involvement has a large effect on the practice of parental involvement at its schools (Epstein 1987b:5). Thus, the role of parents, according to Swazi education policy, is examined in this chapter.

Although South Africa and Swaziland are quite different in some important respects, South Africa is Swaziland's closest neighbour and has a large influence over it. Furthermore, while not culturally identical, the populations of Swaziland and South Africa have considerably more in common than either population has with populations of other non-southern African countries. Thus, the research on parental involvement carried out in South Africa may be more relevant to Swaziland than research done in other countries. Hence, research on parental involvement in South Africa and South African education policy are discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Swaziland and the Swazi education system

Swaziland is a very small land-locked African country with an area of 17 364 square kilometers and a population of just under 1 million people (SASB 1999:1-2). Swaziland is surrounded almost entirely by South Africa, its only other neighbour is Mozambique on its eastern border (Magagula, Dlamini, Mkatshwa, Dlamini, & Shongwe 2001:8).

Swaziland is an unusual African country in that its population is largely culturally and linguistically homogenous. This is not true for the majority of other African countries where colonisation resulted in heterogeneous populations usually including several ethnic groups with different languages and cultures, and sometimes, different religions as well. The Swazi population is almost entirely composed of Black, Christian, siSwati speaking people of Swazi culture (SASB 1996:8). In fact, European and other non-Swazi residents make up less than 1% of the population (SASB 1999:8-16). As a result of this cultural homogeneity, education in Swaziland does not face some of the problems found in schools composed of learners of a variety of different cultures and values (Huang & Gibbs 1992:81).

Swaziland is also one of the few remaining countries to be ruled by a King rather than an elected government. The King is responsible for appointing the Prime Minister who in-turn appoints the various departmental ministers including the Minister of Education. As a result the Minister of Education is accountable to the King.

Further, the majority of Swaziland's land falls under Swazi Nation Land (SABS 1999:2), which is governed by the chief of that particular area. Land is available to all Swazis who fall under a chief. The vast majority of Swazis, even if they own a house in an urban area, also have a piece of land on which they can build

a home and grow crops. As a result they have various duties and obligations to the chief of that land.

Like most other African countries, however, Swaziland is a poor country. Although Swaziland prioritises education and spends approximately a third of the national recurrent budget on education, it has inadequate resources for education (IE 1994:ii). Facilities and materials are in short supply and there is an urgent need for well-qualified teachers (IE 1994:13-15). Almost 80% of Swazi teachers have some teacher training (SGES 2001:12). However, only 10 % of the teachers have completed their O'Levels, the majority of the remainder have pre-O'Level education and have attended teacher-training courses (IE 1994:13).

In Swaziland there are three different types of schools: private schools; aided schools; and government schools (SGES 2001:7). Private schools rely entirely on school fees and church or community donations for their funding. The Ministry of Education staffs aided schools (IE 1994:9). In addition, aided schools receive additional funding usually from religious groups. Government schools are funded entirely by the government. Almost 80% of Swazi schools are aided schools, while only just over 2% are private (SGES 2001:7). In practice the differences between urban aided schools and government schools are minimal. Both types of school are staffed by the Ministry of Education, have very large class sizes, low school fees, and are poorly equipped when compared with private schools (IE 1994:12-15). The curriculum taught at government and aided schools is chosen by the Ministry of Education which also prescribes regulations concerning discipline and corporal punishment (IE 1994:12). This means that some decisions such as staffing, curriculum and discipline, in aided and government schools are made almost entirely by the government.

Parents do, however, decide which school their child will attend. Many of the learners served by a school are not from neighbouring communities (IE

1994:28). Parents select schools by performance as much as by location (IE 1994:28). School fees also influence the parent's choice.

Parents must pay for their children's education at all three types of school. However, in government and aided schools these fees are only expected to cover learning materials, while the few private schools depend almost entirely on school fees for all of their expenses (IE 1994:26). As a result, government and aided schools have far lower fees than private schools. Nevertheless, increasingly learners at government and aided schools are dropping out of the education system altogether, because their parents cannot afford school fees (IE 1994:31).

The language of instruction in the majority of primary schools in the country is siSwati. English is introduced later in the primary cycle (IE 1994:12). However, many of the urban primary schools teach in English from Grade 1 and attract parents on this basis, since fluency in English is prized in Swaziland.

On average nearly 9% of all learners dropout of school at the end of each primary grade, while 16% repeat each grade (SGES 2001:30). Only 50% of the children who start Grade 1 complete primary school and many take as long as 12 years to do so (DP 1998:172). The situation is even worse in high school (SGES 2001:30). This indicates a need for practices that will increase the academic success of learners and encourage them to stay at school. Parental involvement has been found to lower dropout rates, improve academic achievement, and result in a wealth of other advantages (see 2.4). Consequently, Swaziland would clearly benefit from a parental involvement program especially since parental involvement is a very cost-effective way to address problems in education (van der Werf *et al* 2001:461).

3.3 The parental involvement policies of Swaziland and South Africa and their implementation.

3.3.1 Introduction

Epstein (1987b:5-6) notes that state polices, guidelines and bylaws for educational programmes strongly influence or determine the degree and type of parental involvement practiced by schools. Thus, it is necessary to investigate Swazi educational policy on parental involvement and its implementation.

Swaziland's closest neighbour is South Africa. In fact, Swaziland is almost entirely surrounded by South Africa and bases its currency on the South African Rand. As a result Swaziland is aware of, and often influenced by, the progressive policies and practices of its powerful neighbour. With this in mind the educational policy of the South African government and its implementation are discussed.

3.3.2 The parental involvement policy of Swaziland and its limitations

3.3.2.1 *Swazi parental involvement policy*
Swazi education policy does not address parental involvement directly, in fact, no mention of any type of parental involvement is made in the *Development Plan 1998-2001* which focuses instead on better quality teaching and greater administrative efficiency (DP 1998:171-187).

Nevertheless, the *National Policy Statement on Education* (NPSE 1998:1-14) outlines several roles for parents in their children's education. Firstly, in terms of curriculum development this policy states, "Consultation with parents, students and other major stakeholders shall be a priority when making regular improvements on the curriculum" (NPSE 1998:4). Further, this document assigns

a role for parents in the determination of school fees. School fees must be determined by the head-teacher and committee of each school and approved by the parents in consultation with the Regional Education Officer (NPSE 1998:11). This policy document also states that the education system must be reorganised so that it includes "...structures of institutional governance such as School Committees, Parent-Teachers' Associations (PTA) and School Boards of Directors which will reflect the interests of all stakeholders and the broader community served by the school" (NPSE 1998:12). Head-teachers, School Committees, PTAs and School Board Members must also be trained to manage relevant aspects of school life effectively (NPSE 1998:12). The policy also includes communication of information to parents, as it charges the Management Information System (which is responsible for collecting the information needed by the Ministry of Education to make policy decisions), to find ways to disseminate information to all stakeholders (NPSE 1998:13). Although this policy also assigns the community a role in establishing infra-structure and ensuring sound educational programmes this is only at pre-school level (NPSE 1998:4).

The Ministry of Education (IE 1994:15-26) points out two further roles for parents in their children's education. Firstly, the parents' role in the physical development of schools, particularly the construction of primary schools. Secondly, the parents' contribution in terms of school fees. Parents also decide which school their child will attend (see 3.2).

3.3.2.2 *Limitations of Swazi parental involvement policy*
Clearly, the Swazi government does not prioritise parental involvement at this time, and thus, does not seem to be fully aware of the benefits of involving parents fully in their children's education. Rather, policy emphasises improved academic outcomes for learners through the use of continuous assessment and teacher training, and economic and administrative restructuring (IE 1994:40-41).

Nevertheless, the policy does include a role for parents in their children's education. Parents must be consulted when curriculum changes are made and school fees are determined, information must be communicated to them, they may play a role in establishing and financing schools, and school governance committees must be representative of them and the larger community.

Unfortunately, these roles for parents are somewhat limited. Policy does not promote involvement in all six of Epstein's (1995:704) types of parental involvement. Learners benefit most from a comprehensive programme (see 2.4.1) and Swazi policy neglects those types of parental involvement found to benefit learners the most, parenting and parental involvement in learning activities in the home (see 2.4.8). As a result the benefits of this limited policy on parental involvement are also likely to be limited.

3.3.3 The parental involvement policy of South Africa and its limitations

In South Africa parental involvement has been recognised as being critical to the new (post-apartheid) education dispensation by both the government and opposition (Mkwanazi 1994:24). This recognition has resulted in the formulation of education policy that includes a role for parents.

3.3.3.1 *South African parental involvement policy*
The *South African Schools Act, 1996* (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996:3) acknowledges the rights of parents, defined broadly to include parents, guardians, custodians and people who take on the role of guardians, to be involved in school governance. As discussed (see 2.4.6), parental involvement in government and advocacy is essential for parents to be true partners in education (McKenna & Willms 1998:25). The functions of school governing bodies in South Africa include: developing the mission statement of the school;

determining the language and admittance policies of the school (within the limits set by the *South African Schools Act*); adopting a code of conduct for the learners; making recommendations on the appointment of teaching and administrative staff; maintaining and improving school property; determining extra-mural curriculum and subject choice; and purchasing textbooks (RSA 1996:10-11). Parents must constitute the majority of these governing bodies (RSA 1996:13). The Act was amended in 2000 (RSA 2000a:2) to ensure that the composition of the governing body is representative of the racial and linguistic composition of the school. If necessary, members who are representative of the racial and linguistic composition of the school can be co-opted onto the school governing body and given full voting powers.

In addition to parents' roles in school governance, the South African government recognises the importance of the community as a partner in education. This is illustrated by priority 3, of a nine-point mobilisation programme for education and training set out by the Minister of Education (DE 1999 in van Wyk 2001:118). Priority 3 states that "Schools must become centers of community life". The Minister states that there is a role in community schools for religious bodies, cultural groups, sports clubs, businesses and civic associations both to serve their own requirements and to contribute to the school's learning programme within and out of school hours (DE 1999 in van Wyk 2001:118). Further, the *South African Schools Act, 1996* (RSA 1996:10-11) recommends that school facilities be made available for community educational and fundraising events. Moreover, the Department of Education notes seven roles for educators, one is a community, citizenship and pastoral role (RSA 2000b:7). This role includes the development of supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations "...based on a critical understanding of community and environmental issues" (RSA 2000b:8).

3.3.3.2 Limitations of South African policy on parental involvement

Although parental involvement in government and advocacy is soundly supported by South African policy Epstein (1987b:7) states, "It is not enough to mandate only parent advisory councils, or parent-teacher organisations, or only parent volunteers at the school building. These activities involve only a small proportion of the parents and have little impact on the abilities of all parents to help or monitor their children throughout the school years". In fact, the only mention made of the parental body as a whole in the *South African Schools Act, 1996* (RSA 1996: 10) is that the governing body should encourage parents to render voluntary services to the school. Only a few vague references to the whole parent body, as part of the community, are made in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (RSA 2000b:7-8). Thus, South African educational policy includes only a small role for the parent body as a whole. This is unfortunate since parental involvement should include all parents and most parents prefer to be involved in their own children's learning rather than in school governing bodies (Epstein 1995:708).

Moreover, while South African policy certainly promotes parental involvement in the areas of government and advocacy, and collaboration and exchange with community organisations, like Swazi policy it does not promote involvement in all six of Epstein's (1995:704) types of parental involvement. Lemmer (2000:61) notes that giving parents an increased role in only the governance of schools often leads to disappointing results as a wide body of evidence suggests that school governance is only weakly related to teaching and learning. Consequently, changes in governance have little effect on learner achievement (Lemmer 2000:61).

3.3.4 <u>Implementation of Swazi and South African policies on parental involvement</u>

In order for parental involvement policy to be successfully implemented, policy must contain or be followed by clear and explicit guidelines for the implementation of the policy (Peressini 1998a:558).

Such guidelines have not been made explicit for the roles described for parents by Swazi policy and for community involvement in South Africa. Swazi policy does not explain how parents will be consulted on curriculum changes or how much influence they will have over these changes or the determination of school fees. It is not elucidated how representativeness in school governing structures will be established, or precisely what the functions of these bodies are. Finally, it is not explained how the Management Information System will inform parents. As a result of this lack of clarity and detail it is likely that government and schools will find these policies difficult to implement.

Community involvement is most clearly discussed in a 10-page list of educator competencies in The National Education Policy Act, 1996 (RSA 2000b: 8-17). However, the Act only makes a few general statements that relate to teachers' competencies in this regard. These include: respecting the roles of parents and the community and assisting in building structures to facilitate this; understanding key community problems; understanding the possibilities for life- and work-skill education and training in local communities, organisations and business; and knowing about the available support services and how they may be utilised. These vague descriptions make it difficult for teachers to understand what to do, or how to go about doing it, where community involvement is concerned.

South African education policy does contain explicit statements concerning the election, composition and responsibilities of the governing body (RSA 1996:9-16). As a result schools should have little difficulty in understanding the nature of these bodies and should be able to implement them. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that these guidelines are not being communicated effectively to educators and other participants and, consequently, they are not being implemented (Legotlo *et al* 2002:117). School principals feel that parents are not being consulted and that educational decisions are still being made at government level (van der Westhuizen & Mosoge 2001:192). Educators are unclear of the distribution of responsibilities for decision-making (Legotlo *et al* 2002:117).

Van Wyk (2001:116) notes that despite the fact that most policy makers and educators endorse the need for parental involvement to improve education, little is being done to prepare educators to work with parents or members of the community in South African schools. Epstein (1987b:8) notes that the state requirements for teaching credentials should include the completion of at least one comprehensive course in family and school connections and the use of parent involvement in teaching. Such a course has recently been introduced at the University of South Africa and confers on teachers a Certificate of Parent Involvement (Lemmer 2000:60). However, it is not mandatory for South African teachers to acquire this certificate. A course on parental involvement is not a professional requirement for Swazi teachers either and this topic is not covered directly in Swazi teacher training programmes (Mazibuko personal communication).

Further, in order for parental involvement policy to be implemented, many educators stress the need for adequate government funding (Epstein 1991:349). Otherwise such programmes are likely to be limited to only those schools whose administrators are very well motivated in this regard. Epstein (1991:348) feels

that the participation of paid parent involvement coordinators may be crucial for the widespread implementation of such programmes. Coordinators guide school staff, provide in-service training for educators, offer services to parents, and perform other tasks that promote successful parental involvement (Epstein 1991:348). In both South Africa and Swaziland no such coordinators exist and funds have not been set aside specifically for parental involvement (DP 1998:185-187). This, despite the fact that the Minister of Education for South Africa acknowledged that we must "...put great effort into ensuring that the governing bodies, especially in poor communities, are given the support they need to become strong and viable" (DE 1999:9).

3.3.5 <u>Summary</u>

Cullinford and Morrison (1999:253) state, "There can be hardly any school policies or mission statements which do not involve the importance of parents and invite as much involvement in school life as possible". Unfortunately, this seems to be the case in virtually all Swazi schools (personal observation) and many South African schools (van Wyk 2001:120).

This is hardly surprising in Swaziland where education policy does not specifically address the issue of parental involvement although parents are given limited roles in their children's education. The situation in South Africa, where a clear and considerable role for parents in government and advocacy has been documented, is somewhat better.

However, both Swazi and South African education policies exclude some of the most beneficial roles for parents and may be difficult to implement due to lack of teacher training, communication, clarity in some areas, and funding.

Swaziland would benefit from adopting an explicit parental involvement policy similar to South Africa's where government and advocacy is concerned. This would necessitate transferring many of the decision-making roles of the Ministry of education to the parents. However, Swazi policy also needs to include a comprehensive and intensive role for parents in Epstein's other five areas of parental involvement. Adequate funding, good communication of the policy, teacher education, and detailed and clear guidelines for policy implementation are also required.

3.4 Parental involvement research in Swaziland and South Africa

3.4.1 Introduction

South Africa differs from Swaziland in several important respects. South African society is heterogeneous and pluralistic and carries the legacy of its apartheid past, which disenfranchised and marginalised the majority of the population (Jantjes 1995:290-300). However, while Swazis do not need to come to terms with the inequalities and bitterness that resulted from apartheid, they do have to contend with similar levels of illiteracy and economic deprivation. Furthermore, the populations of both of these southern African countries have far more in common culturally than either of these populations do with those of Western countries. Consequently, the results of South African research are likely to be more relevant to Swaziland and the development of a parental involvement programme in Swaziland, then are the results of research done in other countries. No research has been done on parental involvement in Swaziland prior to this study.

The majority of South African studies have focussed on previously disadvantaged school communities (e.g. Sitole 1993:85; Mkwanazi 1994:24; van Wyk 1996:6).

3.4.2 Benefits of parental involvement in South Africa

Research suggests that, similar to the findings of foreign studies (see 2.4), parental involvement in South African benefits learners in a variety of ways.

Sitole (1993:142) found that parents of Soweto primary school learners who passed were significantly more involved than those of learners who failed in terms of parental attitude, parent initiated contact and school initiated contact.

The introduction of a paired reading programme in Mitchell's Plain in the Western Cape significantly improved the learners' attitude to reading and their accuracy and comprehension (Overett & Donald 1988:347).

Jantjes (1995:297-298) found that teaching parents in the economically deprived community of Bishop Lavis in the Western Cape how to improve their home environment using the procedures of Dave (1963) had a number of positive outcomes. Not only did learners' school achievement improve, but parents were also more confident about consulting teachers and understood their children better. Moreover, the principal and teachers reported closer relationships with parents (Jantjes 1995:298). Jantjes (1995:296-297) noted that the involvement activities were manageable from the parent's perspective, and that these interventions were not costly. This is important in economically deprived communities.

Lemmer (2000:73-74) found parent involvement in a variety of different activities in black South African schools resulted in such benefits for teachers and educators as strengthened teacher professionalism, teacher empowerment, less stress, and more positive relationships with parents. Parents felt more appreciated and confident and learners noted a more positive atmosphere in the school and strengthened parental interest in home learning.

3.4.3 The current level of parental involvement in South Africa

Unfortunately, despite the evidence of the benefits of parental involvement both locally and internationally, parental involvement in South African schools has been found to be inadequate (Mkwanazi 1994:24; van Wyk 19996:iii; Heystek & Louw 1999:26; van Wyk 2001:120-121). Mkwanazi (1994:24) found that parental involvement in the Soweto schools she studied meant parents compensating for deficiencies in the school system and that no true involvement in terms of the content of children's education or school management was occurring.

In terms of Epstein's classification of parental involvement into six categories (Epstein 1995:704), evidence suggests that South African parents are involved in only very limited ways in their children's education.

Van Wyk (2001:120-121) found schools predominantly use conventional methods of involving families such as fundraisers, open-house days, and parent-teacher conferences. However, the teachers in Heystek's study noted only 19% "good" parental attendance at parent-teacher meetings. Furthermore, many of these schools did not have regular parent evenings (Heystek1999:104).

Parents were not provided with opportunities to be volunteers in the classroom (Heystek 1999: 103; van Wyk 2001:123). Parents in Heystek's study were more active in terms of attendance at sport and social functions (25.8% and 38.4% "good" participation respectively), and assistance with extramural activities and maintenance of the physical facilities of the school (18.5% and 31.5% "good" participation respectively) (Heystek 1999:104-105).

Parents were provided with limited opportunities to communicate with the school (van Wyk 2001:123). The majority of teachers only contacted the parents of

learners who were having problems at school (van Wyk 2001:121). Although 74% of primary school educators van Wyk studied, stated that they had a policy of involving parents in learning activities in the home, all admitted that they had never taught parents how to play a positive role in their children's school work and did not know how to do so (van Wyk 2001:122). Teachers in Heystek's study noted very little parental assistance with homework and in most of the schools he studied no provision was made for parental involvement in this area (Heystek 1999:103).

Teachers in van Wyk's study felt that parents' roles in decision-making should be limited to voting for, or serving on, the school's governing body (van Wyk 2001:123-124). These teachers felt that South African legislation had given these bodies too much decision-making power and that educators should not be in the position where they could be outvoted by parents (van Wyk 2001:124-125). Mkwanazi (1994:24) found that parents played a very limited role in school management. Heystek (1999:102-111) found that the teachers in his study noted that over 40% of parents participated in school management activities. This was one of the highest areas of parental involvement in his study. He suggests that this was probably because education policy necessitates this type of involvement. However, he found that despite legislation to the contrary, some schools did not have a governing body at all. Other recent studies have shown that most South African schools do not have governing bodies that have been elected and function in terms of education policy and that parents play little or no role in decision-making (Christie 2001:56-57; van der Westhuizen & Mosoge 2001:192).

Community involvement at these schools was limited to the use of the premises by outside groups and inviting speakers from the community, including parents, and various agencies to address the learners (van Wyk 2001:125).

3.4.4 <u>Factors influencing the degree or type of parental involvement in South Africa.</u>

As was found to be the case in other countries (see 2.7), various factors relating to the parent and family background, as well as the teacher and child have been found to influence the degree and type of parental involvement in South Africa.

3.4.4.1 *The parents*
Parental illiteracy and unemployment have been identified by South African educators as two of the biggest barriers to parental involvement (Mkwanazi 1994:29; Molepo 2000:83; van Wyk 2001:126). In contrast to this, Sitole (1993:123-124) found no significant differences in the involvement of employed and unemployed parents of underachieving children although, employed mothers were found to have a better attitude to the school than unemployed mothers.

In addition, Mkwanazi (1994:29) found parental age was one of the foremost reasons given by educators for the lack of parental involvement. Old parents were less involved (Mkwanzi 1994:29). Sitole (1993:124) found 30 to 40 year old mothers initiated more parent initiated involvement and had more positive attitudes to the school than either older or younger mothers. No significant difference was noted for fathers in these respects, however.

Parental marital status, and educational level of parents of underachieving children were also found not to be related to parental involvement, although married parents had a better attitude to the school (Sitole 1993:122,138).

However, many South African parents do not know why or how they can be involved and believe that they need not be involved since teachers are paid and qualified to educate their children (Heystek & Louw 1999:26; Rambinyana & Kok 2002:14). This finding was supported by van Wyk (2001:126) and van der

Westhuizen & Mosoge (2001:193), who found that one of the foremost reasons for non-involvement was lack of parental recognition of their responsibility in their children's education. Attempts to involve parents have been seen by viewed by some parents as the school not fulfilling its responsibility (Christie 2001:56). Some parents felt they should be paid for their involvement (Christie 2001:56). Further, parents were also not always confident that they could assist their children (Jantjes 1995:298).

Lack of time, particularly in the case of single mothers, was also identified by researchers as a major barrier to parental involvement (van der Westhuizen & Mosoge 2001:193; van Wyk 2001:126). Often in South African townships both parents work and get home very late such that meetings have to be scheduled on weekends. This is further complicated by the fact that parents have many weddings, funerals and other social commitments to attend on weekends (van Wyk 2001:126).

Mkwanazi (1994:27) found that one reason South African educators feel that some parents are not more involved in their children's schooling is simply the fact that they do not live with their children. Many parents leave their children with other family members in order to get jobs. She notes that these family members, often grandparents, are even more likely to be illiterate and unaware of their possible roles in the children's education.

South African educators also put forward barriers such as: lack of school resources, such as photocopiers; lack of transport; factional fighting amongst parents on tribal lines or due to political affiliations; and an unstable school environment reflected in teachers' strikes, low teacher morale, and school thefts (Mkwanazi 1994:28; Heystek 1999:109).

3.4.4.2 *The learners*

Foreign studies have provided evidence for factors relating to the nature of the child affecting the level and type of parental involvement (see 2.7.3). However, Sitole (1993:125) found child gender, birth order and sibling number to have no relationship with parental involvement.

3.4.4.3 *The teachers and schools*

Evidence suggests that the effort of teachers and schools to involve the parents is the decisive factor in terms of the amount and type of parental involvement that occurs in that community (see 2.7.4).

Unfortunately, South African teachers are not adequately prepared to work with families and members of the community (van der Westhuizen 2001:192; van Wyk 2001:127). The majority (67%) of educators in van Wyk's study did not believe that parent involvement was important for learner success (van Wyk 2001:121). The schools she studied in Gauteng did not have a written policy on school-family-community partnerships (van Wyk 2001:121). Moreover, most schools had never discussed family and community involvement as a way of improving schooling (van Wyk 2001:121). Teachers felt parents' primary role was to help with discipline (Christie 2001:56).

The emphasis in these schools tended to be on "fixing" rather than accommodating parents (van Wyk 2001:120). Educators felt that schools often viewed parents as difficult (van Wyk 2001:123). Many parental involvement activities did not even exist at the schools Heystek (1999:110) studied, suggesting that schools do not make provision for structures or opportunities for parental involvement. Moreover, the majority of educators did not recognise their own role in the lack of effective parental involvement (Heystek 1999: 110; van Wyk 2001:126).

3.4.5 <u>Summary</u>

Prior to this study no research had been done on parental involvement in Swazi schools. However, since South Africa has a fairly similar culture, South African research on parental involvement may be particularly relevant to Swaziland.

South African research indicates that parental involvement in South Africa offers the same sort of benefits as it does in other countries (see 2.4). Unfortunately however, South African schools presently offer parents only very limited and traditional forms of parental involvement. Schools are not enthusiastic about parents' volunteering in the classroom, do not teach parents how to help their children at home, resist legislation on parental involvement in governance structures, and communicate mostly when problems arise. Moreover, a large proportion of parents do not participate in the limited ways made available to them. Contributing factors include: parental illiteracy and unemployment; the parent perception that their children's education is not their responsibility; and a number of barriers of which some are universal, such as a lack of time, and some local, such as attendance of funerals and factional fighting. Older parents also tend to be less involved in their children's education. Teachers, whose roles are critical to successful parental involvement, were unprepared for parental involvement to the extent that many of them did not recognise the importance thereof.

3.5 Chapter summary and conclusions

At present the education system in Swaziland is organised in such a way that the vast majority of parents, whose children attend government or aided schools, are prevented from playing any role in many decisions concerning their children's education. Further, current Swazi education policy does not prioritise parental

involvement and assigns parents a very limited role in their children's education. This role includes a consultative role for parents in respect to curriculum changes and the determination of school fees, a role in school governance structures, a right to information, and a role in the financing of education. Moreover, what policy exists is not likely to be successfully implemented as parents' roles are not clearly elucidated, a budget has not been assigned to parental involvement, and teachers are not trained in parent involvement. This is very unfortunate as Swaziland desperately needs to improve learners' academic success and decrease the rate of school dropout. These are just a few of the positive outcomes of parental involvement.

South Africa's policy on parental involvement is also not comprehensive enough and implementation is also retarded by lack of clarity, inadequate teacher training and funding. However, South Africa has a clear and explicit policy on parental involvement in governance and advocacy and Swaziland would benefit from adopting a similar policy although this would require a more limited decision-making role for the Ministry of Education.

Since no research has been done in Swaziland on parental involvement, those studies conducted in neighboring, and culturally similar, South Africa are particularly relevant. These studies support foreign research in terms of the benefits of parental involvement and indicate that parental involvement in South Africa is inadequate for many of the same reasons that this is often the case internationally. There are, however, some barriers to parental involvement that are particularly prevalent in South Africa such as funeral attendance and parents not living with their children.

Before a parental involvement policy and programme can be designed for Swaziland, it is necessary to understand the nature of parental involvement in Swaziland especially in regard to the amount and type of parent involvement

initiated by parents and teachers presently. Further the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of parents and teachers in regard to parent involvement must be revealed (see 2.11). The methods and methodologies used to expose this information are discussed in Chapter 4.