

# Chapter 6

## Qualitative findings and discussion

“I don’t think they [parents] have that space for putting their views. They are not involved. I think that is something the Ministry has to do, try at this time to involve them, because we need them, we need their ideas” (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).

## 6.1 Introduction

Patton (1990:18) states that quantitative methods provide statistically generalisable patterns, but that these only tap the surface of the meaning of the phenomenon in question. He notes, however, that qualitative data, “add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience”. This analysis explains succinctly the purpose of the qualitative component of this study, to reveal a deeper understanding of parental involvement as it occurs presently, and as it could occur, in Urban Swazi primary schools. This in-depth understanding of parental involvement, combined with the generalisations that resulted from the quantitative analysis, form a suitable basis for the design of an effective programme of parental involvement.

The results of the qualitative interviews and observations of a small group of urban Swazi primary school teachers and parents are presented in the ensuing sections. Themes that arose from the literature and the analysis of the teacher, focus group, and parent interviews are presented. The original unedited words of the informants are used in all quotes although occasionally a word or phrase was added, or changed in the interests of clarity. Where this has been done, such words are presented in square brackets. Observations of informants’ actions are typed in italics and are also in square brackets. Quotes are in bold and are indented. Pseudonyms have been used for all informants to ensure anonymity.

As noted in Chapter 4 it is a considerable challenge to combine qualitative and quantitative results. Nevertheless this chapter will attempt to draw these results together to form a coherent picture of parental involvement in Swaziland. Thus, after the qualitative results are presented they are discussed in terms of both the literature and the quantitative findings of this study (see Chapter 5).

## **6.2 Parental involvement: Opportunities and possibilities**

### 6.2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are two determinants of parental involvement (see 2.6). While analyzing the interview data the researcher noted the opportunities that Swazi parents were given to become involved in their children's education, and the efforts made by the schools, teachers and Ministry of Education to involve them. She also observed whether parents took these opportunities to become involved, as well as whether they were involved in their children's education in ways that were not under the control of the teachers, school or Ministry of Education. The teachers' and parents' beliefs on how parents should be involved were also noted.

The data segments that formed the above theme were then sorted into Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein 1995:704) following the frameworks of Chapters 2 and 3.

### 6.2.2 Parenting

#### *6.2.2.1 Parents were aware of their basic obligations*

The six parents interviewed showed a keen awareness of the basic obligations of parents to provide the resources, and establish the home conditions, that make education possible.

The parents felt that two of their main responsibilities were ensuring that their child attended a good school and paying school fees. Parents also noted their other traditional parental responsibilities such as supplying school stationary and books and providing physical care for their children.

Ms. Dlamini, a parent whose son attended School D noted:

**I think I should make sure they get a good basic education. That is beginning from nursery. They should attend nursery. Then I should always try to get a good school.**

Ms. Nxumalo, a parent whose daughter attended School C, stated:

**I think a parent has to provide for the child, pay school fees, buy everything at the school and then help the child at home with his schoolwork and also, like now we have some schools that don't provide food. You have to make some balanced meals for them to take. You must see that they get real food.**

Parents also acknowledged their role in establishing positive values and in the discipline of their children. Mr. Kunene, a parent whose child attended School C, noted:

**[Parents must] also try to instill a sense of discipline; certain values which we believe will help them to be responsible citizens in the future.**

The parents were aware that they played an important role in encouraging and advising their children.

**Then I should always help them with doing their schoolwork, always encourage them (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

**Although they can depend on me for advice and the rest... I need to guide them to a future profession (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

However, despite the fact that the parents knew they should encourage and advise their children, the parenting styles (see 2.4.2) they used were not always positive when dealing with educational issues. Mr. Razibuhoro (parent, School D) knew this and stated:

**Sometimes when the child does a mistake we say "stupid, stupid". I said to her [my wife] let us try not to tell our children stupid because maybe later on they become stupid.**

All of the parents spontaneously and enthusiastically thanked the researcher for holding the workshops, which focussed on parenting style and parental involvement in the home (see Appendix V). The parents noted that attending the workshop had shown them that the way they interacted with their children when helping with schoolwork was not always positive. Many commented that they had improved their parenting as a result of the workshop.

**So at least it helped me to some extent. I must really appreciate it. That workshop did work. It made me a better parent because I could see maybe I'm too strict here. I get upset easily when a child is failing to tell me what is 8 times 3. Ja, they start crying, crying all the time and I say [swearing]. So when you [the researcher] start mentioning this its like you knew exactly what is happening (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

The parents tried to supervise their children's home activities.

**I said now you [the children] must only watch TV for only 2 hours. Not more than that, because they also like to watch TV all day (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

However, the fact that many parents were at work all day and were not able to supervise their children personally made this difficult.

**Sometimes when they come home I am not there. And when I'm not there they find time to go and play (Ms. Nxumalo, parent, School C).**

#### *6.2.2.2 Teachers made no attempt to educate parents*

All the teachers interviewed emphasised the parents' role in fulfilling their basic obligations. They noted that parents must pay school fees, provide books, feed and clothe their children, be their primary educators, and also provide them with the emotional support, values and discipline they need to learn.

**They provide for all the needs of the child that has to do with the learning situation. When you need instruments, they are there, when you need crayons, they are there (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

**The parent should teach the child the fear of the Lord, firstly, from my side. The parent should take care of the child, body, soul and spirit (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

However the teachers felt that some parents did not meet these obligations.

**In fact the parents are the first teachers of the child. Before they come to us they have already taught them something [values] but if there is nothing then there is very little we can do for the child (Mr. Dladla, teacher, School D).**

**That's where most of the problems start, if the kids don't get that interest from their parents. Interest in their work, interest in what they are doing at school, interest in their friends (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

**I think some of the kids are not getting the support and love from the home (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

In fact, some of the teachers felt that parents did not realise that their role was not limited to only providing the material resources for education. Ms. Dube, a teacher at School D noted in respect to some parents:

**When I [the parent] pay the school fees, the child has got a uniform that is fine. The teacher will do the rest.**

Very few teachers were happy about the general level of supervision in the children's homes. Children were watching too much, often unsuitable, TV and were being left to do whatever they wanted.

**They are not bothered at all if their children watch the TV until the morning hours. So if they could control the watching of TV, that is the main problem I have discovered (Mr. Dladla, teacher, School D).**

**Most of them [the learners] are spoilt and there is less discipline, there is less discipline than one would expect. Definitely. Children have amazing freedom (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

Nevertheless, despite teachers' awareness that some parents were not fulfilling these important obligations, none of the schools ever held parent workshops in which parents' responsibilities and positive parenting behaviours were discussed. The surprised response of Mr. Fortune, a teacher at School B, when asked whether the school provided such workshops was typical. Laughing and shaking his head, he replied:

**No, not at all, not at all.**

Only Ms. Costa, whose daughter had attended a school in the USA, had ever even heard of such workshops for parents. The only workshops held at the government aided schools were in-service workshops for teachers on continuous assessment, while Private School A occasionally held workshops for staff on how to handle children with various learning problems.

The researcher during the course of this study (see 4.2.8) gave a workshop at Schools C and D. These workshops were poorly attended with only 10% of the parents, and teachers, attending.

#### *6.2.2.3 Discussion*

The parents interviewed were aware of their basic obligations and tried to meet them. Teachers felt that most parents met their children's material needs. However, although research suggests that almost all parents accept their basic responsibilities (Epstein 1986:281), the teachers interviewed were concerned that some parents were not providing their children with the values and discipline required for successful learning. Further, teachers did not feel that most parents supervised their children adequately.

The parents interviewed reported that although they tried, they found it difficult to supervise their children's afternoon activities since they were usually working at this time. This sometimes resulted in parents helping and supervising their

children's homework at night when both were exhausted (see 6.2.5.2). The contention that the children were not always well supervised is supported by the finding that just over 40% of the parents in the quantitative research reported that they did not limit the amount of time that their children watched TV on a frequent basis (Item 35, Table 5.29).

The parents interviewed proved to be some of the more involved parents (see 6.2.8.1). Thus it is likely that they were also the parents that were most aware of the nature of a positive parenting style. Nevertheless, even these parents benefited from the workshop and made changes in their parenting style as a result.

Consequently, despite an apparent need for parent education on parenting styles and supervision that was recognised both by teachers and parents, none of these schools, or the teachers themselves, made any effort to educate parents in these respects.

### 6.2.3 Communication

#### 6.2.3.1 *Teachers and parents recognised the need for communication*

Both parents and teachers felt that communication between the school and the home was essential. Teachers placed emphasis on the parents making the effort to communicate with them.

**The parent, if he sees something, he must quickly communicate with the teacher, immediately. There should be open communication between the teacher and the parent as the centre point is the child (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**The perfect parent is one that has very close contact with the teacher, yes, actually keeps in line with the progress the child is making. The occasional**

visits to school, have a chat with the teacher, the visits on open-day (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).

**There must be that communication between the teacher and the parent. Its not like it's the teacher faced with the kid and that's it. We are also involved (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D)**

The parents felt that they were welcome at the school and that they could approach teachers whenever they needed to talk to them. For this reason several parents noted that they did not feel teacher-parent meetings needed to occur more than once a term.

**Because I think the teachers have got time to talk to the parents. I think that if the parents want to talk to the teacher, I don't think they will mind (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

**If I feel there is something I need I always go there [the school] (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

**It is okay to meet the teacher once a term because if I have a problem or my child has a problem I can always go and meet them. (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

Most teachers indicated that the school had an open door policy and welcomed spontaneous visits from parents although a few teachers expressed reservations in this regard.

**We always encourage them to come anytime, anytime they want to discuss [something]. And they come, but sometimes they interrupt classes, which is a problem (Ms. Wade, head-teacher, School C).**

#### *6.2.3.2 Communication mostly by notices from the school*

A great deal of communication between the school and home took the form of notices, which were usually sent to parents at least weekly either requesting

help, materials or money from parents or informing parents of events at the school. These notices were all sent in English, which the teachers felt the parents expected because they had chosen these schools based on the fact that they taught in English.

**I think because its Swaziland and the children speak a lot of siSwati at home they [parents] like to put their children in an English school so that when they go to South Africa they can speak English fluently. I think that's partly why they put their children here (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

The teachers' felt that parents read these notes and that most responded positively to requests for materials.

**You'll send out letters and you'll get the letters back, they [the parents] are very good at replying. You get that communication going (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

Mr. Nyoni, a teacher at School E, noted that parents did not respond to requests from the schools, if they did not get notices. A few teachers also communicated to parents in writing by means of homework diaries or communication books but the majority of teachers did not use these forms of communication.

Parent workshops and home visits by the teachers to parents did not occur at any of these schools. Most teachers did not realise that it was possible to do these things. Mr. Fortune, a teacher at School B, realised the benefits of home visits but thought it was his novel idea and was not aware that this was practiced at any schools.

**I thought it was a bit of a wild idea but I never had the chance to sit down and propose it.**

Although most contact between parents and teachers was in writing or in person, one parent expressed great satisfaction over his frequent contact with his child's teachers by telephone.

I've had a good relationship with them [the teachers]. Particularly his class teacher because I also have his phone number. If I feel there is a need to speak to him I speak to him on the telephone (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).

#### 6.2.3.3 *Reasons for communicating*

##### **a) Teachers wished to communicate learners' problems and progress, and parents' duties**

As mentioned in 6.2.3.2, notices were sent frequently to inform the parents of events at the school and to request resources from parents.

Teachers also felt it was important to communicate children's progress to parents, which was mostly done at parent-teacher meetings and also to inform parents of any problems concerning their children. If such problems arose parents were usually asked to visit the school. The teachers reported that most parents responded promptly when asked to visit the school.

**The parents here are very much cooperative, because for instance in my class  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them are very much responsible because once I discover something [a problem] then I quickly make a note, they [the parents] respond either they come or they phone and we make an appointment. Maybe the  $\frac{1}{4}$ , you know we have to keep on sending "please call your parent" (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

While most teachers said they would welcome more frequent visits from any parents, they felt that they particularly needed to see those parents whose children were having problems; but these were also the parents that were the hardest to see.

**You see, so I mean, and often it is the wrong parents [who attend meetings]. The kids are doing fine, there are no hassles and they are doing great. So the ones you really want to see, I'll be lucky if I get two or three (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

These schools also told parents what duties and roles the school expected of them.

**Once a year we hold a curriculum review. We explain to the parents what we are doing here and what their role is. It will work if they do their part that we are expecting, sort of. You have to know as a school that there is a certain amount that the parent puts in to be able to say at the end of the day that we did a good job (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

**Last year I attended two meetings. We were told about the children's progress in school, how we should help, sort of, cooperate with the school (Ms. Nxumalo, parent, School C).**

Teachers felt that communication from the home was particularly important when the children were having problems at home.

**[Quoting a parent] "We have a problem at home, I am leaving my husband and my child is not taking it well so could you [the teacher] lookout". It helps a lot because you can actually see the slump and you think, what can I do? (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

However, only one teacher noted that parents had access to information about the children themselves, which was valuable to teachers.

**Whereby if the parent had made you aware of the child's [academic] problem, work would have started earlier (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

Although the schools showed the parents their children's books at the yearly parent-teacher meetings, no deliberate effort was made by any of the schools to inform the parents about the teaching methods or the topics their children were learning about at school on a weekly or even monthly basis. Only private School A held a single yearly meeting, the curriculum review, in which the year's syllabus and the parent's role were communicated. The researcher attended this short meeting. The skills the children were supposed to learn during the year were superficially listed on overheads and parents were told that they should

ensure that their children did their homework. The teachers expected parents to approach teachers and ask for this information or look at their children's schoolbooks if they were interested.

In response to the question of whether parents were informed about the topics taught, Mr. Fakudze, a teacher at School E, responded:

**No we don't, we don't. Let me be open, we don't. All we do is request [at the annual teacher-parent meeting] them to look at the work of the child so he will know what topic he has been doing. There is the date, topic and everything. So he will know, this week they are doing this. Otherwise there is no special notices that says we are doing this topic this week.**

#### **b) Parents' wanted to know about their children's problems and progress**

Resolution of problems and determining their children's progress were also the reasons given most often by parents for them contacting the teachers

**So from time to time he [the class teacher] phones me if there is a problem. So from time to time I do phone the teacher to find out the progress (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

**I always go to school and inquire from the teacher how he is [the child]. And especially he is not good at maths so I would go to the school and ask, "how can I help? How can you [the teacher] help?" and they would always assist me (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

#### *6.2.3.4 Discussion*

Unlike some foreign parents who feel like intruders on the school grounds (Eldridge 2001:66), the parents interviewed here felt welcome at the school and felt they could approach the teachers to talk whenever they needed to. The teachers also welcomed parents coming to the school to communicate with them. This corresponds with the quantitative data (see 5.6.1) which also showed

that parents felt welcome at the school and had a very positive attitude to the school. This should facilitate home to school communication.

Nevertheless, the quantitative data (see 5.7.2) indicate that the majority of the parents did not visit the school more than once a year. Further, as is the case in some foreign schools, most parents did not talk to the teacher frequently, and 40% of the parents had had no verbal communication with the teacher that year (Item 28, Table 5.31). Since only the more involved parents were interviewed (see 6.2.8.1) this finding does not conflict with these parents' recognition of the importance of home to school communication, but does indicate that a substantial proportion of the parent population did not seem to be aware of this.

The teachers noted that the parents responded well to notes, which were clearly the predominant form of communication at these schools. This was substantiated by the high return rate of the parental questionnaire (see 4.2.4.2). This suggests that the use of English as the language of communication by the school did not form a barrier to the involvement of most parents. This was supported by the quantitative findings, which found that siSwati-speaking parents were as involved as English-speaking parents (see 5.5.3).

Parents emphasised communication over the problems and progress of their children, and clearly felt it their role to help remove problems. None of the parents mentioned a role in giving teachers information about their children.

The interviews indicated that these teachers recognised the need for communication in both directions, from school to home and home to school. However, although the teachers wanted parents to communicate with them, teachers felt that parents should take the initiative to approach them. Moreover, although the teachers recognised that parents had important information about the children's home circumstances, with only one exception, they did not seem

to realise that parents had useful information about their children. Hence, teachers did not emphasise communication with parents as a way of finding out about learners. This finding is supported by the quantitative data (Item 47, Table 5.34), which showed that over 60% of parents felt the school did not ask them for information about their child or “could do this much better.”

The teachers also did not seem to realise that listening to parents could be of benefit to the children’s education since schools and teachers only deliberately invited communication from the parents when problems existed. The quantitative data indicate the resultant emphasis at these schools on school to home communication, as is also the case in many foreign schools (see 5.8.1 & 5.8.2). Although, routine vehicles for frequent two-way communication are essential to establishment of partnerships between parents and schools (Weiss & Edwards 1992:216; Bhering 2002:236), the teachers and schools provided parents with very few formal opportunities for home to school communication despite professing a desire for such communication. The vast majority of teachers did not use communication books and parents were only invited to come and talk to teachers at the annual parent-teacher meetings.

The quantitative (see 5.8.1) and qualitative data show that parents were sent a great many notices informing them of events occurring at the schools, and of resources required by the schools. Schools also sought to communicate their agendas and expectations to parents. The implication is that parental involvement was about obtaining parental support for the schools and getting parents to adopt the schools’ values and goals. This attitude is common in many schools (Crozier 1999:113; Edwards & Warin 1999:331-335).

None of the teachers or parents ever mentioned that the teacher should or did contact parents just to inform them of positive things. In fact, teachers made it clear that they felt they did not really need to see parents unless the child was

having problems. This is in accordance with research in other countries, which has indicated that few teachers want more contact with parents of children without problems (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988:76). Thus, it is almost surprising that the quantitative data indicated that only 40% of parents felt they were only contacted for problems (see Item 14, Table 5.27). However, this can be explained by the fact that even though the teachers themselves felt they only really needed to see parents whose children were having problems (see also 6.2.4.1), all parents received reports and were invited to parent-teacher meetings. These were the main forums for communicating information about individual children at these schools.

The teachers were happy for parents to come and find out about the topics being taught at school but, with the exception of School A, which did this only annually and superficially, did not deliberately make parents aware of the topics being taught or the methods being used. This corresponds with the quantitative data which showed that nearly 60% of parents felt the school either did not or “could do much better” tell them the skills their children needed to learn that year (Item 38, Table 5.34). The fact that 23% of the parents felt the schools did this fairly well suggests that at least some teachers may have been communicating this information albeit, possibly, superficially. However, the majority of teachers were not doing so.

#### 6.2.4 Parental involvement at the school

The interviews indicated that parents were afforded limited opportunities to become involved at the school.

#### 6.2.4.1 *Parent-teacher meetings, important but infrequent*

Teachers from all schools noted proudly that their schools held parent-teacher meetings, which they believed, were very important.

**It is very important that parents come to the school. In fact what we do here is once a year we have an open day when we sit down with the parents and we look at the work of the child and discuss and see if there are some problems. We see what we can do in order to help. So there is that kind of working together with the parents (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

These annual events were mainly held to inform parents of their children's progress and to address problems that the children may have been having at school. In addition, these meetings clearly improved parent-teacher relationships. Parents appreciated the opportunity these meetings gave them to access their children's progress and behaviour at school.

**They put all the books on the table and you go through them, the exercises that he does, the tests that he has done. At least you think the school is doing a good job in that regard because you are able to pick up what the child is doing before you even get the report. At least you can go there with your child, then you can hear he is playful, at the very least you can see how your child is doing (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

All parents interviewed reported that these meetings were important and that either they or their spouse attended the parent-teacher meetings, usually not both.

**I believe that it is critical in fact, not only important, but critical in fact that parents attend such gatherings (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

**In most cases I go [to the meetings]. Its only maybe when I'm not in a position to go I ask my wife (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

The teachers at Schools B, C, D and E felt parent-teacher meetings were well attended. School D was willing to arrange an alternative time to meet parents if they were not able to come on the specified day.

**Yes, they do come and those that cannot come on a particular day, then they come earlier or later but they all attend because it is very important. In my class I had 99%, only one parent who didn't come (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**From what I have observed about 80% [of parents] are interested to know about their kids. But about 20% are not. Even if you make a tremendous effort to call them they don't come. They don't even bother themselves (Mr. Mduli, teacher, School C).**

A number of teachers reported that parents commonly sent another family representative to the meeting when they could not go.

**You find some parents often send a sister or a grandmother, but we try to discourage that (Ms. Makuba, deputy, School D).**

The teachers at School A felt, that almost half the parents did not attend these meetings.

Teachers felt that those parents whose children were having the most problems were those that did not attend. These were the parents they particularly wanted to see.

**I think a lot of the time we see the parents we don't really need to see, of course we love to see them, but the parents we really would like to see are the parents that are so elusive (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

**Some don't come at all, usually the ones we need to see the most are the one's that don't come (Ms. Wade, head-teacher, School C).**

The teachers and parents agreed that one parent-teacher meeting per year was insufficient and that these meetings should occur far more often, at least once a term.

**I think that one is not enough, I would say, because if they come once then I don't think that it will be enough because problems come every day so then I**

**believe that they have to come everyday if they get time (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

**They should change how the school is calling upon the meeting because the meeting is only once a year, so what I think the school could do is to make sure that every term there is a parent-teacher day (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

The necessity for more frequent teacher-parent meetings is illustrated by an incident related by Mr. Nyoni, a teacher at School E:

**We have open days every year during the first term and this year we somehow had two open days because there was the time when we had the first official one after which at the beginning of the [next] term they [parents] were made to come and collect their kids reports and it became an open day even though it was not planned because as soon as they looked at their kids' reports they started discussing and it became an open day coincidentally.**

### Discussion

Parent-teacher evenings were valued by both teachers and parents interviewed. Teachers reported that these were well attended at Schools B, C, D and E, but not at School A. However, the parents' responses to the questionnaire indicate that although most parents felt they had been invited to these events "very well", only a third had attended these meetings that year (see 5.8.3). This figure, which is considerably lower than that found in a study in the USA (Epstein 1986:281) but higher than that found by in South Africa (Heystek 1999:104), suggests that a large proportion of parents did not attend parent-teacher meetings. This conflicts with the teachers' perception of good attendance.

This difference between the perception of teachers and parents is hard to explain, especially since neither response flatters those giving it. The most likely explanation is that a substantial number of parents may have sent another family representative in their stead. Alternatively, teachers who were not interviewed may have experienced lower attendance at these events. However as all

teachers were referring to school-wide attendance this seems a less likely explanation. Nevertheless, although the teachers and parents interviewed, recognised the opportunities these meetings provided for communication and problem solving, apparently many other parents did not.

The interview data suggest a need for more frequent parent-teacher meetings. This may also encourage higher attendance by providing parents with more flexibility. This may be particularly important in the case of the parents whose children have problems. Teachers in this study, like those in many others (Ascher 1988:110), noted that these parents were also those least likely to attend. Although parents and teachers did not seem to be fully cognizant of this, their remarks indicated that these meetings also improved teacher-parent relationships. These meeting brought teachers and parents closer together and promoted mutual understanding.

#### *6.2.4.2 Parents were involved in fundraising on the rare occasions they were given the opportunity*

Fundraising events were held at most of the schools. These took the form of donations from parents, civvies days, cake sales, raffles, forms from the school asking for money that parents took to their employers, fun-nights, and family days. However, with the exception of private School A, which held many fundraising events, the other schools often held no more than one event per year. Frequently, parents were not involved at all.

In reply to whether the school held fundraising activities Mr. Nkunita, a teacher at School C, said:

**We've never had one [a fundraiser] actually.**

Mr. Fukudze, a teacher at School E, stated:

**This year we did not have one but we used to have them, like we used to say to child, maybe on Friday, must put on their private clothes and then pay one Lilangeni. We do have some like that but not often, they only involve the pupils and teachers.**

Ms. Dube, a teacher at School D, reported:

**[We usually have fundraisers] one time per year, but it depends whether that year has been a very busy year. We see that we are so tired maybe we can do it next year.**

Both teachers and parents reported that the parents enthusiastically took part in fundraising activities when given the opportunity to do so. Questioning revealed that this involvement was not only paying money or attending the fundraiser, but also included some parents managing and organising fundraisers. The teachers were very enthusiastic about the fundraising events that had taken place and had clearly enjoyed them.

**They [parents] do donate as long as they are informed and they see the good cause of why that is done (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

**They came, we had one [a fundraiser] in the previous term, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term. We had a fun night. We had a beautiful turnout. The parents are always ready to help the braaing here and arranging. They are very supportive (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

**They do have a cake sale, if they want to collect money to do something like the library they will always ask the parents what should be done and the parents will come up with ideas. Its quite good (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

The teachers at School A, the only school to hold many fundraising events each year noted that while most parents were willing to give their money towards

fundraisers, only the same small group of parents actually took part in managing or organising fundraisers.

**The parents that are involved are involved [in managing and organising fundraisers] pretty good but it's a very low percentage, maybe 10 to 15% (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

**They do give money or they drop the child at the function, but in-terms of offering assistance it actually ends up that each class has a core group of three to five parents that actually carryout whatever fundraising. They are the ones who will offer, it doesn't matter what function we are doing (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

### Discussion

Fundraising is a traditional way in which parents are involved at most schools (Jantjes 1995:300). However, to the researcher's surprise, parents were hardly used as resources for fundraising in any school except School A. Fundraising events were very rare, often being held less than once a year and parents were often not invited to contribute. Teachers reported that when fundraisers were held, parents attended them and, when they were given the opportunity, they also helped manage and organise them. The low frequency with which these events were held at the schools explains why Item 33 was reassigned to SIPI rather than PIPI (see 5.8.3). Simply put, parent involvement in fundraising was limited, primarily, by a lack of opportunities for them to be involved rather than by parental choice. Parents seemed to enjoy attending these events. In fact, considering how infrequently teachers reported having invited parents to fundraise, it is surprising that as many as 36% of the parents said they had helped with fundraising many times that year (see Item 33, Table 5.35). This difference in perception may be because teachers seemed to define fundraising in terms of specific events while the parents defined any request by the school for money as fundraising. Nevertheless, both the qualitative and quantitative (see 5.8.3) results support the contention that parents would fundraise if asked

to do so by the school. Possibly, however, only a small percentage of parents would be intensively involved in the organisation and management of these activities if they were held frequently as was the case at School A.

#### *6.2.4.3 Parents attended the infrequent sports, social and cultural events*

Like fundraising, parents, with the exception of those whose children attended private School A, had very little opportunity to take part in or attend sporting or social events due to the infrequency of these events.

At all the schools except School A, social events occurred no more than once a year and were often combined with fundraising events. Sport was limited to an annual athletics day. Cultural events were even more infrequent. However, these events were well attended by parents at all schools when they did occur.

**We haven't had a situation whereby we have competed with another school. School A usually does that, when they normally invite another private school and they have three [schools] and they have a sports day and the parents come through. No we don't have that. We have our annual sports day where we focus on athletics. We have a whole day programme and then the parents come through for that, they certainly do (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

**Parents do come for the sports, but we did not have a sports day this year (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

**...and obviously anything that involves the children on stage, then you definitely have support, definitely (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

When asked about these events specifically, most parents felt that they should attend to encourage their children.

**They [parents] should always encourage their children [at sporting events] and try to provide them with sports gear so their children can be encouraged to play (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

**I know its not nice, like if the child is performing in a play at school and his own parents are not there, it is painful (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

This was also the reason given by teachers for why parents attended.

**They come [parents] because they would like to cheer their kids (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

The parents did not always take the few opportunities they had to be involved in organising these events. Ms. Wade the head-teacher at School C remarked:

**Also, just recently, I put out a newsletter asking parents to help us assemble props and crafts for a play that we are doing. No response, not one.**

Most parents seemed to accept that the school their child attended offered very few sporting opportunities. They did not complain about the infrequency of social and cultural events. In reply to the question of whether he felt there was enough sports at School C, Mr. Kunene, a parent, said calmly:

**Well that's another area because there are no facilities especially at that school.**

Only Mr. Nardu, a parent at School C seemed to fully appreciate the benefits to the child of parents attending school events:

**I think its good because it sort of gives us another perspective apart from reading and writing. I never used to attend the school prize day and actually this boy gets so worked up and disappointed. But the day I went to the prize giving day, that made me change my mind completely about actually my presence in the school is very important for them it gives them a lot of encouragement. It shows that you actually care for them. I don't know if its actually caring or maybe they actually feel "now people actually know who my dad is" but it helps a lot. I saw a big change. He was more confident and, in fact, I think his performance also rose. From that time I decided, in any meeting, unless I've got a very good reason I would attend.**

Teachers at School A, which held many sports, social, and cultural events noted, that only a small group of parents helped with the actual event but that the events were well attended if they were held outside of working hours.

**During the weekend when we have sports festivals the parents attend, during the week, very little [parental attendance occurs] (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

Parents at School A who the school considered to be adequately skilled were given the opportunity to coach sports. While he had observed parents coach successfully, Mr. Reed, a teacher at School A, had some reservations about parents assuming this role:

**The biggest problem is that knowing the information and being able to convey it is a different ball game. I've seen that often when I've had top sports men come in and try and run a coaching session and it would be an absolute disaster.**

Mr. Reed went on to point out that most parents do not have time to coach sports at the school.

### Discussion

Teachers reported that sport, social and cultural events were well attended. The parents interviewed attended these events because they recognised that their attendance encouraged their children. The animated responses of parents and teachers when discussing these events also suggested that they enjoyed them.

The quantitative findings revealed very low levels of parental attendance, similar to those found in a South African study (Heystek 1999:104), at sports, cultural and social events. However, the questionnaire items that dealt with sports, cultural and social events were reassigned by factor analysis from PIPI to SIPI (see 5.8.3). This suggested that the low levels of attendance at these events may have been because parents were unable to attend largely because the schools were holding these events so infrequently (see 5.8.3). The interviews

indicated that these events were, in fact, held only very rarely, and sometimes not even annually at most of the schools. Since School A only made up a tiny proportion of the quantitative sample (see Table 4.2), the effect of these more frequent events at this school is likely to be hidden. It is particularly sad that these events were generally held so infrequently, since the teachers reported that they were well attended.

Although parents attended these events, aside from Mr. Nardu, the parents interviewed did not fully realise how important their involvement at these events was. They were not aware that research has shown parental attendance at these types of events can improve children's academic results (see 2.4.4). Parents did not include attendance at these events in the description of their role as a parent and did not complain that they were given almost no opportunity to attend.

Parents also helped organise and manage these events when invited to do so by the schools. School A was the only school that complained that only a small group of parents were involved this way. This may have been due to these events being held so much more frequently at this school thus, placing a greater demand on parents' time.

The infrequency of these events at most of the schools suggests that the teachers and schools, with the exception of School A, did not realise the importance of holding social, cultural and sports events for the development of the child. They also did not seem to appreciate the excellent opportunity such events give teachers and parents to get to know each other under relaxed conditions. Further, none of the teachers interviewed mentioned parent attendance or involvement in the organisation and management of school cultural, social or sports events when describing the role of parents. This suggests that teachers did not fully appreciate the importance of parental involvement in these areas. Only School A made use of parent coaches.

#### 6.2.4.4 *Parents contributed to educational trips if invited to*

All the schools held annual educational trips where they would take a grade of learners to visit museums and other educational venues either inside or out of Swaziland for several days. At all schools parents were willing to pay money for their children to go on these excursions. At some of the schools parents also helped organise, and went on, these trips. Ms. Crawford, a teacher at School A, when asked if parents attended these trips replied, sighing:

**It's the same people, with everything.**

At School D the parent body chose parents to act on an organising committee for school trips. The teachers at School E reported that parents helped organise trips and went on them, if invited to do so by the teachers.

**If we invite them to help us they do come but if then we don't, then they just leave everything to us. All they do is send the money with the child to the school. We decide what place, when and how. Everything is planned by the school. But if we invite them they are willing to come and help. I remember one time when we went to Botswana we had parents who had relatives in Botswana. They helped us to plan our accommodation and places to visit and so forth because we as teachers did not know the place. But because of these parents we managed to plan the trip well (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

Mr. Nyoni, School E, remarked:

**My past experience has taught me that parents at School E are very much cooperative as long as you take the initiative to involve them.**

At Schools B and C parents were not invited to either help organise or attend educational trips.

#### Discussion

Parents of children at all the schools were willing to pay for school trips. However, unless invited to do more, this is where their contribution ceased.

Often, parents were not invited to be involved in field trips. When they were invited to help plan, organise, and attend these trips they did so.

#### 6.2.4.5 *Volunteering at the school was unknown*

Parents at these schools were not invited to volunteer in the classroom, tuck-shop, playground, library or any other school venue during school hours.

School C did make an attempt to involve parents in career guidance at the school.

**At one point we tried to develop a parental skills bank when we questioned parents about what work they did and would they come in and talk to the students about their life's work and absolutely no one responded (Ms. Wade, head-teacher, School C).**

The other schools had not thought of involving parents as guest speakers but were enthusiastic about involving educated parents this way. Schools A and D did involve other members of the community this way.

Most of the teachers had never heard of parents volunteering to help in the classroom but, to the researcher's surprise, many were very enthusiastic about this possibility and, immediately, realised some of the ways they and the children would benefit. When asked how he would feel about parents helping in the classroom, Mr. Fortune, a teacher at School B, replied:

**Wow [*hits desk with fist*], that would be nice. I've never even thought of that. You know I think a little bit in our society, its always seen as the teachers duty and finished, but, wow, that's an interesting concept. I think that would be nice. I think that would reinforce relationships.**

Mr. Nkunita, a teacher at School C, responded:

**That would be very good. For one it would be a welcome change in the normal activity of the class and some [parents] actually do certain jobs that perhaps they would furnish us with information that we need in class. They could contribute to a lesson. It's a very welcome change.**

Ms. Malaza, a teacher at School D, replied:

**Its really good, its good for the lower grades because the way we have our reading at School D, actually, it needs parents to help with the reading because they have got 24 books which means that it is impossible for the teacher to teach when there are so many numbers. So usually you have to group them. I've taught the lower grades so I know the constraints. You've got to group them and you find, per day, that maybe 10 are reading and you find you have got to take one page per child and there are other subjects waiting. So we need much parents participation in reading.**

Some of the teachers, however, were concerned that parent volunteers may be disruptive under certain conditions and that not all parents were skilled enough to help in the classroom.

**I'm always open to it [parents helping in the classroom], the only thing is I think it must be consistent. We have had parents come forward and there are parents who are willing to assist but for it to be really effective and for it not to be disruptive, you introduce the person and they are there for at least a term (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

School A dealt with these teacher concerns by hiring teacher assistants from the parent community whom they felt were adequately skilled.

**...and they [teaching assistants] get a bit of money. But its more that, but its not just "you can help so come and help", its to ensure that we are actually on the right track and that the person is qualified to do so. We've never really pursued it much further beyond that (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

The teachers felt that, while work commitments would prevent most parents from volunteering in the classroom, a few parents or other relatives would be willing to do so.

**You may find some of them are busy, they don't have time to help the kids [by volunteering at school]. Each parent if she is available [would volunteer], I don't think it would be a problem for them. If it were my child I'd be very eager to come along. You may find some of them may have a relative to come and help. That I would also appreciate. It is not necessary that it be a parent. Somebody responsible could help (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

The parents felt that work commitments would make volunteering at the school difficult for them but almost all were willing to talk at the school about their career and come in occasionally. Mr. Kunene, a parent whose child attended School C, felt work commitments would make volunteering at the school impossible for him and his wife. Ms. Nxumalo, a parent whose child attended School C, was considering offering to teach traditional dancing at School C.

**I want to introduce traditional dance, I just haven't made up my mind how to do it.**

### Discussion

As is the case in South Africa (see 5.8.2), these Swazi parents were given no opportunity to volunteer at the school. No structures or planning existed to accommodate this except at School A where teachers held a very limited concept of the parent as volunteers and could only envisage parents as paid full-time classroom assistants. The quantitative data showed that only 11.5 % (see Item 41, Table 5.34) of the parents felt that the school asked them to volunteer at the school for a few hours, "very well". These positive replies were probably due to confusion about what was meant by volunteering since the interviews showed clearly that none of the schools asked the parents to volunteer at all. This finding is supported by the responses of the vast majority of parents, 80%, who reported that the school did not ask them to volunteer at the school at all or "could do this much better" (Item 41, Table 5.34).

Teachers were not aware of the other roles parents can play at schools. The teachers at School A were neither positive nor enthusiastic about parent volunteers, as was also found by Tichenor (1998:252). However, the teachers at the other schools were very enthusiastic about parent volunteers and welcomed help from any family member. They were also excited about educated parents giving presentations and tutorials at the school. The teachers felt, however, as was noted in a study by Epstein (1987b:5), that work commitments may prevent

most parents from volunteering. These teachers, unlike those in other studies (Newport 1992:49-50), did not express any concern about being, interfered with, observed or judged by parents. These teachers may be particularly confident or perhaps had not had time to think of this due to the novelty of the idea. Although, teachers generally felt that any parent could contribute, they were particularly keen on educated parents volunteering and felt these parents should work under their direction.

Parents were also concerned about work commitments but most felt they could at spend at least a few hours or days at the school a year and one parent wanted to volunteer to teach at the school. Since these highly involved parents (see 6.2.8.1) were concerned about the amount of time this type of involvement would require during work hours, it is likely that only a very small number of parents would volunteer at the school. Epstein (1987a:125) found that only about 4% of parents she studied were highly active at the school. However even one parent volunteer per class would make a big difference to the teachers at Schools C, D and E who teach very large classes.

#### *6.2.4.6 Summary*

Opportunities for parental involvement at Schools B, C, D and E were extremely limited and infrequent. Parents could, and did, attend sports, social, cultural and fundraising events. However, these events were held annually or not at all which greatly limited parental involvement in these areas. Parents were rarely asked to help plan or attend educational trips and were never asked to volunteer in the classrooms.

Parent-teacher meetings were also only held annually. Parents and teachers interviewed recognised the importance of parent-teacher meetings and felt these should be more frequent. Although the parents interviewed attended these meetings, most parents did not. These parents may have sent other relatives in

their stead. Further, parents did not always take the opportunities they were given to help organise and manage events.

Most parents and teachers did not seem to fully appreciate the importance and advantages of parental involvement at the school. The importance of a well-developed non-academic component to children's education was also not realised by teachers at these schools.

Contrary to foreign research findings (see 2.4.4), however, teachers welcomed the novel idea of parents as volunteers in the classroom and other school venues. While work constraints may make it difficult for most parents to volunteer, a small proportion would probably do so.

#### 6.2.5 Learning activities in the home

##### 6.2.5.1 *Parents conducted home discussions*

Parents and teachers were aware of the importance of home discussion although parents were given no advice by the teachers or schools in this respect.

**I think the perfect parent will take the time to talk to the child and ask them the questions [about their school experience] that will give them the information they need (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

Ms. Mazibuko, a teacher at School C, noted:

**You can see that they [the children] talk about what they learn about with their parents and their parents provide information on those topics.**

##### 6.2.5.2 *Involvement in homework was prioritised*

Parents were strongly aware of their role in both supervising and helping with homework. Every parent mentioned this role early in their descriptions of their role. All the parents reported that either one or both parents spent as much time

as was necessary helping their children with homework. One parent defined the role of a parent in terms of whether they helped with and supervised homework.

**The work at home must be done by the child and helped by the parent. That is how I do understand it. So as a parent I have to make sure the homework has been done and if there is any problem I have to contribute. It is really sometimes a shame to hear that the child has not done his homework and if my child goes to school without doing his homework then I'm not supposed to be called his parent. You cannot know the weaknesses of your child if you don't follow and you don't help him in the homework exercises (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

**I try by all means that we finish the homework, whether [or not] it is long. At times it lasts for an hour or so if it's a long one (Ms. Dlamini, parent, school D).**

Some of the parents required their children to do their homework at a specific time while others allowed their children to do their homework whenever it suited the child.

**Normally I require him to do his homework as soon as he comes back from school. Normally he does it by about 18h00 (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

**She wants to go and play. At night when everything is finished she starts doing the work and then I have to stay up to help her (Ms. Nxumalo, parent, School C).**

Teachers also emphasised a role for parents in homework. Most teachers felt parents should help with and supervise homework.

**I think the parent has to see to it that everything the child is assigned both at home and at school, he does it. He must see to it that the child does his or her work efficiently and give help where possible (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

These teachers were confident in the parent's ability to help the child at home.

**So then when they [the learners] are given work to do at home I expect the parent to put a hand to help them because the parents are educated so they can be able to help them (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

Mr. Fakudze gave his learners homework despite the policy of School E that all schoolwork should be completed at the school.

A few teachers felt that parents should only supervise homework and not actually help their children with it because they did not always know how to help their children.

**I had an example of a parent [whose child is] in Grade 6 who is an engineer with a company and he had gone and marked some maths and marked it correct when it was actually incorrect. So I actually prefer the parents not to get involved with the actual teaching of it unless you are sure they understand the process (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

**It better if parents just monitor the homework. The problem is, these parents tend just to give the children answers instead of guiding them through the question. They just give the answers and you find the answers are even higher than the child's level (Ms. Mazibuko, teacher, School C).**

Mr. Nkunita, a teacher at School C noted:

**I think it is very important to teach the parents how to handle the kids when it comes to homework. I had a very interesting parent last year who said, "The way I help my child to do homework is to ask the child what we know about the subject and let him teach me". It was always a challenge for the child to teach the father and he found in most cases the child would do the right thing and then at the end of it all he would sign. So the various ways for how to monitor the homework would be very important for the parents.**

However, despite this observation and even though some teachers felt that parents did not always have the skills required to help their children, none of the teachers or schools actually taught parents general skills for helping with homework or even provided guidelines for specific homework assignments.

Ms. Dlamini expressed the frustration that parents can feel as a result of not knowing how to help their children. She noted that parents often end up doing their children's homework for them when they do not know how to help them.

**No, I don't enjoy doing the homework with my child because some of the teachers will just send the child with a pack of homework, not even explaining to them how to go about that homework. It's very frustrating. I think the instructions for homework should be clear, at least the child should know what is happening. So at least when you ask him or her "How did the teacher say we should go about doing this?" , she should be able to tell you a little bit. Otherwise you end up doing the homework for that child and at the end of the day she doesn't end up knowing anything.**

Aside from not always knowing how to approach the homework task itself, parents did not always approach home learning with their children in a positive manner.

**I was like that too [before the workshop] I easily get angry and upset especially when I ask what is 9X3 and the child struggles (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

Most teachers, however, were enthusiastic about parents approaching them to find out how to help, preferably by using the same methods as those used by the teacher in class.

**If ever they want to help the kids [with homework] they can contact the teacher and find how things can be solved so then they can apply the same method to the kids so that the child is able to follow in the same way. I would be very much happy if they [parents] came (Ms. Bhembe, teacher, School D).**

In terms of homework supervision most of the schools gave only general, superficial advise.

**We always, when we have an open-day, advise the parents that they need to give the child some time to play, some time to watch TV, some time to study. So it's a matter of making a time-table (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

Only School D had a policy that required all parents to sign the learners' homework or homework diaries, although Ms. Dube, a teacher at this school, was not sure whether all the teachers at this school followed this policy.

**Yes, they sign. I cannot say for every class, but with mine they sign (Ms. Dube, School D).**

At the other schools some teachers required parents to sign their children's homework or homework diaries, while others did not even though many of these teachers recognised the benefits of this practice.

**We haven't instructed them to do it [sign homework], but that is something good. I had to sign everyday when my child attended the other school (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

Teachers, often from the same school, differed widely in their opinions of whether parents were, in-fact, helping with and supervising homework. Some teachers felt that very few parents were actually supervising or helping their children with their homework or projects.

**Most of the parents in my class, most of the children's projects, if I don't do it here at school its not done properly. With wildlife now, only one parent sent me those pictures, which I appreciated. You'll get a few of them [children] very eager, very eager to want to bring what they brought, what they did at home. [But] when I found out there was more [children] not having their projects I decided we would do it together as a class (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

Other teachers felt that parents were generally fulfilling their homework supervisory role properly, but that the parents were not really helping their children with their homework much. All of the teachers who were satisfied with the parents' performance of their supervisory role were those that insisted that parents sign the homework or homework diary.

**In my class I actually insist on the parents signing the pupils' book after every piece of homework and looking at things I'd say 75% of them actually sign. One thing I've come to note is a lot of parents actually like their children to have homework but I don't think they are very comfortable to actually sit down with their kids and do the work (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C.)**

Other teachers felt that most parents both supervised their children's homework and helped with it.

**I would say 90% of the parents really try to help, mostly they stick to the confines of the approach already taken by the teacher (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

Teachers noted that a small proportion of the parents neither supervised nor helped with their children's homework.

**Most are very cooperative, but I must say that is not everybody. Some are not cooperative. You find that the child is supposed to have done written work at home. In the morning when you check, there is nothing. No work (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

#### 6.2.5.3 *Very limited home involvement in other ways*

Several of the schools asked parents to help their children in the lower grades learn to read.

**Especially in the lower grades we have a reading programme where the parents have to assist the child in reading the readers. The parents take a most active part there in helping the teacher so that the child masters reading and word recognition (Ms. Makhuba, Deputy, School D).**

Ms Dube, a teacher at School D, required all parents to read and correct the first drafts of their child's essays.

**When I give a composition. I give a topic and I outline what the child must write about and then I say, "You must write your composition. After you have written then you give it to your parent to go through. Then your parent will be underlining your mistakes, your spelling and then from there you re-write. I want the page where your parent has underlined and also signed and put the date". I want to involve them [parents] and they appreciate it. Then they discover, "You are able to write this composition my daughter on your own, here at home". Yes!**

Only one teacher recognised the importance of educational games but she had not approached the parents about this. None of the parents or teachers had experienced, or were aware of, the specially made-up home packages which have been created in many foreign countries for learners and their parents to work on together or any other forms that learning in the home can take (see 2.4.5).

#### 6.2.5.4 *Discussion*

Teachers and schools did not seem to be fully aware of how beneficial parent involvement in the home can be to the child academically and in other ways (see 2.4.5). Although teachers and parents recognised that home discussion was important, teachers did not encourage parents to talk to their children or attempt to teach parents how to do this. This is unlike the situation in the USA where home discussion was one of the most popular techniques encouraged by teachers (Epstein 1986:282).

The interviews indicated, however, that, as is the case in the USA (Epstein 1986:282), Swazi parents did talk to their children about schoolwork, future goals and events at the school. This finding was substantiated by the quantitative data in which parents reported that the vast majority of their children liked to talk to them about school (Item 3, Table 5.26) and that they talked to their children about school work (Item16, Table 5.29). This is very important since home discussion has been found to have a particularly strong effect on academic outcomes (Ho & Willms 1996a:137-138).

Teachers and parents interviewed felt that parent involvement in homework was essential. Both teachers and parents always specified the parents' involvement in homework when describing the role of the parent. Research has consistently shown that parents consider homework to be important (Epstein 2001:185). The quantitative findings indicated that over 85% of the parents agreed that their

child should get more homework (see Item 4, Table 5.28). The parents interviewed felt that they should both help with and supervise homework. Some of the parents interviewed set aside specific times for homework and some did not. The quantitative data indicated that most parents had rules about homework (Item 36, Table 5.29). However, the rather unspecific language of this item does not make it clear whether these rules concerned just doing the homework or when and how it should be done. Nevertheless this response suggests that most parents did supervise homework in some way.

While all the interviewed parents did make time to help with and supervise homework, teachers' opinions on how involved most parents were in this way differed widely. Some teachers felt that very few parents either helped or supervised homework. Other teachers felt that while most parents supervised homework they did not actually help their children with it. Still other teachers felt that most parents both supervised and helped with homework. Only one teacher, unlike the third of teachers in a study by Izzo's *et al* (1999), felt he wasn't in the position to know what happened at the children's homes.

Epstein and van Voorhis (2001:185) found that of all types of involvement, parents from the USA said they most wanted to help their children with homework so that their children would do better. The quantitative data support the view of those teachers who believed that most parents helped and supervised homework since over two-thirds of the parents claimed to have helped their children with homework and checked that it was done many times that year (Items 20 and 21, Table 5.29). These figures are considerably higher than those found in South African and American studies (see 5.7.1) but are in accordance with Swazi parents' desire for more homework and the very strong feelings about homework of the parents interviewed.

The parents' responses do not seem to be particularly biased towards socially acceptable responses (see 5.7.1). Therefore, such a bias is not likely to explain the difference in the perceptions of parents and some teachers about whether parents were helping with and supervising homework. Moreover, the parents' responses to the items that dealt directly with homework (Items 4, 20, 21, and 36) were remarkably consistent with two-thirds of the parents choosing the most positive response for all items (see 5.6.3 & 5.7.1). Thus, most parents probably supervised and helped with homework.

Teachers at the same schools differed widely in their perception of parent involvement in homework. It is possible that the actions and attitudes of the teachers themselves may have resulted in some teachers experiencing very little support from parents with regard to homework, while others experienced a great deal of support. Thus, while the majority of parents probably supervised and helped with homework, some teachers may have been unaware of this. Teachers' actions clearly influenced the level of home supervision by parents that teachers experienced. Teachers that encouraged parents to supervise homework by insisting that parents sign homework or homework diaries were also those that reported that most parents supervised their children's homework. Foreign studies have shown that teacher practices are the strongest determinant of how, and in what ways, parents are involved (see 2.7.4).

Another reason why a third of the parents who, by their own admission, did not help with or supervise homework frequently (Items 20 & 21, Table 5.29), may have been due to the frustration some parents expressed about not knowing how to help their children. This is consistent with the findings of Epstein and Dauber (1991:290) that note that most parents need help on how to become involved in their children's education at each grade level. Parents also sometimes became angry and frustrated when trying to help their children to learn at home,

which has been found to be detrimental to a child's learning (Georgiou 1999:425) and may put parents off being involved.

Some teachers felt that it would be better if parents only supervised homework. Consequently, it is not surprising that these teachers made no effort to help parents learn how to help with homework. Some of these teachers were concerned that parents may actually be doing more harm than good when they helped their children. Certainly, parental help with homework has been found to harm the child when done inappropriately (Georgiou 1999:412). However, many of the teachers who did not want parents to help with homework complained that this was because parents often did their children's homework for them. Ironically the literature (Brandt 1989:27) and the comment of Ms. Dlamini indicate, that parents do this precisely because they do not know what the teacher expects.

Most teachers, however, felt that parents could and should help, and they were willing to help parents achieve this but only if the parents approached them. These teachers, like their South African counterparts (see 3.4.3), made no attempt to teach parents the skills they need to help even though they knew parents lacked them. Moreover, although the teachers had noticed the benefits of parents signing homework many of them did not practice this. This lack of action by teachers probably reflects, in part, a general lack of school policy (the exception being School D, which did not enforce its policy) on the parents' role in homework. It also suggests that teachers were ignorant about just how beneficial parent involvement in homework and homework supervision can be if done properly (see 2.4.5).

Teachers' comments reflected the belief that homework should provide learners with an opportunity to practice skills taught in class, help them prepare for the next lesson, and encourage their personal development. These teachers did not

seem to be aware that homework could be used as a tool for parental involvement. Homework can be designed to guide and promote positive communications between the parent and child and between the parent and teacher (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:182).

All of the schools, except School E, encouraged parents to be involved in reading programmes for their young children. Moles (1982:46) notes that this is one the most popular approaches teachers use to involve parents but that its use tends to decline from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. These teachers also remarked that this technique was used in the children's early years at the school rather than throughout their education.

The teachers interviewed were not aware of home packages or paired reading and did not encourage parents to play educational games with their children, discuss TV programmes with them, help them to prepare for tests, read to them or read their essays (with the exception of Ms. Dube). Nor were teachers aware of the myriad other ways that parents could be involved in home learning activities. This finding is consistent with the quantitative results. Between a half and three-quarters of the parents responded that they had only listened to their child read, read a story their child wrote, practiced skills before a test, or talked to their child about TV programmes (see Items 18, 19, 23, 24 & 25, Table 5.30) at most a few times that year. Most parents also only played educational games with their child infrequently or not at all (see Item 26, Table 5.31). It is likely that parents were not aware of the benefits of these activities for their children (see 5.7.2 and 5.7.3) because teachers made no attempt to inform them of these benefits, probably as they were unaware of them themselves.

## 6.2.6 Parents did not make decisions

Parents were interviewed in order to determine what their role was in making decisions about issues such as school uniform, discipline, staff appointment and dismissal, school management, teaching methods and curriculum. The interviews also aimed to determine what role teachers and parents wished parents to play in decision-making. Most of the schools had two potential decision-making councils, the School Board and the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

### 6.2.6.1 *The School Boards: Often powerful but usually not representative*

Schools A, B, C and D had School Boards. The roles and composition of these bodies differed from school to school. Schools A, B and C all had School Boards that consisted of a small group of individuals that had not been elected by the parents and were, thus, not representative of the parent body as a whole. In School A, this was a group of parents and local business people who had played a large role in funding the school. In School B and C these groups were composed of religious leaders as well as a few parents selected by these religious leaders. Ms. Nxumalo, a parent interviewed, was on the School Board of School C.

In Schools A and B the School Board was very powerful and decided matters such as school uniform, discipline, staff appointment and dismissal, teaching methods and the curriculum. In School C the School Board chose the schools uniform, decided how school funds should be spent, and played a role in appointing staff. In School D the school committee consisted of only parents, elected by the parent body for a term of three years, and the head-teacher. This committee was concerned with the schools long-term goals.

**We discussed things like maybe trying to make the school a high school and the construction of a library which was successful so they are running that library now (Ms. Dlamini, parent, committee member, School D).**

#### 6.2.6.2 *PTA's were fundraising bodies*

All of the schools except School C had PTAs. These PTA's were composed of a few teachers that served on them on a rotational basis but, unlike most of the school boards, the majority of the members were parents who had been elected by the parent body. Thus, at Schools A, B, and E it was only the PTA's that were in any way representative of the parent body and it was only through these bodies that the parent body was afforded any opportunity to make decisions.

A few of the teachers and parents recognised the importance of PTA's in giving parents a role in decision-making.

**We need the parents as well [to come to the PTA meetings] as there are issues there where they have to take a decision. A second person cannot take a decision on your [the parents] behalf (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

**There is that exchange of knowledge and strategies because as we know life is changing so if there are radical changes we need to get cross fertilisation of ideas so that we can move the school forward (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C)**

However, the interviews revealed that the mandate of these bodies at the school was very limited and that they in fact afforded parents very little opportunity to make decisions. The PTA committees of the four schools focussed on fundraising. These committees met once or several times a year to organise fundraising activities.

**Actually for now we have been meeting very often because of problems at the school. We wanted to rehabilitate the swimming pool so we wanted to make a fundraising. When we have some projects to execute then we meet often (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

PTA committees also had other duties at some of the school's such as ensuring that school fees were collected and that teachers had accommodation. A number of parents and teachers mentioned other roles that they felt the PTA should play; notably these did not relate to decision-making.

**I think that's [PTA meetings] where the parents and teachers can work together [to help the child] and get to know more about the parents (Ms. Nxumalo, parent, School C).**

**We need the PTA to bring them closer. So if there are any problems you can easily communicate, we have overlooked that (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

**We should meet not only to discuss where the money was spent but also each teacher can say something to the parents towards the performance of their children (Mr. Dladla, teacher, School D).**

Mr. Razibuhoro was the chairman of the PTA of School D and Mr. Tsabedze had served on this committee previously.

At general PTA meetings, which were held between one to three times per annum, parents were informed about the activities and agenda of the school, how the school's funds had been spent, and they elected the PTA committee. Teachers reported that attendance at these general PTA meetings at Schools B, D and E was good. The parents interviewed whose children attended School D reported that either they or their spouse always attended these meetings. Teachers reported that those parents on the actual PTA committee of School A were dedicated. PTA meetings for the entire parent body were held more frequently at School A than at the other schools, however, attendance was poor. Mr. Reed, a teacher at School A, gave this example:

**Like at the PTA meeting earlier this year had to be postponed and redone because there weren't enough people for quorum.**

School C had no PTA and since only two parents who had not been elected were on the governing body, parents at this school had no formal channels for making any decisions. Although the teachers and parents both felt a PTA was necessary, most teachers at the group interview, with the exception of Mr. Nkunita, were

not deeply troubled by the lack of this body. In reply to a question on whether the school now had a PTA, Ms. Wade (head-teacher) said, shaking her head,

**No, we've tried but they've never really come together.**

The parents of School C expressed more urgency with regard to the formation of a PTA, however none of them mentioned this matter when asked how they felt about the school generally but only when asked directly about the PTA.

**I think it's good to have a PTA because sometimes disciplinary and some of the school's issues need to be solved by parents and teachers (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

#### *6.2.6.3 Parents were excluded from decisions about school uniform*

The school uniform at Schools D and E had been decided many years previously and it was unknown whether parents had had any input at that time. There were several alternative items with the same function that could be worn at these schools and the teachers noted proudly that parents could make a choice of which of these items their children wore to school. Parents also approved the quality of the school clothes.

**They [parents] look at the quality and then the guarantee of the garment and if somebody has a recommendation then they raise, discuss and approve it in the [PTA] meeting (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

Ensuring the quality of the school uniform was also the parent's main role in the other three schools with respect to uniform. The staff had chosen the school uniform at School A and the School Board had chosen the school uniform at Schools B and C. At School C this decision had been made by the School Board exclusively even though some of its members were aware that parents wished to contribute to this decision.

**We, our school took a long time to decide on the school uniform and I know some parents and they said, "You [the School Board] must let us know, we want to choose the uniform for our children." The School Board chose it, the School Board chose it (Ms. Nxumalo, parent and School Board member, School C).**

In response to whether parents had a say in the school uniform, Mr. Fortune, a teacher at School B, replied:

**No, no, no. The school committee has always made school decisions.**

Nevertheless, all the teachers interviewed felt that the school should consult the parents if changes in the school uniform were to be made. School E had recently considered changing the pattern of the uniform:

**...and at the same time there were ideas that were taken to the parents and it was approved, they felt it was a good idea, they accepted that (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

None of the parents felt that they should exclusively decide on matters dealing with the school uniform. However, some parents embraced the idea of helping make these decisions.

**Yes, yes, I think parents should have an input in that (Ms. Dlamini, parent School D).**

To the researcher's surprise, most of the parents felt that the school or Ministry of Education should exclusively make this decision.

**I don't really think it's the parents' duty to be involved in the curriculum, the uniform and these things (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

**I think school uniform and school discipline should be decided by the school because mostly they are the ones that are instilling that code, dress code, ethic code, everything for the school (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

#### *6.2.6.4 Schools should decide about discipline*

Discipline in Schools A and B was carried out in accordance with school policy, which was decided by the School Board. At Schools C, D and E school discipline was based on the policy of the Ministry of Education. All the schools did, however, call the children's parents to the school to notify them, and to recruit their assistance, whenever serious disciplinary problems arose.

**We take the child to the office and the parents have to be called. Maybe the parents are not aware of what is going on...The Ministry of education lays**

**down the guidelines and we are aware of the community that we are in as the parents may sue us (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

A few teachers and parents felt that parents should have a role in deciding how their children are disciplined.

**It would be fine if parents helped decide on the discipline because these are their children. They have to have a word on that (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

**Sometimes disciplinary and some school issues need to be solved by both parents and teachers (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

Most of the teachers, however, felt the school staff knew better than parents how best to discipline the children.

**The [school] policy on discipline, I feel its still Ok. But you know a lot of parents they will come in and say, "You should beat them." you know, but we try to explain to them the negative effects of corporal punishment (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

**We consider the [parent's] request [about forms of discipline and other suggestions] and consider the validity and how reasonable it is. If it fits in with what we think should be happening. So at times we agree and other times we might say, "No we can't go with that because", and then the reasoning would be conveyed to the parent. (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

Most of the parents agreed that the teachers should decide how to discipline their children at the school, but explained that this was because the teacher was the one who had to handle the problems.

**No I think it [discipline] should be entirely on the school because most of the time the children are with the teachers. So if I decide that you mustn't spank my child how are they going to handle that situation? So I think its on their part (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

*6.2.6.5 Teachers and parents placed confidence in the administration to appoint or dismiss teachers*

At Schools C, D and E in accordance with education policy, the Ministry of Education chose the candidates to be appointed to teaching and administrative posts at the school. Sometimes several candidates were chosen and the head-teacher selected the successful one. No staff member had ever been dismissed from these three schools. At School C the School Board also approved appointments and hired a few teachers outside of the Ministry of Education. At School's A and B staff were appointed or dismissed by the School Board in consultation with the head-teacher.

Both teachers and parents had great confidence in the head-teacher and School Board or Ministry of Education's ability to choose appropriate candidates and did not feel that parental input was necessary.

**I think when it comes to that, I have got a lot of confidence especially in the School C principal and management staff there and I know actually whoever they are going to employ as a teacher is definitely qualified and that is my main concern (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

**I don't think that they would employ out of ignorance. Normally a CV must be submitted and they would be able to screen the applications because really it would reflect on them if they chose someone unsuitable (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

The only exception was Ms. Dlamini, a parent whose child attended School D, who when asked if parents should play a role in the appointment of teachers replied:

**I'm not sure about that because in most of the schools in Swaziland, the teachers are employed by the Government so I don't think it could happen. But if it could, I would love parents to play a role.**

#### *6.2.6.6 The school timetable was the responsibility of the school staff*

The school staff made all decisions about the academic and extra-mural timetable. The teachers felt that this was the role of the staff or head-teacher. The parents agreed. In response to being asked if parents were invited to make this sort of decision, Mr. Reed, a teacher at School A replied:

**No, I think that's more what our role is.**

School A, had however sent home a survey asking parents whether they wanted a study-period for their children included in the school timetable.

#### *6.2.6.7 Teachers felt parents could contribute to the curriculum and teaching methods*

Teaching methods were decided upon by individual teachers who, however, followed the Ministry of Education's guidelines in the case of Schools C, D and E or School Board policy in the case of Schools A and B.

**There are some teaching objectives and some teaching aids, so that the format is in the teachers guide but then the teacher can sort of individualise (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

Similarly, the Ministry of Education determined the curriculum for Schools C, D and E while the School Board decided the curriculum at Schools A and B.

**The parents have never played any significant role especially in the curriculum or direct teaching yet (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

Most parents felt that they should be informed about which curriculum was being used by the school but should not be involved in its choice. These parents believed that most parents were not educated enough in this field to help make these decisions.

**There are disadvantages associated with that kind of arrangement [parents deciding on the curriculum]. If maybe the level of education of the parent is not high enough to make an informed decision. Because designing a curriculum must be quite taxing. You take into account lots of developments and also the job market so there are so many factors which I believe come into play and which involve, among other things, a lot of research. So I don't**

**think we have the capacity and skills to make such decisions but it would be a good idea to be briefed on why we are moving towards that curriculum (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

Mr. Nardu (a parent, School C), felt parents had an important role in helping their children choose subjects.

**I've got this idea if all these children want to pursue a particular line and their selection will depend on what they are interested in and I could be more aware of it than the school and as such could play a very big role making that sort of decision.**

Of the parents, only Ms. Dlamini unreservedly felt that parents should be involved in the choice of curriculum.

Surprisingly, many of the teachers were more positive about a role for parents in the choice of curriculum and teaching methods than the parents themselves. These teachers felt that parents should work together with teachers and the Ministry either because they had the right to do so and/or would contribute positively.

**I think we'd be happy to hear opinions [of parents] on anything, because even these parents when the child is now finished school without any job, then it hits back onto the parent. So they should be involved as this education is for their children. This side is for the teacher with the Ministry of Education [*pointing to the right*], this side [*pointing to the left*] is the parent so if they can work hand in hand with the curriculum [*clasping her hands together*] (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**Most parents forming the School E community are learned parents but the thing is this is done by government so parents are some how neglected. They have not been given the chance to, maybe put some additions or bring about changes [in the curriculum]. Otherwise they should be doing something. They would have some valuable things if only ever the chance could be there (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

A much smaller group of teachers agreed with the parents that parents were not adequately educated to participate in choices about curriculum or teaching methods.

**We could listen to them but its something that is way over their heads, you need experts for that to really set-up the curriculum (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

**I think, curriculum the school needs to decide on that because not every parent is in the education field. They would no know what to submit to the school committee (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

Parents had no advocacy role at any of these schools.

#### *6.2.6.8 Discussion*

Parental involvement in decision-making is essential for any true partnership between parents and the school and is beneficial to parents, teachers and children in several ways (see 2.4.6). Research indicates that this type of parent involvement is particularly difficult to implement and that at most schools, parents play a very limited, usually advisory, role in decision-making (see 2.4.6). Both the qualitative and quantitative data in this study indicate that parents have virtually no decision-making powers whatsoever at Swazi schools.

The interviews revealed that at the private schools, Schools A and B, virtually all decisions were made by the School Board, while at the government schools most decisions were made by the Ministry of Education. Those decisions not made by the School Board or Ministry of Education were made by the staff at schools A and B or by the staff and School Boards at the other three schools. Even though education policy assigns some role to parents when changes in the curriculum are made (see 3.3.2.2), in practice parents had no say in the curriculum. Parents were only consulted when disciplinary issues arose. However, since teachers felt they knew best how to discipline the learners, it seems likely that this was an

attempt to enlist parents' support rather, than to allow them to contribute to decisions about discipline.

This qualitative finding, that parents at these schools did not even have an advisory role in virtually all decisions, was supported by the quantitative data. The items that concern decision-making, Items 48 to 52 (see Table 5.34), received the most negative responses of any items in the questionnaire with between 73% and 89% of the parents reporting that the school did not invite them to contribute to decision-making or "could do much better" in this respect.

Thus, in government subsidised Swazi schools parents were given no role in even those few decisions, such as school uniform, that were not made by the Ministry of Education. This was despite the requests of parents at School C to help choose a uniform. Further, in the private schools where the Ministry of Education did not prevent parents from making decisions, parents were nevertheless not even allowed to play an advisory role in decision-making.

Only at School D did parents have any say in decisions that may have helped them to have a sense of ownership of the school, given them the opportunity to make use of their talents and ideas, and helped ensure that there was a better fit between the school and the needs of the children (see 2.4.6). The School Board of School D was elected by parents and made decisions about the long-term goals and objectives of the school. Thus, while the parents on the board were not given a say in curriculum development, teaching methods and so forth, they did at least play a role in determining the future direction and needs of the school.

While some teachers felt that parents were not educated enough, or had nothing to contribute in terms of making decisions, most teachers welcomed a greater role for parents in decision-making. However, teachers envisaged a subordinate,

advisory role for parents in decision-making. Many teachers felt the parents had the right and the abilities to contribute positively to decisions about curriculum development, teaching methods and school uniform. The teachers did not see parents' contributions to decisions about the curriculum as a threat to their professional status. Swap (1993:39) notes, "for many educators, curriculum is seen as the centerpiece of their professional expertise". Many of the teachers in other studies have been shown to feel that parents should have no role in decisions that relate to the curriculum (Parr *et al* 1993:37). The only areas where teachers felt parents should have no role were in the appointment of staff and in the design of the school timetable.

Surprisingly, with the exception of Ms. Dlamini, the parents interviewed wanted virtually no role in decision-making. Like parents in some foreign communities (Crozier 1999:319), these parents placed great trust in the school staff and School Board or Ministry of Education to make decisions about their children's education. Parents' positive and trusting attitudes towards the school were also demonstrated by their responses to the section of the questionnaire dealing with parental attitude to the school (see 5.6). The parents felt that school discipline and choices about school uniform should also be left up to the school as it was the teachers who had to face these issues as they only arose at the school. Although the parents wished to be informed about the curriculum used at the school, most did not feel that they were adequately educated to play any role in choosing the curriculum. Since the parents interviewed were some of the more involved parents (see 6.2.8.1), it seems likely that most Swazi parents did not want to make many decisions. Research in other countries has shown that parents often do not want to make decisions (see 2.4.6). This lack of demand by parents for decision-making rights no doubt contributed to the fact that they had almost no role in decision-making in these schools.

Although PTA's serve as decision-making bodies in some schools (see 2.4.6), these bodies, while elected by parents, and thus possibly representative of them, had mainly a fundraising role in these schools and were not envisaged by most parents and teachers to be decision-making bodies.

At School C there was no PTA and teachers were not particularly concerned that parents had no representation of any sort. Parents, while more concerned about the absence of this body than teachers, seemed to accept this. This may have been because they recognised that most PTAs in this community were primarily fundraising bodies and were, consequently, not essential for their children's academic success.

Teachers at Schools B, D and E reported that the general meetings of the parent body were well attended. This perception is supported by the quantitative data, which shows that 60% of parents reported that they did attend these meetings (see Item 29, Table 5.35). This figure is lower than that found in Heystek's South African study (Heystek 1999:101). This is expected as South African legislation affords parents some power as members of these bodies (see 3.3.3.1) and thus, one would expect South African schools to put greater emphasis on these meetings resulting in higher attendance rates. Research has shown that parents prefer to be involved directly in their children's learning (Epstein 1995:708) and do not find these meetings enjoyable (Parr *et al* 1993:38). Thus, it is surprising that such a high proportion of Swazi parents attended these meetings. This relatively high attendance may be because parents were informed of how school funds had been spent at these meetings.

Teachers at School A, however, complained that most parents did not attend these meetings. This may have been because PTAs were far more frequent at School A and parents at this school had many other more enjoyable ways to be involved such as attending social, sports and cultural functions (see 6.2.4.3).

### 6.2.7 Schools did not collaborate with their communities

Aside from teaching, the five schools did not perform any services for their communities whatsoever. It was clear from the surprised looks on teachers' faces when asked if the school did things like collecting litter for the community, that most teachers had never even thought of this.

The administration of School E made no attempt to involve the local community, even to raise funds.

**Most of the time the school does everything. If maybe, that mind is not within the school administration to ask for donations [from the local community]. They can because we've seen this happening in schools around. If they ask for donations they end up getting them (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

Community involvement at the other schools was also very limited. Schools A, B, and D requested financial help from local businesses. Schools B and D were not too successful in this regard. When asked if the local community helped the school in anyway, Ms. Dube, a teacher at School D, replied:

**Not much, but when we are having a fundraising then we go and ask for things, like if we are having a draw, things to be won but there are so many schools around. I think that all the schools go to the same businessmen "Hayyi! This school, another school" but they are trying their best.**

School D also invited members of the Manzini community to talk to the learners every Thursday. It had not occurred to them to invite parents to present these talks.

**Every Thursday there is a speaker. It depends on what field but we normally have it for the whole year. They speak about different topics, a career, growing-up, a good life (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

School A was given quite a lot of support from the local community both financially and also in terms of the use of sports facilities. The community members who gave this support were mostly parents of children at School A.

**The business community is very supportive financially, also in terms of us being the place they would recommend to expatriates or people they are bringing in [to Swaziland]. Obviously our board of Governors comes from the business community. The Manzini Club has been very supportive in-terms of providing sports facilities when we haven't had. Even now they provide sport facilities so I think we've got a lot (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

Schools B and C received some financial help from the religious communities that supported them. School C relied entirely on this help and did not request assistance from the larger community. In both schools a few staff members were volunteers from these religious communities.

### Discussion

Very little community involvement occurred at these schools. It had not occurred to the teachers and schools that they could perform services for their communities. Most of the schools made no attempt to involve the wider community in their schools in any other way than to ask for donations. The administration of School E did not even do this although the teachers knew that other local schools had some success in this area. Only School D involved the wider community in any other way than financially and this was by inviting members of the community, and community organisations, to talk to the learners every Thursday. The quantitative results support the finding that the schools made little attempt to involve the wider community. Over 70% of parents reported that the school did not, or "could do much better", in terms of approaching and involving the community, local businesses and community organisations (see Items 53 and 54 in Table 5.34). Thus, in Swaziland, like in South Africa (see 3.4.3) involvement from the wider community at schools was very limited.

School A relied mainly on support from the parents, while Schools B and C relied mainly on support from religious communities. Support from these religious communities was considerable and was mainly in the form of financial resources, sports facilities and teaching staff.

#### 6.2.8 Summary: Opportunities and possibilities for parental involvement.

##### 6.2.8.1 *The determinants of parental involvement*

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.6) the involvement of parents in their children's education is determined by the efforts made by the school to involve parents, including the opportunities provided by the school for parental involvement, and whether the parents take these opportunities as well as the extent to which they involve themselves in activities that they can choose whether to be involved in or not.

The quantitative and qualitative data suggest that parents could not be involved, or were severely limited in their involvement, in many activities that were under the control of the schools, their school boards, or the Ministry of Education. These bodies gave parents very few opportunities to be involved in their children's education.

Parents were not given the opportunity to attend workshops on parenting styles or other basic parenting obligations, to volunteer in the classroom or supervise other activities during the school day, or even to have an advisory role in virtually all the decisions that involved their children's education. This makes it impossible for parents to accept ownership of the school, and perpetuates the divide between schools and parents (Lazar & Slostad 1999:207).

Parents were also limited in their involvement at school events by the scarcity of fundraising, sports, cultural, and social events at all the schools except School A. Although, most parents took the few opportunities they were given to attend, these events were held so rarely that parents could not be involved at the school in these ways more than a few times a year at most. Parents were rarely asked to help organise and manage these events but did help when given the opportunity.

The wider community was also given very little opportunity to be involved with the schools since most schools only perceived the community to be a source of funds.

These schools did, however, give parents the opportunity to receive information from the school. A strength of these schools was school to home communication. Frequent letters were sent to parents inviting them to events at the school and informing them of resources required by the schools, the school agenda, and the problems and progress of their children. Parents were not, however, told about the topics their children were learning about. Moreover, while teachers welcomed parents at the school, the schools provided very few official channels for home to school communication. Parents were only invited to communicate with teachers at the annual teacher-parent meetings and when their children had problems.

While the schools, school boards and the Ministry of Education prevented parents from being involved in some ways in their children's education by restricting parents' opportunities for involvement, they did not determine the parents' opportunities to be involved in learning activities in the home or to fulfill their basic obligations.

Teachers generally felt that most parents made some effort to be involved, while only a small proportion were highly active and a small proportion were totally

uninvolved. The parents interviewed were those who had attended the parent workshops (see 4.3.5.3). They held discussions with their children and supervised and helped with homework. They attended the few events that occurred at the school, PTA meetings, and parent-teacher meetings. These parents visited the school and spoke to teachers and most of them had served on either the PTA committee or School Board. Thus, the parents interviewed were highly involved in their children's education in most of the areas in which they had the opportunity be involved.

The teacher interviews and the parents' responses to the questionnaire indicated that the majority of parents were active in many of the same ways as the highly involved parents interviewed. Namely, they helped with and supervised homework, conducted home discussions, supervised their children's TV watching, attended PTA meetings, and visited their children's classrooms occasionally. Most of these parents probably attended events at the school and did fundraising on the rare occasions they were given the opportunity to do so. Nevertheless, over a third of the parents had not spoken to the teacher at all that year, just over 40% did not supervise TV watching, and 60% had not attended parent-teacher meetings. Further, most parents did not, help their children to prepare for tests, play educational games with them, discuss TV programmes with them or do reading activities with them frequently. Although School A provided parents with numerous opportunities to organise and manage events at the school only a small group took this opportunity.

The teachers' views and the quantitative findings both suggested that a small proportion of parents were hardly involved in their children's education at all.

#### *6.2.8.2 How teachers and parents felt parents should be involved in their children's education*

The design of an effective programme of parental involvement requires knowledge of how parents and teachers feel parents should be involved in their children's education (Gettinger & Guetschow 1998:40). Both teachers and parents must be convinced of the necessity of parent involvement in a particular area for parents to be effectively involved (see 2.7.2.6 & 2.7.4).

Both the teachers and parents interviewed were aware of the parents' basic obligations, including home supervision, and felt that it was important that parents fulfill them. However, teachers felt that some parents were not aware that their basic obligations included more than paying school fees. As mentioned (see 6.2.8.1), the parents interviewed were probably some of the more involved parents and, thus, it is quite possible that while they recognised their basic parenting obligations, other parents did not.

Both teachers and parents interviewed felt communication between the school and home was very important. However, teachers felt that the parents' role was primarily to take note of, and respond to, school communications and support school disciplinary actions. Although many of the teachers stated that they wanted communication to flow in both directions, these teachers made little effort to encourage parents to talk to them. Most parents may also have felt that their main role was to read and respond to notes from the school because teachers noted that parents responded very well to these notes and the quantitative findings showed that 40% of the parents had not spoken to the teacher that year. Thus, while the responses of the parents interviewed show that they recognised the importance of one-to-one communication between them and the teacher, a large proportion of parents may have felt that personal communication with the teacher was not necessary.

Parents and teachers interviewed felt parents should frequently attend parent-teacher meetings. The low attendance of parents at these meetings may indicate, however, that the majority of the parents did not feel attending these meetings was important.

When questioned, teachers recognised that parents could play a part in fundraising and field trips and that the parents' presence encouraged their children at social, cultural and sporting events. However, they did not usually mention this in their description of the parents role, and did not personally encourage or invite the parents of the children they taught to be involved in these ways. They also did not feel very strongly about the lost opportunities for parental involvement that the lack of these events created at their schools. The parents' interviewed attended these events when they occurred, however, they still did not seem to realise how important their attendance and participation were.

Teachers embraced the idea of parent volunteers. Parents felt that work constraints would limit their involvement at the school.

Both parents and teachers interviewed felt parents should supervise homework. Even though many teachers did not enforce parental supervision of homework they did feel that parents should supervise homework. The quantitative results suggest that most parents did. However, while the parents and some teachers felt parents should help with homework, other teachers felt parents should not help because they did not know how to help and would do more harm than good. Parents and teachers did not seem to be aware that parents could help their children by playing educational games with them, discussing TV programmes and so on. A small proportion of parents did not help with or supervise homework frequently. This suggests that they may not have believed it was necessary for them to be involved in this way.

Most teachers felt that parents should have a contributory role in making decisions on curriculum, teaching methods, and uniform although they felt that the school should decide on the appointment of staff, discipline and the timetable. In contrast, most parents felt that they should not contribute to these decisions.

#### *6.2.8.3 Conclusions*

Opportunities for Swazi parents' involvement in their children's education were mostly limited to parenting and involvement in learning activities in the home, usually without any encouragement from the school. Parents also received frequent communication from the school. Parents were given very little opportunity to make decisions or play a role at the school. Teachers did not encourage parents to be involved in virtually any of the myriad of novel and interesting ways currently available. Further not all parents took the few opportunities they had to be involved. Thus, parents at these schools played a very limited, traditional role in their children's education (see 2.1).

The teachers interviewed envisaged a rather limited role for parents in their children's education. Despite having attended the parent workshops, the parents interviewed envisaged an even narrower role for themselves. Nevertheless, these teachers and parents valued the parents' contribution to their children's education and recognised that parents should have a wider role, than parents were having at the time of the interviews. The teachers in particular envisaged a role for parents that would include more school involvement and decision-making. Nevertheless, both teachers and parents envisaged a supportive rather than a partnership role for parents. Parents were seen as subordinate to teachers who were able to provide experiences the parents could not provide.

## **6.3 Explanations for the current picture of parental involvement at these schools**

### **6.3.1 Introduction**

Parental involvement at urban Swazi primary schools was very limited. During the analysis of the interview data some themes arose that shed light on the possible reasons for the limited opportunities parents were given to be involved in their children's education as well why parents and teachers held rather limited views on how parents should be involved. These themes, and those that reveal reasons why parents did not always take the few opportunities they had to be involved, will be explored in the following sections.

### **6.3.2 The Ministry of Education restricted parental involvement**

Teachers and parents recognised the role of the Ministry of Education in parental involvement.

**I don't think they [parents] have that space for putting their views. They are not involved. I think that is something the Ministry has to do, try at this time to involve them, because we need them, we need their ideas (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

**The education system has not gone to ask parents to get involved. Whereas in other countries the parents [*hitting his fist into his other hand*] must, must, must get involved. But here the system is, "No the parents are not involved and such and such". It is not the right way (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

South African school principals felt that the foremost cause of lack of parental involvement at their schools was that decisions concerning the school are made at only the highest level of government (van der Westhuizen & Mosoge

2001:192). Similarly, the Ministry of Education clearly played an important role in the limited parental involvement at these Swazi schools.

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 3, Swazi education policy describes a very limited role for parents (see 3.3.2.2). Thus, teachers and schools in Swaziland are not under pressure to implement parental involvement. Further, the clear guidelines and resources necessary for implementation of this policy are not present (see 3.3.4). Consequently, it is not surprising that the policy of involving parents in curricular changes was not implemented at these schools (see 6.2.8.1).

Secondly, the practices of the Ministry of Education actually prevented parents from making virtually any decisions about their children's education. Policy did not force private schools to give parents any role in these decisions either (see 6.2.8.1).

Lastly, the Ministry of Education did not require teachers to complete a course on parental involvement as part of their teacher or in-service training (see 3.3.4). This has far reaching implications for parental involvement in Swaziland.

### 6.3.3 The teachers' and schools' beliefs, knowledge, understanding and views of parental involvement

#### *6.3.3.1 Introduction*

Since, the teachers and schools efforts to involve parents largely determine the extent and ways that parents are involved (see 2.7.4), it is important to explore teachers' preparation for, and understanding of, parental involvement.

### 6.3.3.2 *Teachers did not know about parental involvement or its benefits*

The interviews indicated that teachers were not prepared to involve parents. None of the locally trained teachers interviewed had done a course specifically on parental involvement. They either had no recollection of being taught anything about parents or had only dealt with parent-teacher relationships very superficially. Some of the teachers interviewed had no formal training in education (see Table 4.3). Only Mr. Nkunita who was trained in Zambia felt that he had received any real training in parental involvement but his responses showed that he was not fully aware of how to involve parents.

In reply to the question: "When you did your teaching diploma did they teach you about how you should involve the parents, about how you should interact with parents? What parents can do? Was that part of your teaching diploma?", Ms. Dube, a teacher at School D, said:

**Ish, even if it was, it was very little. But now myself I see there is much.**

In response to a similar question, Mr. Nyoni, a teacher at School E, replied:

**It is just not there.**

Before the interviews, most of the teachers did not know what parental involvement really was or how to involve parents. None of the schools had a parental involvement policy.

**All I can say is I would like to take this opportunity and thank you for coming because it raises something in my mind if you come and interview me on this topic. [Now I know] parents need to be involved and maybe that strategy of how we get them to be involved (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

The teachers had never heard of many parental involvement strategies such as parenting workshops (see 6.2.2.2), home visits (see 6.2.3.2), parent volunteers, and packages of home activities. In reply to a question on whether they would like help from parent volunteers, Mr. Fortune, a teacher at School B, said:

**Wow, that would be nice, I've never even thought of that.**

Ms. Malaza's, School D, initial response was:

**I don't know we've never seen such.**

### Discussion

Like teachers in South Africa (van Wyk 2001:127) and many other parts of the world (Epstein1987b:8; Jones 2001:18), the teachers interviewed in this study had not had any training in parental involvement. Thus, it is hardly surprising that they did not understand what parental involvement was before the interviews, and had not heard of many parental involvement techniques. This was also true of South African teachers (van Wyk 2001:127).

Due to their lack of education in parental involvement, the teachers and schools also lacked a full appreciation of the benefits of parental involvement. This was displayed by the limited formal opportunities the schools provided parents to be involved in traditional ways that they had been aware of prior to the interviews, such as the attendance of events at their school (see 6.2.4.6) and home to school communication (see 6.2.3.4). Moreover, although the teachers' responses indicated that they felt parents should be involved in these and other ways (6.2.8.2) they did not insist on parental involvement in these areas. Teachers and schools also did not always persist in involving parents. School C made several half-hearted attempts at involving parents, which were soon abandoned (see 6.2.4.5 and 6.2.6.2). Furthermore, even though the researcher offered a workshop for parents on parental involvement at all five schools at no charge (see 4.2.8), only the head-teachers of Schools C and D actually wanted, and hosted, these workshops. These head-teachers did not however discuss the report given to all of these schools on parental involvement with their staff before the group interviews, despite the fact that they had promised to do so and had provided ample time. In fact, most of the teachers were unaware of its existence and, thus, had no understanding of parental involvement prior to the

group interview (see 4.3.5.2). The head-teacher at School D also apparently forgot the group discussion and was not present for it (see 4.3.5.2a).

#### 6.3.3.3 *Teachers did not view involving parents as part of their role*

The first question teachers were asked was what they felt their role was in the education of learners. Since the teachers did not know about parental involvement prior to the interviews, it is hardly surprising that when they described their role, not a single teacher included initiating or promoting parental involvement or even establishing positive relationships with parents. Most teachers focussed their role as a facilitator of learning and as a role model.

**So I think the role of a primary teacher is to instill those basics [of the learning material] because they are very important. A child without those basics may not be able to attack, maybe problems in mathematics, when he or she is in high school (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

**I think as a teacher, not you choose to be, but with the situation, you become a role model of some form. The way you conduct yourself, the way you approach the children and the way you teach them is important (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

Many of the teachers felt their role as a teacher included a role as a parent to the learners. However, while they felt this parental role improved their effectiveness as teachers and partially compensated for lack of parent attention in the home, they did not feel they could actually replace the parent (see also quotations in 6.2.2.2).

**I must give that sense of love and if I am saying I am partly a mother here, I must give that love so they want to be with me. Even if they did not get a smile at home, let me give them a smile and a hug. But we can't actually do the parents' job (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

**They [the parents] have got a huge role. We [the teachers] are only busy with the kids, 5 hours, 6 hours in the classroom. They are busy with the kids over**

**the weekends, in the afternoons, in the evenings. The kids are learning their morals their, from the house (Mr. Reed, teacher, School A).**

However, the teachers did try to substitute the parents on some occasions.

**When you sort of take a very parental approach to the way you teach the kids in the class it always seems to be very positive. Because, for example, Njabu [the child's name], we [the teachers] actually sat down and discussed her case as teachers and we came to the conclusion that there is a problem at home. Nbody seems to care much for her. And when the teachers tried to open themselves to her and bring her close, more or less substitute the parents, she improved greatly (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

### Discussion

Teachers at these schools did not feel that their role included forming relationships with parents and initiating and encouraging parental involvement. Consequently, they did not go to much effort to do so. In addition to facilitating learning and serving as role models, teachers felt that they needed to adopt a parental role in their teaching. When teachers recognised that some learners did not have positive home circumstances their approach was to attempt to substitute the parent rather than approach the parent. This demonstrates the teachers' lack of orientation to parental involvement.

#### *6.3.3.4 Teachers did not recognise their responsibility for parental involvement*

During the course of the interviews the teachers noted a number of ways that they were willing for parents to be involved, however, they often expected the parents to initiate and maintain involvement (see also 6.2.3.3a & 6.2.5.2).

Mr. Nyoni, School E, complained:

**Parents have begun to put less effort on their side. They used to come to the school anytime, say they see that their kids are not doing well. They used to tell us, before we could ask, how the child was performing at home and the behaviour of the child as such. But now they are so much relaxed, it needs the teacher to go to them.**

Many of the teachers did however recognise, in contrast to some educators in South Africa (see 3.4.4.3), that they had a role in the low levels of parental involvement at their schools. Ms. Crawford, a teacher at School A, noted:

**Its not forthcoming in terms of the parents, in terms of giving suggestions [to volunteer to speak to the learners at the school] but I think its also maybe we haven't gone out and canvassed for that sort of thing which is perhaps an idea we can add in.**

### Discussion

Newport (1992:52) states, "The major agent to achieve participation will be teachers and executives who first, will have to convince parents that they are welcome and necessary participants, and second, will have to educate parents in the knowledge and skills essential to successful participation in the practices of schools. Thus, it is the teachers who will have the major responsibility for the effective development of parental participation". Although many professionals agree that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make the first move in reaching out to families (Morris & Taylor 1998:220), these Swazi teachers had not received training in parental involvement. As a result it is not surprising that they did not always recognise that parental involvement was primarily their responsibility. Like teachers in other studies (Newport 1992:47), they felt the onus was on the parents to get involved and did not seem to realise that parents would require a great deal of encouragement and support to be involved.

#### *6.3.3.5 Teachers viewed parents as problem solvers not partners*

When asked what a parent's role in his child's education should be, teachers emphasised a number of roles. These included talking to their children, being aware of everything occurring in their children's lives, communication with the school, supervising homework, sometimes helping with homework, and attending parent-teacher meetings (see 6.2.8.2). However, teachers repeatedly referred to

parents as problem solvers. In response to a question of how many times teachers felt they needed to see parents, Ms. Mazibuko, a teacher at School C, replied:

**Twice a term. But with the children who give us problems, I think each week. If they turn up each week and see the problems of the child I think it can make a difference.**

**When the parent takes his or her role efficiently, it is only when he can join hands with the teacher and define the problem in the earliest stages so that the child can get help as soon as problems are identified (Mr. Nyoni, teacher, School E).**

### Discussion

Like South African (see 3.4.4.3) and foreign teachers (Delgado-Gaitan 1991:32), above all other roles teachers seemed to rely on parents to help them solve problems they were having with the child. Aside from parent-teacher meetings, parents were only invited to come to talk to teachers when their children were having problems (see 6.2.3.3a). These were also the parents that teachers felt they needed to see (see 6.2.3.3a). Only when children had problems, did teachers actually demand parental involvement and feel they truly needed parents, if only to enlist the parents' support. Since teachers did not feel truly reliant on parents in other ways, they could not view parents as partners in their children's education. Some teachers felt parents should not even help with homework (see 6.2.5.2), and none of the teachers frequently invited parents to the school to communicate information or help in other ways (see 6.2.3.4 & 6.2.4.6). Parents were rarely even informed about what their children were being taught (see 6.2.3.3a).

In conclusion, because teachers did not really know what parental involvement was or appreciate its benefits, prior to the interviews, teachers did not realise that they needed parents as partners. Moreover, the Ministry of Education

effectively prevented parents from having a partnership with the school by stripping away most of their decision-making capabilities.

#### *6.3.3.6 Teachers had little time or energy for parental involvement*

**There is no remedy for anything here, you must just work. We don't have any leisure time here at work, we teach non-stop (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).** Since these schools offered parents very little opportunity to be involved, the possible impact of the above statement was not readily apparent. Throughout the interviews teachers mentioned ideas they had had, but not had the time or energy to implement. They also repeatedly mentioned how exhausting their large classes and full teaching schedules were. Further, although teachers were very enthusiastic during the interviews, they expressed reluctance to be repeatedly interviewed due to lack of time. Even the annual fundraising event was not always held at School D because teachers were too tired (see 6.2.4.2). Often teachers enthusiastically embraced a new idea for parental involvement but ended their endorsement of it with the words "if there is time". Teachers seemed to be continually rushing from duty to duty and had very little time to think about parental involvement or energy to implement it.

#### *6.3.3.7 The theoretical stance of the schools*

In practice Swap's Protective Model or Epstein's Separate Spheres of Influence Model operated at Schools B, C, D & E (see 2.7.4.4). Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that that parents at these schools were not encouraged to be involved, had very few opportunities for involvement, and were not permitted to make decisions (see 5.10 & 6.2.8.1). As such the functions of the school and the parents were kept separate.

Schools usually adopt the Protective Model to protect the school from the interference of the parents (Swap 1993:28). However, while this model seems to be operating at most of these schools, this did not seem to arise from the belief

of the majority of teachers and head-teachers that the school needs to be protected from the interference of parents. Although a few teachers and the head-teacher at School E (see 6.3.4.2c) did seem to believe in the Protective Model, the comments and actions of the vast majority of the teachers clearly indicated that most of the teachers were open to a different theoretical stance, Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model (see 2.7.4.4). These teachers believed that parents could support the school by contributing to the enrichment of the curriculum, volunteering at the school, and playing an advisory role in decision-making (see 6.2.8.2). It seems likely that at most schools the practice of the Protective Model was a historical left-over from the days in which parents really were not welcome at schools. Teachers and head-teachers probably allowed the minimal opportunities for parental involvement at these schools to continue simply because they did not realise all the ways parents could be involved or understand how beneficial this involvement could be. Teachers also did not have the time to worry about many types of parental involvement, which they felt were not too important anyway.

#### 6.3.3.8 *Conclusions*

Since parental involvement forms no part in teacher certification or in in-service training, as is also the case in South Africa (see 3.3.4), Swazi teachers did not know what parental involvement truly was or the extent to which learners, teachers, and parents can benefit from it. They did not, as a result, feel that it was part of their role and their responsibility to initiate and encourage parental involvement and were not too concerned about the very limited opportunities parents were given to be involved by these schools. As a result the teachers allowed the Protective Model of parental involvement to operate at these schools. Teachers also had a rather limited view of parents' roles as a result of this lack of education. Parents were seen, primarily, as problem solvers and not as partners. The teachers were, however, clearly very dedicated and most teachers enthusiastically embraced other involvement roles for parents (see

6.2.8.2) when they became aware, during the interviews, that parents could become involved in these ways. Generally teachers were in favour of the School-to-Home Transmission Model of parental involvement. This new teacher awareness of ways parents could be involved accounted in part for the discrepancy between the role teachers envisaged for parents and the limited opportunities that teachers and schools gave parents to be involved at the time of the interviews.

Thus, primarily because of their lack of knowledge about parental involvement, teachers did not initiate or encourage much parental involvement in those areas under their control. This, combined with the limitations to parental involvement imposed by the Ministry of Education, resulted in very few opportunities for parental involvement. Nevertheless, parents did not always take the opportunities they had to be involved (see 6.2.6.8).

#### 6.3.4 Parents' beliefs, knowledge, understanding and views of parental involvement

##### *6.3.4.1 Introduction*

Swazi parents did not have the opportunity to be involved in certain ways whether they would have liked to be involved or not. These included: making almost all decisions about their children's education; volunteering at the school; attending workshops; and visiting the school frequently to attend events (see 6.2.8.1). Nevertheless, it is quite possible that parents would not be involved in all of these ways even if they were given the opportunity. Most parents interviewed, although involved in most other ways available to them (see 6.2.8.1), did not want to make decisions and were uncertain about whether they would be able to volunteer at the school (see 6.2.8.2). Furthermore, the interviews and quantitative data revealed that a substantial proportion of parents

were not involved even in those ways that they had the opportunity to be involved in.

This section deals with how the beliefs, knowledge, understanding and views of parental involvement of these parents limited their involvement and their view of how they should be involved.

#### *6.3.4.2 Parents' conception of their role*

##### **a) Parents delegated responsibility for their children's education to the school**

Teachers at all the schools complained of a small group of parents that were not involved at all (see also 6.2.8.2).

**Some parents don't help the children, because we find that sometimes the child comes to school and he has forgotten the book at home. This suggests to me that maybe the parents don't take care. But when the child comes back with the exercise book then we discover she did not finish the work. So the parent did not follow-up to see that the child was doing his work (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

Like South African educators (van der Westhuizen & Mosoge 2001:193), many Swazi teachers felt that some of these parents had delegated the responsibility for educating their children to the school.

**Yes, that is the main one. I wanted to say that once the children are here they write the cheque and that's it. All they need is a good report at the end of the year. "Whatever you do to my child is none of my business" (Ms. Nsibande, teacher, School C).**

**And when you inquire from the parent, she said "It's your problem it's not my problem. You should know what he does with his school books, it's none of my business" and so on. So it was very difficult to work with such a child (Mr. Mduli, teacher, School C).**

**The parents nowadays think the teacher has to do everything. Largely, they don't think it is their job (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

The interviews revealed three possible explanations for why some parents felt that they could leave their children's education entirely to the school.

### **b) High school fees absolved parents from responsibility**

**It is almost like, "We are paying that money, so you must see to my child". The parents will pay the most expensive school fees to a school; thinking and hoping, I would say, that the teacher will take her role (Ms. Costa, teacher, School D).**

Mr. Kunene, a parent whose child attended School C, echoed this sentiment:

**We are not maybe absolving ourselves from our responsibility, but really you hope that if you part with such a lot of money you expect a larger chunk to be done by the teachers. While the quality is high and the fees are reasonable [at School C] it is a win-win situation, you expect to put a lot of effort because you feel, after all, the teachers are not paid a high enough salary to put a lot of effort. Obviously if the fees you are paying are like the private schools where you are expected to part with E5000 and then to be told you are expected to spend 3 hours a day with helping that child then it doesn't make sense. Because in some cases we feel investing in our children's education we are taking some activities we are supposed to be doing and delegating them to somebody else to make sure he takes full responsibility in fact.**

### Discussion

School fees at all five schools were higher than those of rural schools, with the fees of Schools A, B and C being the highest (see Table 4.1). There was definitely a perception amongst teachers at these schools that some parents felt that by paying high school fees they no longer needed to be involved. Although, none of the other parents interviewed expressed views similar to that of Mr. Kunene (above), his views suggest that there may be a perception amongst some parents that by paying high school fees they can absolve themselves from any further role in their children's education. Mr. Kunene seemed to believe that

if teachers were paid enough, and put in enough effort, they could replace the parent.

Teachers at Schools D and E also complained that some parents abdicated their responsibilities to the school but they did not put forward the explanation of high school fees.

### **c) The psychological impact of the theoretical stance of the school**

Teachers noted that the practices and policies of the head-teacher and school had an impact on whether parents were involved.

**Yes, she [the head-teacher] is very, very helpful on that [getting parents involved]. More especially when there are meetings here at school. She emphasises that, "You parents, you must know that three quarters of the work is done by the child. The teacher does only one quarter and the child needs you. You also have to play a role. You don't have to come here at school because you are called, everyone can just come anytime, see how your child is performing. Take the teacher by surprise, take the child by surprise" (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**Whenever we give them an assignment, there must be a signature to show that there is that cooperation. That way we find that if you are a relaxed parent, there is no way out, we can discover if you are not doing anything. So that way we find many parents are encouraged to help their students (Mr. Dladla, teacher, School D).**

The parents whose children attended School D, noted that this school tried to involve them more than other schools that their children had attended previously.

**...and also especially at that school. What I like about it, whatever they do they involve the parents. If they want to collect money they will always ask the parents what should be done and the parents will come up with ideas. It's quite good. It's unlike other schools when they call parents just to say this is how we spend our money (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

In answer to the question, "What do you think the main reason is that parents don't get more involved?" Mr. Fakudze, a teacher at School E, replied:

**Maybe it's the planning of the administration. They do not think it is much important. They think parents are just there to send the child to school and yet they can also contribute a lot to the smooth running of the school.**

### Discussion

Gettinger and Guetschow (1998:40) note that a major determinant of whether parents choose to be involved is the extent to which they perceive that the school wants them to, or feels they should, be involved. In practice Swap's Protective Model operated at these Swazi schools due to the limited opportunities parents were given to be involved (see 6.3.3.7). Parents were rarely invited to these schools and had no role in decision-making so it would be hardly surprising if some of them believed that the basic assumptions that underlie these models held true for them. Namely, that they were expected to delegate responsibility for their children's education to the school and that the educators accept this delegation of responsibility (Swap 1993:28). Parents have been found to become involved to the extent that they believe they have a role in their children's education (see 2.7.2.6). Some of these parents, as a result of the theoretical stances of these schools, may have found it easy to believe they did not have a role at all.

However, although practices at Schools B, C, D and E generally reflected the Protective Model, these schools formed a continuum between those that strictly practiced the Protective Model and School A, which practiced the Home-to-School Transmission Model (see 2.7.4.4).

School E strictly practiced the Protective Model. This school did not even involve parents in the very limited ways that they were involved in the other schools.

The school had a policy of not giving children homework (see 6.2.5.2), parents played no role in fundraising (see 6.2.4.2) and were hardly ever invited to the school (see 6.2.4). The quantitative finding revealed that School E had the lowest levels of SIPI (see 5.5.8.1). Low school SES did not explain this finding (see 5.5.8.1). Teachers at this school felt that the school's administration (the head-teacher and deputy, there was no School Board) did not feel that parents had any role in their children's education and they felt this was one reason why parents were not involved. The quantitative results show that this school also had the lowest PIPI (see 5.5.8.2). This suggests that some parents may have accepted the stance of the school, that they should have no role in their children's education.

Teachers at School C complained that some parents were not aware that they had a responsibility in their children's education. This is hardly surprising since, although the teachers and head-teacher of School C did not believe that parents should be separated from the school, they provided very few opportunities for these parents to be involved. School C did not even have a PTA. To the teachers great surprise the quantitative data indicated that the parents at School C were the most involved in PIPI (see 5.5.8.2). One teacher, Mr. Nkunita, commented, "I don't think they responded with utmost faith". It is possible that while parents were given almost no opportunity to be involved at School C, they were highly involved in the home in ways which the teachers were not aware of. However, this would be surprising since they received little more than occasional verbal encouragement to be involved from the school. The school's SES was unrelated to its high PIPI (see 5.2.8.2).

Teachers at School D were most in favour of parent collaboration. The head-teacher had set in place several policies to ensure parental involvement. Parents were represented through the School Board (see 6.2.6.1), they had to sign homework (see 6.2.5.2), and alternative dates were arranged to ensure parents

attended parent-teacher meetings (see 6.2.4.1). The teachers at this school were noticeably the most positive about the contributions of parents. This may explain why this school had the highest level of SIPI (see 5.5.8.1). Surprisingly, this did not seem to increase parents' involvement in the activities under their own control, however, since this school did not have higher PIPI than the other schools (see 5.5.8.2).

It was not possible to see the quantitative effect of the theoretical stance of School's A and B on parent or school initiated involvement since the very small sample sizes from these schools resulted in the parental responses from both schools being combined for this analysis (see 5.5.8). The interviews revealed that these two schools, despite both being private, practiced different models of parental involvement. School B largely excluded parents from a role in their children's education and consequently practiced the Protective Model while School A practiced the School-to-Home Transmission Model (see 6.2 & 6.3.3.7).

At School A parents seemed to be viewed as clients (see 2.7.4.4). Parents were expected to accept the decisions of the professionals, the School Board and teachers, but this school tried to ensure that its clients understood these decisions. School A held a meeting once a year where it explained, superficially, to parents what the school was trying to do and what their role should be (see 6.2.3.3a). Teachers at this school said they would be happy to listen to parents and would respond to their views if they were in line with the professionals' judgements (see 6.2.6.4). Surveys were carried out at this school to test parents' responses (see 6.2.6.6). This school also attempted to enlist parental support in more ways and more frequently than the other schools, particularly in events at the school. Hence, at this school Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model, seemed to be in effect. Consequently, one would not expect parents of learners at this school to feel that they could delegate responsibility for their children's

education to the school. Nevertheless, teachers at this school also reported a small proportion of parents that did very little.

In conclusion, due to the limited opportunities these schools gave parents for involvement, these schools operated primarily from the stance of the Protective Model. As a result it is possible that some parents may have believed that the teachers and schools felt that parents had no role in their children's education, and thus delegated their responsibilities to the school. However, although most schools essentially practiced the Protective Model, varying attempts to involve parents were found at these schools.

Although levels of parental involvement were similar at most schools studied (see 5.9), the quantitative and qualitative results suggested that the specific theoretical stance of a school, and its consequent efforts to involve parents, does have an effect on parental involvement in ways that are under the school's control (SIPI). This probably results from the theoretical stance of the school determining which involvement opportunities are available to parents, and by making parents feel that their contributions are important and welcome. However, except in the extreme case of School E, the variations in the theoretical stances of the other schools could not be shown to have had an impact on the degree to which these parents were involved in activities which they could initiate independently of the school (PIPI). Nor was the SES of the schools responsible for differences in SIPI or PIPI between these schools (see 5.9).

This suggests that other factors played a role in the degree to which these parents were involved in their children's education. Even at School A, where parents could have no illusions about their responsibilities, a small group of parents was hardly involved at all.

#### **d) Lack of understanding of parental involvement and its benefits**

The parents interviewed knew that they had an important role to play in their children's education and were aware of the possible consequences of not playing this role.

**My role in my children's education is very important because it is my aim for them to have as much a broad education as possible. I can't imagine after all of these children of mine are finished school and don't have anywhere to go and I have to take care of them. It's going to be a disaster, a disaster! I think its better I cope now with the school fees and the homework than suffering at a later stage (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

Some teachers, felt, however, that some parents simply did not know that they should be involved.

**Ignorance can contribute. He [the parent] thinks that when you have sent the child to school that is it. "When I pay the school fees, the child has got uniform, that is fine. The teacher will do the rest" (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

All the teachers felt that parents cared for their children and their education and would be more involved if they knew what to do and were asked to help.

**If we could get the ideas and tell them what to do, they will do it. I'm telling you. You find a parent coming, "Oh, what should I do, what should I do to help him or her" (Ms. Makhuba, Deputy, School D).**

**If we did ask for their [parents'] help they would actually want to respond. It's just a break in communication that causes all this. It not that they have that apathy. I think they actually could rise up to the occasion and say, "Alright lets meet up to what's required of us, lets try to help out." A lot of them would, because at the end of the day they are paying a lot of money and they want quality education (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

**For Form 1 getting a high school is a problem. If your child gets a third [for his primary exams] you'll be struggling with your child. So the parents are so serious. Ja! But some, its because of, they don't know (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

Only one interviewee, a parent, felt that parents did not care.

**“It is something to do with the culture here that the people don’t care if the child goes to school or not. Seriously, its just like that. They don’t value education” (Mr. Razibuhoro, parent, School D).**

### Discussion

Teachers at these schools felt that parents took their children’s education seriously and wanted their children to excel. It seems unlikely, in view of these teachers’ comments that many parents simply did not care, as Mr. Razibuhoro felt was the case. Teachers felt that many parents wanted to help and simply were not involved because, like some South African parents (Jantjes1995:297), they did not recognise the value of their involvement and did not know how to get involved. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:316) point out that for parents to be involved they must have a strong sense of personal efficacy for involving themselves in their children’s education (see 2.7.2.6).

The parents that attended the workshops expressed amazement at the variety of ways that they could be involved (personal observation). They stated repeatedly that they hadn’t realised their involvement mattered so much. Specifically, parents did not fully realise the importance of positive reinforcement of their children’s successes, not pressurizing their children, creating a time-table for afternoon activities, and family discussion at meal times (personal observation). Many parents came and thanked the researcher after the presentation and said that they felt that they had really benefited from it.

The parents interviewed had some sense of personal efficacy; they knew that their involvement made a positive difference to their children’s education. Their sense of efficacy probably explains the fairly high levels at which they were involved (see 6.2.8.1). However, their responses indicated that even these

parents did not fully realise how beneficial to their children their involvement in some types of activities could be (see 6.2.8.2). Further, these parents were generally satisfied with their levels of involvement and had not even heard of some types of parental involvement including volunteering at the school, home visits, and home packages of learning materials. The interviewed parents were astounded by, and disapproved of, the fact that in some foreign countries parents make important decisions about their children's education (see 6.2.6.8). They had never heard of this and they placed great trust in teachers, as the professionals, where the making of decisions was concerned (see 6.2.6). Crozier (1999a:315) notes that this results in parental passivity. Despite these parents' high levels of education (see Table 4.6) they felt they did not have a positive contribution to make to decisions and did not feel they needed to play a role (see 6.2.6.8). Although the workshops only introduced the most basic concepts of parental involvement (see Appendix V), these parents felt that they had learned a lot (see 6.2.2.1). This lack of knowledge about parent involvement, and the parents lack of a full appreciation of their contribution to their children's education, probably accounts for the interviewed parents rather limited concept of what parents should be doing (see 6.2.8.2).

Since teachers did not teach parents about parental involvement (see 6.3.3.3), and a culture of parental involvement does not exist in Swaziland (see 6.3.3.7), it is likely that some parents knew virtually nothing about it. Research suggests that parents who are not involved are those that have not realised that they are a critical part of their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan 1991:31). Differences in the levels of parent involvement in various activities (see 6.2.8.2) may reflect the parents' beliefs on how important their involvement is to their children's academic success. Parents may believe that they can contribute to their children's academic success a great deal by helping with and supervising homework but very little by attending parent-teacher meetings (see 6.2.8.1).

#### **e) Summary**

Some Swazi parents did not recognise that they had any role in their children's education. They may have believed this because they felt that the payment of high school fees absolved them of responsibility, especially those parents whose children attended Schools A, B and C. Alternatively, the practice of Swap's Protective Model by most of the schools may have led some parents to believe that they should not have much of a role in their children's education. Finally, Swazi parents, like some South African parents, may simply have been unaware that they could make a positive contribution to their children's education. Parents were unaware of many of the ways they could be involved. Parents at the workshops were delighted to learn what they could do to help.

Nevertheless, even if Swazi parents fully realise the benefits of their involvement, and are fully committed to being involved, they face many barriers to their involvement.

### 6.3.5 Barriers to parental involvement

#### 6.3.5.1 *Introduction*

Identification of significant barriers to parental involvement is a critical step towards developing effective home-school partnerships (Gettinger & Geutschow 1998:40).

#### 6.3.5.2 *Less educated parents may be excluded*

Most teachers felt that the majority of parents were educated enough to help their children (see 6.2.5.2).

**The curriculum is very basic. Parents can help their children quite easily. The parents here are educated (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

**Most can help, but some give you a note “I was poor in Maths, please give all the help” (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

Teachers felt that the involvement of educated parents was particularly beneficial and that less educated parents were less involved.

**I can see that if we can involve them we can achieve a lot because some of our parents here are educated. Some of them are lecturers, some are even ministers (Mr. Fakudze, teacher, School E).**

**The parents that are less involved are the less educated ones, that’s one thing I’ve noticed (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

### Discussion

Most teachers felt that parents were sufficiently educated to help their children. Even those teachers that preferred parents not to help with homework (see 6.2.5.2) did not feel that parents’ lack of general education was the problem, rather they felt the parents did not know how to help. This makes sense in the light of the quantitative findings, which indicated that most parents had secondary or tertiary education and that, in contrast to South Africa (see 3.4.4.1), illiteracy was not generally a barrier to parental involvement in this community (see 5.5.2). Moreover, around two-thirds of the parents felt they could help their children in reading and mathematics (see 5.7.4).

The quantitative results (see 5.5.2) indicated that teachers did not discriminate between parents who had secondary education and those who had tertiary education, in terms of the extent to which they tried to involve them (SIPI). However, the teachers interviewed definitely felt that involving the most educated parents would be most beneficial, and that less educated parents tended to be more resistant to involvement and to value education less. The lack of a significant difference between the SIPI of secondary and tertiary parents

(see 5.5.2) may simply reflect the fact that most schools made very little attempt to involve any parents.

For a number of types of involvement including helping with homework (see 6.2.5.2), giving presentations (see 6.2.4.5), and decision-making (see 6.2.6.7), teachers stated that parents' contributions would be valuable since they were "learned". This implies that the contributions of less educated parents would not be valued as highly and that they may even be excluded from these types of parental involvement on the grounds that they could not contribute. This is exactly what School A had done in terms of parents working in the classroom. They excluded all but a tiny minority of parents whom they felt were sufficiently educated (see 6.2.4.5). Thus, Swazi teachers, like teachers in other communities who did not frequently involve parents (Epstein & Dauber 1991:290), seemed to make negative stereotypic judgements about the involvement of less educated parents. Consequently, while lack of education would probably not discourage the majority of parents from getting involved, since most parents were highly educated, parents with little education may find themselves excluded from many types of involvement.

#### *6.3.5.3 Lack of parent confidence*

Although most teachers and parents felt parents could cope with the level of difficulty of the primary curriculum (see 6.3.5.2), parents did not always feel confident about **how** to help their children in learning activities in the home (see 6.2.5.4). They were not always sure of which technique to use, or approach to take, when helping children with their homework.

**So even the parents think "I'll confuse my child, I'll leave it to the teacher (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**Sometimes I don't help because at Primary level the way you are explaining maths, maybe the way you are teaching, is not the way you would teach Form 1 (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

Further, a minority of parents did not feel they were able to cope with the level of difficulty of some of the primary work, particularly in mathematics (see quote 6.3.5.2). Teachers felt that these parents did not help their children with homework because they feared revealing their ignorance in some topics to their children. Teachers claimed that this fear was particularly prevalent amongst parents from their own culture, namely African parents.

**I think it goes back to a cultural thing, a traditional thing. You know as Africans we would always like to have a situation where the parent knows better than the child. So you'll avoid a situation where the child can outsmart you. So the best thing is, "Do your homework, I'll check it", but not discuss (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

### Discussion

Foreign studies have shown that lack of parental confidence forms a barrier to parental involvement (see 2.7.2.6). This also seems to be the case in Swaziland. Although most parents were educated and felt that they could help with reading and mathematics (see 5.7.4), the interviews revealed that parents were not always confident about **how** to help their children. This may have resulted in parents attempting to conform to the teachers' methods (see 6.2.5.2) such that the parents' unique talents and abilities were not utilised. This decreases the effectiveness of parental involvement (Edwards & Warin 1999:336). Alternatively, lack of confidence on how to help may have prevented some parents from helping at all. Even Ms. Dlamini, a high school teacher, was not confident of her ability to help her primary school child and sometimes did not try because she was not she would use the correct method.

Further, the small proportion of parents who lacked confidence in their ability to cope with primary school work, particularly in mathematics, may also have avoided involvement in school-work as they may have feared that revealing their ignorance would result in their children losing respect for them.

#### 6.3.5.4 *Learners did not recognise parental authority*

Teachers and parents complained that the children did not always recognise the parents' authority to assist them with learning activities in the home.

**At times the kids feel that we are old to teach them. That's one thing I've realised. You try and tell them, "You don't do this like this", [and they reply] "No you can't tell me, the teacher said we must do it this way. (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

**Sometimes when we give the homework the child says, "No Mommy, my teacher says we don't do it like that, we do it like this (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

#### Discussion

Some children did not believe that their parents were able to help them with schoolwork. This put parents off trying to help them with schoolwork. This learner perception also reflects the absence of a culture of parental involvement in this community. Learners did not always perceive a role for their parents in learning activities in the home.

#### 6.3.5.5 *Parental frustration and annoyance*

Teachers and parents (see 6.2.2.1) noted that parents sometimes became frustrated and annoyed when trying to help their children with learning activities in the home and that this put some parents off helping their children.

**Some parents say "I can't help him, he is so playful. He cannot sit still so I get fed up" and one child, I asked him, I said, "Did you ask Dad to help you with**

**this” and the child said, “Daddy said he won’t help me with this anymore because I can’t learn” (Ms. Nsibande, teacher, School C).**

Mr. Tsabedze, a parent whose child attended School D, complained that his wife was reluctant to help their children with homework because she became too angry with them.

### Discussion

Parental frustration and annoyance while assisting with home learning activities seemed to be quite common since almost all the parents interviewed mentioned that they became frustrated and annoyed when their children did not seem to be learning. In some case parents’ feelings of frustration and anger may have prevented them from getting involved with their children’s schoolwork.

#### *6.3.5.6 Inability to speak English*

Teachers complained that a small proportion of parents, especially Portuguese-speaking parents from Mozambique, were unable to help their children with homework because they could not speak English.

**Most of the parents help with homework. But here in Swaziland we have parents that don’t understand English, for instance those coming from Mozambique. They can’t read English so we are having a problem with the child here (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

### Discussion

Language differences have been found to create a formidable communication barrier between the parent and school (see 2.7.2.7). Most parents in this community spoke either English or siSwati at home. Despite the fact that these schools taught and communicated in English, no difference was found between the involvement of English- and siSwati-speaking parents (see 5.5.3). siSwati-speaking parents also responded well to notes written by the school in English (see 6.2.3.4). It was not surprising that siSwati-speaking parents were not at a disadvantage because most could speak good English since they were well

educated (see 5.5.3). The siSwati-speaking parents interviewed spoke good English. Further, since cultural-ethnic congruency existed between siSwati speaking parents and the teachers this may have encouraged their involvement (see 5.5.3). Cultural differences did not present a barrier to English-speaking parents, possibly because they were not socioeconomically disadvantaged and did not suffer from communication barriers (see 5.5.3). Thus, language and cultural differences did not present a barrier to the involvement of the majority of parents; those parents who spoke either siSwati or English.

Nevertheless, language differences may have formed a barrier to the involvement of some of the parents who formed part of the 7% of the parent population who spoke other languages at home (see Table 4.2). Teacher reports suggested that many of these parents were Portuguese-speaking and that these parents often could not speak English. These parents may have experienced difficulty communicating with the school since the schools sent home letters in English and held meetings in English. Teachers noted that these parents were not able to help their children with schoolwork, since this was also done in English at these schools.

#### *6.3.5.7 Work commitments*

Teachers noted that in most households both parents were employed. They came home late and were tired. As a result they either could not or would not help their children with homework.

**I think that there is really a big factor which is the fact that they are working. Some of them don't get back till half past six, seven O'clock at night. The child doesn't work well at that time so it's very difficult for them to be involved (Ms. Crawford, teacher, School A).**

**They come home after a tough day tired, and they want to unwind a little bit, relax a little bit. They want to see what is happening [on TV] and have supper**

**and after that “Aagh, get your sister or brother to help you” and they head off to the room and that’s it (Mr. Fortune, teacher, School B).**

The parents interviewed noted that work commitments sometimes made home supervision and attendance at school events difficult. The parents nevertheless, tried to be involved.

**We are in a factory. At times it [meetings] coincides with my work. So maybe we’ll split, my wife will go. One will try to go (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

**Sometimes I work here up to six, six-thirty, seven, at the moment I go home I just give my time to them, I’m there for their disposal (Mr. Nardu, parent, School C).**

**Sometimes, when I get home [late] the work is not done. She has been playing (Ms. Nxumalo, parent, School C).**

Mr. Reed, a teacher at School A, noted that those parents most involved at the school were those that were not working.

**You get parents who are perceived as interested because they are here at school a lot, but its just a whole lot of mothers who are bored and have nothing else to do. You get other parents who are working extremely hard, they are maybe more interested but they don’t necessarily have time to come to the school.**

### Discussion

A number of studies have shown time constraints and inflexible work schedules to be the most significant barrier to parental involvement (see 2.7.2.7). Every teacher and parent mentioned time constraints, mostly due to work pressures, as a barrier to parental involvement. Many of these participants claimed it was the most important barrier. Unfortunately, as is the case in many countries (Ascher 1988:115), Swazi employers seem to be rigid about the time and hours they demand from their workers. Moreover, like teachers in South Africa (see 3.4.4.1), Swazi teachers felt that in most households both parents worked and got home

late and tired. As a result teachers believed that parents may have felt too tired to help their children with homework or could not help with it because their children had already done it earlier. The parents interviewed noted that it was difficult for them to supervise their children's time as they worked late and that this also made it hard for them to attend some meetings. Nevertheless, they still managed to be involved suggesting that if the parent is sufficiently committed this barrier can be overcome.

Mr. Reed of School A noted that those parents most commonly present at school events were the housewives (since other schools held events so infrequently they could not be expected to notice this relationship). This suggests, as has been found in other studies (see 2.7.2.3), that non-working parents are more involved at the school. However, this does not mean these parents are more involved in all ways. Research has, in fact, shown that working parents tend to participate in more home involvement activities than non-working parents (see 2.7.2.3).

The teachers felt that most parents had to work. Not a single teacher mentioned unemployment at all during the interviews. This supports the quantitative finding that most urban Swazi parents are employed and that unemployment is not a barrier to the involvement of the majority of parents (see 5.5.4). This contrasts with the situation in South Africa where unemployment has been found to be an important barrier to the involvement of parents (see 3.4.4.1). In these Swazi families, when one parent was unemployed this was probably a matter of choice based on the high SES of the family not requiring both parents to work.

#### *6.3.5.8 Family and community commitments*

Teachers and parents mentioned a number of family and community commitments that interfered with parental involvement.

Normally we now have a very high death rate. They [the parents] give notification before the time that “On this date we are having a family funeral and we cannot come” it is well understood (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).

In our culture we’ve got extended family so you know there is much tearing apart of the parent, when he reaches home he must see to this, he must see to that (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).

We’ve got commitments and we’ve got extended families. You find that these days people are dying like flies. So maybe I have to attend a certain funeral. At times you say “Mom please go there [to the school event], I’m going to attend this funeral” I don’t want to be political [*laughs*]. Its like you know when the community has called, the chief has said “We must do this”, then everyone must go and do it in that community (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).

### Discussion

Like South African parents (see 3.4.4.1), Swazi parents have many social commitments. Funerals are very common in this community and Swazi’s also have obligations to their local Chief, which cannot be neglected (see 3.2). These commitments made it particularly difficult for them to attend events at the school on weekends. However, teachers and parents reported that the presence of extended family in the home often meant the parents did not need to arrange babysitters when they were free to attend school events. Further, because the majority of teachers and parents came from the same racial-ethnic community (see 4.2.4.1), teachers had many of the same commitments as parents and were sympathetic of the barriers to involvement faced by parents.

#### *6.3.5.9 Single parents may be excluded*

In response to a question on what may prevent parents from becoming involved, all teachers responded that single parents were under more strain and were less likely to be involved.

**We also have a lot of single parent families. Where, you know, one parent is doing everything and they just have no time (Ms. Wade, head-teacher, School C).**

**Single parents, she is not married and the responsibility gets more difficult. She has four children and the four children must be going on the combi and she can't even afford to pay the fees. Lots of things on these parents (Ms. Costa, teacher, School B).**

**I've also noticed here that a lot of them come from single parent homes, its very common here. You can actually single them out in class, believe it or not, those that come from homes with both parents and those that come from single parent homes (Mr. Nkunita, teacher, School C).**

### Discussion

The teachers felt that single parents had less time and were under more stress and, thus were less likely to be involved. As a result, these teachers may decide in advance, as has been found in other communities (Scott-Jones 1987:271), that single parents cannot be approached or relied on. Although SIPI was the similar for married and single groups (see 5.5.5) this may be more because these schools hardly made any attempts to involve any parents rather than because teachers were not discriminating against single parents.

No significant difference was actually found between the PIPI of single and married parents (see 5.5.5). However, these results may be misleading as teachers noted that in many homes, despite the fact that parents were actually married, only one parent was present. In fact, they believed that married parents living separately were very common in this community. One parent, usually the mother, lived with the children, while the other parent lived close to his place of work. Mothers in these families would be likely to have fewer financial pressures than single parents, but like them, would shoulder most of the responsibilities. Thus, a difference may exist between the involvement of parents in homes

where two parents are usually present and those in homes where one parent is usually present.

#### 6.3.5.10 *Children did not always live with their parents*

Some teachers noted that some children did not live with their parents and that this prevented their parents from being involved.

**I have discovered that some of them are not staying with their parents. They are staying with anybody that is close to the school (Mr. Dladla, teacher, School D).**

**Some of the children, they are not living with their parents. Parents don't know about the school. The children live with the grannies and the grannies don't know about that positive attitude [to education] (Ms. Makuba, teacher, School D).**

#### Discussion

South African educators noted that not living with their children was a barrier to parental involvement (Mkwanazi, 1994:27). Some Swazi children live with other relatives. This may be due to the Swazi practice of trying to get a child into the best possible school regardless of where the parent lives (see 3.2). Teachers felt this prevented parents from being involved and that they may not even be aware of what was going on at the school. Further, teachers did not believe the grandparents, with whom these children often lived, were able to assume the parents' role effectively.

#### 6.3.5.11 *The perception that the involvement of only one parent per household is necessary.*

It was clear from the responses of most parents that usually only one parent attended meetings or helped with homework. Parents did not try to excuse or explain the non-involvement of the other parent.

**In most cases I go [to meetings]. Its only maybe when I'm not in a position to go I ask her [my wife] (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

Teachers noted that the involvement of only one parent sometimes caused misunderstandings between the parent and teacher.

**The mother would sit down and talk. She was always coming, constantly. So we finally decided the child should repeat the class. The just before we closed I was called by the head-teacher. The father went straight to her and said the teacher said the child should repeat, he doesn't understand why. I was shocked. I didn't know this man I only knew the one parent of the child (Ms. Nsibande, teacher, School C).**

### Discussion

Although all of the parents interviewed were married and lived with their spouses, it became clear that often only one parent was heavily involved in the children's education or that the parents took turns to be involved. It was rare for both parents to attend an event. No couples were present at either workshop (personal observation). In view of these parents' work and social commitments this was unsurprising. However, most of the parents interviewed did not feel that more than one parent needed to be involved. This perception acts as a barrier to the full involvement of both parents. Teachers noted that having only one parent involved could lead to communication problems since they had often only formed a relationship with one parent and the other parent may have had little understanding of what was going on in the school.

#### *6.3.5.12 Older parents and fathers*

Only one parent, and no teachers, mentioned age as a barrier to parental involvement.

**It depends on the age group of the parent because I think older parents, parents in their 40's, take it [parental involvement] more seriously. Younger ones think they are just wasting their time (Mr. Tsabedze, parent, School D).**

## Discussion

This observation was contrary to the quantitative findings, which showed that parents over 40 years of age initiated the least involvement (see 5.5.9.2). This may have been because older parents generally hold more traditional, limited views of their role at the school (see 5.5.9.2). However, the above quote illustrates, as would be expected, that some older parents are deeply aware of their responsibility to be involved in their children's education. None of the other teachers or parents mentioned age as a barrier to parental involvement.

The teachers did not specifically mention parent gender. This suggests that they were not biased against involving either fathers or mothers. This finding was supported by the quantitative results, which indicated that they made similar efforts to involve mothers and fathers (see 5.5.10). However, teachers' accounts indicated further that the majority of parents involved were women. Again this finding was supported by the quantitative data which revealed that, as is usually the case (Reay 1995:337), mothers were more involved than fathers in PIPI (see 5.5.10). This is probably because parental involvement, especially in the activities that can be initiated by parents, is generally considered a maternal role (see 5.5.10). However, fathers made up 40% of the workshop participants. Nevertheless, Reay (1995:346) points out that often many of the men present at school events are there because their wives encouraged them to go. Even so, the four men interviewed were more involved than their wives, and the teacher's mentioned many conversations and interactions with fathers. Thus, in this community although mothers were generally more involved there did not seem to be strict role delineation that reserved parental involvement exclusively for mothers. None of the fathers interviewed felt they had to explain or apologise for their involvement.

#### 6.3.5.13 *Transport*

Teachers did not feel that a lack of transport would prevent parents from attending events at the school.

**No, in Manzini with the community we are in, transport is not a problem at all. Because normally our meetings are not at night. They cater for everybody. The public transport is their so even if you are not mobile everyone is covered (Ms. Malaza, teacher, School D).**

#### Discussion

The teachers did not feel transport problems, such as have been found in South African communities (see 3.4.4.1), formed a barrier to parental involvement in this community. None of them mentioned this as a possible reason for lack of involvement and they dismissed this possibility when questioned. None of the parents, interviewed complained about transport problems or felt these may effect the involvement of other parents.

#### 6.3.5.14 *Poor planning of events*

A number of parents noted that events at the school had to be carefully planned so that parents could attend.

**I think its also the time [that the event is held] If maybe the times were after hours or on weekends then some would make time for such meetings. Funerals are usually scheduled from 07h00 to 10h00 so if the meeting is at 13h00 its OK. Timing is crucial. I think for this workshop the information was given at short notice. I only heard on Friday. When you get that invitation you already have plans (Mr. Kunene, parent, School C).**

#### Discussion

Various authors have noted that for events at schools to be well attended they must be well planned (Stouffer 1992:6; Swap 1992:70). Since these parents, like those in South Africa (see 3.4.4.1), had many work and social commitments, this seems to be especially true in this community. The head-teachers at Schools C

and D chose the time they felt would suit parents best for the workshops. However, the head-teachers did not seem to be aware of what suited the parents as nearly every parent interviewed complained that these meetings were too close to lunch. Since these schools lacked home-to-school communication (see 6.2.3.4), it is not surprising that head-teachers did not know the times that suited parents best. Parents also felt they had only been told in the last minute.

#### 6.3.5.15 *Teacher-parent relationships*

Parents and teachers felt they had very friendly caring relationships with each other.

**Myself, I am friendly with the parents. To me they turn out to be my sisters, my uncles, my what, what. Like my surname has got a bit off your surname so I say you are my uncle. So that the parents from afar say, "That is my teacher, the teacher of my child" [*pointing into the distance*]. So I believe the closer we come then the relationship, even the child starts to relax, and the parents believe in you. I believe that one can help very much (Ms. Dube, teacher, School D).**

**I think the relationship is a good one, they are caring. Every one of them. Even the head-mistress (Ms. Dlamini, parent, School D).**

#### Discussion

Although teachers complained that parents were occasionally bossy or blamed them for a child's failures, they generally felt that they had very good relationships with the parents, and had a great deal of difficulty thinking of negative incidents. The parents, without exception, claimed to have good relationships with the teachers, and ascribed some of their children's academic successes to them. The teachers' and parents' positive assessment of their relationship corresponded with the quantitative data, which showed that parents felt welcome, had very positive attitudes to the school, and felt the school had the same goals as they did (see 5.6). This was not unexpected since the majority of teachers and parents came from the same racial-ethnic community (see

4.2.4.1). This helped them to understand each other (see 6.3.5.8) and ensured congruency between the values and goals of teachers and parents. However, it was of concern that despite the fact that these were some of the most involved parents, not all of the parents knew the names of their child's class teacher. This indicates that while the relationships were friendly, they may not have always been close.

#### 6.3.6 Conclusions: Parents beliefs, knowledge, understanding and views of parental involvement and barriers to their involvement

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:313-318) note that the most critical factor determining whether parents are involved in their children's education is whether they perceive this to be part of their role and the extent to which they believe they can make a positive contribution. This study indicates that some parents may have felt that they had little or no role because they paid high school fees or as a result of the psychological impact of the practice of Swap's Protective Model by most of these schools. Further, even the most involved parents, who clearly had well-developed senses of personal efficacy, knew little about parental involvement. This limited the ways they could be involved as well as their perception of their role. It seems likely that many other parents simply were not fully aware of the benefits of their involvement and that this limited their involvement. Even the most committed Swazi parents, however, face other barriers to involvement (see Table 6.1).

Some of these barriers seem to be widespread and interfere with the involvement of parents in many countries and communities. These include lack of parent confidence (see 2.7.2.6) as well as parental frustration and annoyance while helping (see 2.9.2). Like parents in most countries (see 2.7.2.3), work commitments may form a barrier to the involvement of Swazi parents at the

school. The results, however, suggest that work commitments may also form a barrier to their involvement in home learning activities and supervision. As is the case in many countries (see 2.7.2.5), parental involvement in Swaziland is gendered. However, although mothers tended to be more commonly involved, this role was not reserved exclusively for mothers in this community. Almost all parents of children at these schools were highly educated and spoke English fluently. The majority of parents were also married. However, uneducated and single parents may be excluded from some types of parental involvement, as has been found in other communities (Epstein & Dauber 1991:290), due to teachers' negative stereotypic judgements. Further, lack of ability to communicate in English is likely to be a barrier to the involvement of Portuguese-speaking Mozambican parents.

Barriers to parental involvement in Swaziland that have not been mentioned previously by studies in other countries include the necessity for parents to prioritise the demands of their Chief over any school commitments, and the perception amongst parents that the involvement of only one parent is necessary.

Other barriers that seem to be particularly prevalent in southern Africa (see 3.4.4.1) include parents' commitments to their extended families, frequent funerals, the absence of one parent due to work commitments, aged parents, and children living with persons other than their parents.

However, in contrast to South Africa (see 3.4.4.1), illiteracy and unemployment are not barriers for the majority of parents, and factional fighting and low teacher morale are not present in this community. Lack of transport, a common barrier in other communities (see 2.7.2.7), was also not a barrier. Racial-ethnic differences between minority English speaking-parents and teachers were not a

barrier to the involvement of these parents, possibly because they are not socioeconomically disadvantaged and did not face communication barriers.

Moles (in Morris & Taylor 1998:221) states that differences between parents and teachers in culture, life-style, values and experiences is a major barrier to effective teacher-parent relations. Swazi teachers and parents had good relationships, positive attitudes to each other, and similar goals. This is probably largely as a result of the racial-ethnic homogeneity of the parent-teacher community. Thus, cultural congruency exists between the majority of parents and the school, and cultural differences are not a barrier to the involvement of the majority of Swazi parents. Moreover, contrary to some foreign studies but in accordance with others (see 2.7.2.1), parents of different SES had similar levels of involvement.

Barriers to the involvement of parents in urban primary education in Swaziland are summarized in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Barriers to parental involvement in Swazi primary education**

Factor	Proportion of parents for which the factor is a barrier		
	Many	Some	Very few to none
1. Lack of parental understanding of parental involvement and its benefits			
2. Lack of parent confidence/sense of efficacy			
3. Parents' work commitments			
4. Parents' commitments to extended family			
5. Parents' commitments to their Chief			
6. Frequent funerals			
7. Parental perception that the involvement of one parent is sufficient			
8. Poor planning of events			
9. Learners do not recognize parents' authority to assist them with home learning activities			
10. Parental frustration and annoyance			
11. Parent gender (fathers are less involved)			
12. Parental age over 40 years			
13. Single parenthood			
14. One parent absent due to work commitments			
15. Children not living with their parents			
16. Parents' home language different from language of school			
17. Parents form part of a racial-ethnic minorities			
18. Parental illiteracy or lack of education			
19. Parental unemployment			
20. Lack of parent-school congruency			
21. Low parental SES			
22. Poor teacher-parent relationships			
23. Lack of transport for parents			
24. Factional fighting			
25. Low teacher morale			

**6.4 Parental involvement in Swazi urban primary schools: Conclusions**

This study, like others (Epstein in Christenson *et al* 1992a:41), showed that there is **little correlation between teachers' attitudes towards parent involvement and their actual practices**. Swap 1993:27 notes, "Whether or

not teachers reach out to parents of children in their classrooms is dictated by policy (written or unwritten), custom or culture as much or more than by their individual inclinations". Teachers did not object to the lack of opportunities for parent involvement at these schools, and they did not make the effort to encourage parents to become involved. As a result very few channels for home to school communication existed at these schools and parents could not volunteer at the schools, make decisions or attend parenting workshops. The parents also had very few, infrequent opportunities to attend events at most of the schools. However, the teachers interviewed, would have liked parents to come and talk to them, supervise homework, find out how to help their children at home, volunteer in the classroom, fundraise, attend meetings and events, and make decisions on matters from uniform to the curriculum.

**Thus, a discrepancy exists between what is practiced by the school and teachers, who seem to follow Swap's Protective theoretical stance, and the teachers' attitudes, which reflect more closely Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model.** As other researchers (Christenson *et al* 1992a:41) have found, reasons for this may include time constraints and a lack of external rewards, since these teachers worked very hard and were under a great deal of stress. However, unlike teachers in some other studies (Christenson *et al* 1992a:41), these teachers did not feel that most parents lacked the commitment or the necessary education to be involved, although some teachers were concerned that parents did not always know how to help. Nor did teachers feel parental involvement jeopardised their professional status (Epstein 1986:277). **Instead, the main reason for this discrepancy between the attitudes and the practices of the teachers seems to stem from their complete lack of knowledge of parental involvement and the absence of a culture of parental involvement in Swaziland.**

Globally, teachers are rarely adequately trained in parental involvement. However **Swazi teachers do not even know what parental involvement is, they were not familiar with techniques of parental involvement and they did not fully appreciate its benefits.** As a result they did not view involving parents as either their responsibility or part of their role, made no attempt to teach parents how to be involved, and were willing to allow their schools to practice the Protective Model and keep school and parents separated. Epstein (1991:345) states that "most schools embrace the concepts of partnership and parent involvement". However, these schools, with the possible exception of School A, which practiced Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model, were not even aware of the concept of parental involvement. Even after teachers became aware of parental involvement, their lack of knowledge of it and the benefits of partnership with parents lead them to envisage the supportive, subordinate role for parents defined by Swap's School-to-Home Transmission model rather than true partnership.

**This ignorance of parental involvement amongst teachers and head-teachers stems from the lack of a parent involvement component in teacher training. This in turn stems from the Ministry of Education's lack of awareness of parental involvement.** As a result training in parental involvement is currently not required for teacher certification. In addition education policy only includes an extremely limited role for parents and even this role is not implemented in Swazi schools. Moreover, the inclusion of many educational decisions in the mandate of the Ministry of Education effectively prevents parents from being partners in their children's education by excluding them from most decision-making. Lack of awareness of parental involvement and corresponding policy also allows the school boards of private schools to exclude parents from decision-making and prevents a culture of parental involvement from developing in Swaziland. While authors in other countries complain that

parental involvement is more often rhetoric than reality (Christenson 1992a:179), in Swaziland this concept has not yet entered rhetoric.

**Schools, the Ministry of Education and/or school boards prevented parents from getting involved in many ways. Nevertheless, not all parents took the opportunities they had to be involved. Most parents supervised and helped with homework, held home discussions, attended PTA meetings and other events at the school (when these were held), and responded to written communication from the school.** However, many parents did not attend parent-teacher meetings or communicate personally with their children's teachers or frequently help their children prepare for tests, discuss TV programmes with them, or carry out reading activities with them. Even the interviewed parents, who were highly involved in many of the ways available to them, did not want any role in most decisions, had difficulty supervising their children, did not play educational games with them, and were not sure if they had the time to volunteer at school. These parents, unlike those with similar limited involvement in other studies (Hanafin & Lynch 2002:35), were satisfied with their limited opportunities for involvement. Further, teachers reported that a small group of parents were not involved in any way and did not even meet their basic obligations. **Thus, as a result of limited opportunities for involvement and because parents did not always take the opportunities they had to be involved, very little parental involvement occurred at these schools.** The only exception was private School A which had a slightly higher, though still very limited degree of parental involvement since parents were invited to many events at the school and most did attend these events.

**Parents knew very little about parental involvement since teachers did not teach parents how to be involved or even that they should be involved, and parents had had no other exposure to the concept of**

**parental involvement. Consequently, it is not surprising that some parents seemed to feel that they had no, or only a very limited, role in their children's education.** This belief stemmed from one of the following views: 1) paying high school fees absolved parents from playing a role, 2) the Protective theoretical stance of most of the schools, or 3) simply a lack of belief that parents could contribute positively to their children's education. **Even the most involved parents did not fully appreciate the benefits of parental involvement and were not aware of the full range of ways that they could be involved.** This limited their involvement.

**Swaziland is a unique community with its own unique set of barriers to parental involvement.** Barriers to parental involvement that Swaziland shares with many other communities include lack of parental sense of efficacy/confidence, parental frustration and annoyance when helping with learning activities, parental work commitments, and the gendered nature of parental involvement. Adoption by teachers of negative stereotypes about less educated and single parents, is also a barrier to the involvement of a minority of parents and a few parents may suffer from language barriers.

This study also revealed barriers not previously mentioned by other researchers. These included the necessity for Swazi parents to prioritise the demands of the Chiefs over the demands of the school and the parental perception that only one parent need be involved. Barriers common to southern Africa include commitments to extended families, attendance at frequent funerals, the absence of one parent due to work commitments and learners not living with their parents.

**Although little parental involvement occurs currently in this urban Swazi community a number of factors favour the implementation of a programme of parental involvement.** Barriers such as illiteracy, poverty,

unemployment, factional fighting, transport problems and low teacher morale, while prevalent in South Africa are virtually absent in this community. Further, low SES did not present a barrier to involvement, and teachers and the vast majority of parents are part of the same racial-ethnic community. **Differences in culture, race, life-styles and experiences that create real or assumed barriers to communication and partnerships, and distance parents and teachers (Keyes 2002:179) are absent in this community.** Teachers and parents had good relationships, similar values and positive attitudes to each other. Further, the teachers' readiness to adopt Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model, which provides parents with a far greater role in their children's education, suggests that these teachers would be open to involving parents far more widely; particularly, if they knew how to do so and fully appreciated the benefits of this. Thus, these teachers are probably open to involving parents according to the dictates of the School-to-Home Transmission Model. Moreover, Swap (1993:37) notes that the School-to-Home Transmission Model can provide a framework for the transition between a Protective stance with parents and a more collaborative one.

Chapter 7 presents recommendations for a parental involvement programme for Swazi urban primary schools based on the combined quantitative and qualitative findings and conclusions, revealed in the current chapter, and the literature review (see Chapters 2 & 3).