

Chapter 7

Recommendations for a parental involvement programme for urban primary schools in Swaziland

“To be effective, research shows family-involvement programs have to be well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting” (Henderson in Jones 2001:22).

7.1 Introduction

A wealth of research indicates that parental involvement is of great benefit to learners, and their teachers and parents. Comprehensive parental involvement including parenting, communication, involvement in home learning activities, involvement at the school, decision-making, and community collaboration is most beneficial. Parenting and involvement in home learning activities have been shown to have the greatest impact on the academic achievement of learners. In fact, the learning success of children has been found to correlate more closely with these factors than family background factors. Nevertheless, research has shown a relationship between various family background factors and the degree and type of parental involvement. Barriers to parental involvement operate in many communities. Further, various other factors relating to the child and government have been found to influence the extent and ways in which parents are involved. However, the most important determinant of parental involvement has been found to be the effort of teachers and schools to involve parents (see Chapter 2).

Despite the prioritisation of education in Swaziland, the needs of all Swazi learners are not being met. This is largely as a result of financial constraints. Nevertheless, education policy in Swaziland describes only a very limited role for parents and does not supply the means to implement this policy. Research suggests that parental involvement in southern African communities results in many of the same benefits as it does in other countries. Further, parental involvement is cost effective. This suggests that the deficiencies in the Swazi education system may be addressed effectively by the implementation of a parental involvement programme (see Chapter 3). Such a programme would require a thorough knowledge of parental involvement in this community.

In order to fully investigate parental involvement in urban primary schools in Swaziland, a combined quantitative and qualitative approach was taken. Parents

were asked to complete a self-rating questionnaire, which was used to statistically test a number of hypotheses about the involvement of parents with different family backgrounds in their children's education. Further, the parents' responses to the items on this questionnaire indicated their attitude to the school as well as strengths and weaknesses in their involvement and in the efforts of the schools to involve them. Moreover, a small group of teachers and parents were interviewed following an ethnographic approach in order to obtain a more detailed and in-depth perspective of parental involvement.

The combined quantitative and qualitative findings (see Chapters 5 & 6) revealed very limited parental involvement in urban primary education in Swaziland. Generally, teachers and schools practiced Swap's Protective Model, largely as a result of a lack of knowledge and understanding of parental involvement. This in turn stemmed from the lack of a Government policy on parental involvement, particularly the lack of the requirement of the completion of a course on parental involvement for teacher certification. The Ministry of Education also excluded parents from most decision-making. Since teachers knew very little about parental involvement they did not recognise or assume their role of involving parents and teaching them how to be involved. Consequently, parents had little understanding of parental involvement and its benefits and thus, did not always choose to be involved. A number of barriers further interfered with their involvement. For a more comprehensive summary of these findings see section 6.4.

In this chapter, recommendations for the design of a parental involvement programme for Swazi urban senior primary schools, and the implications these recommendations have for the major role players in education, are presented. These recommendations are based on the combined quantitative and qualitative findings and the literature review. The limitations of these findings are also indicated in order to establish the usefulness of these findings as the basis for the design of a parental involvement programme.

7.2 Limitations of this study

The findings, based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative results, had a high degree of reliability and validity (see 4.2.7, 4.3.10 & 4.3.11), thus, they provide a suitable basis for the design of a parental involvement programme. However, while the parental involvement findings are generalisable to Swazi urban senior primary school education, they are not generalisable to education at all schools and at all levels.

The generalisability of these results is particularly limited where rural schools are concerned. Rural schools in Swaziland, like those in South Africa (Maree & Molepo 1999:375), have fewer resources and operate under more difficult conditions than urban schools. Rural schools usually have larger class sizes, fewer facilities, higher proportions of children who do not live with their parents, higher proportions of illiterate parents and, unsurprisingly, poorer academic results (IE 1994:1-29). Thus, investigation of parental involvement in the rural Swazi population may yield quite different findings as was found by Heystek & Louw (1999:21) when they compared rural and urban South African schools. Further, research has shown that parents tend to be involved less and have different barriers to their involvement as their children get older (see 2.8), thus, caution must be exercised when generalising these results to junior primary or secondary education.

A further limitation of this study was that each hypothesis was not tested separately for each of Epstein's (1995:704) six types of parental involvement. Some studies that did not find differences in the extents various groups of parents were generally involved in their children's education, did find differences in the ways they were involved when involvement in these areas was measured separately (e.g. Hickman *et al* 1995:129). It is possible that while no significant differences in SIPI, PIPI and PAS were found for parents of different SES, education levels, languages, marital statuses and so forth, these parents may,

nevertheless, be involved to different degrees in some of Epstein's six types of involvement.

In conclusion, the findings of this study serve as a suitable basis for an urban senior primary parental involvement programme. However, further research is required in order to establish the involvement of parents with different family background factors in each of Epstein's six types of activities and to investigate parental involvement in rural areas and at other levels of education. Research will also be required to improve, and determine the effectiveness of, the parental involvement programme recommended in the following section.

7.3 A programme for parental involvement in urban senior primary education in Swaziland

7.3.1 Introduction

Urban primary school teachers and parents in Swaziland have unique understandings of, and feelings and beliefs about, parental involvement (see 6.4). Furthermore, unique barriers and facilitators to parental involvement exist in this community (see 6.4). Consequently, the parental involvement programme recommended in the following sections is based largely upon the findings of this study. Nevertheless, advice is also drawn from the literature. Downer (1996:44) states, "While there is no one "perfect" parental involvement program, there are elements common to all programs which can furnish a useful starting point for developing stronger links between home and school".

In practice successful parental involvement requires considerable time and sensitive work. Epstein (1991:348) found that three to fifteen years of concerted effort, during which programmes were honed to suit specific schools and districts, was required to see real progress in partnerships. Thus, the

recommendations that follow are intended to serve as starting points to increasing parental involvement in Swazi urban primary schools rather than final pronouncements on what must be done. As the programme unfolds it will necessarily require modification. Further, no two schools will have exactly the same programme since it will have to be adapted to suit the unique needs of each school's learners and families (Allen Brough & Irvin 2001:56). As a result most recommendations are in the form of broad guidelines.

A great number of different parent involvement practices have been studied and are recommended (see 2.4). It is not within the scope of this thesis to review each of these. However, specific recommendations of established strategies that may serve as useful guidelines to teachers and schools in the design of their own parental involvement programme are made.

In the following sections recommendations and implications for the major role players in parental involvement shall be given, followed by recommendations for improving involvement in each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement. Since the lack of a culture of parental involvement in this community can be traced back to the national education policy (see 6.4), this shall serve as the starting point for these recommendations.

7.3.2 Government

The Swazi government prioritises education and allocates a great deal of resources to education (see 3.2). This has resulted in an impressive improvement in the quality and accessibility of education in Swaziland over recent decades (IE 1994:1). However, efforts to improve education have not focussed on parental involvement (see 3.3.2.2). The limited role assigned to parents in their children's education by education policy, suggests that policy makers and Education Ministry officials are not fully aware of the benefits and cost effectiveness of

parental involvement. Numerous research studies have shown parental involvement to be one of the most inexpensive and effective ways to improve the quality of education (Epstein 1991:349; van der Werf *et al* 2001:447).

Education policy has a large impact on the practice of parental involvement at schools (Epstein 1987b:5). Epstein (1987b:7) notes that the first step towards a viable parent involvement programme is the **design of specific policy for parental involvement**. Consequently, the design of a policy **that clearly specifies the government's perspectives, services, requirements and expectations concerning parental involvement** is recommended. **Explicit guidelines for the implementation** of policy, similar to those in South African education policy on parental involvement in government and advocacy (see 3.3.3), must be included (see 3.3.4). In order to derive maximum benefits it is recommended that **policy makers adopt Swap's Partnership Model** of parental involvement (see 2.7.4.4). However, a culture of parental involvement has not been established in Swaziland (see 6.4). As a result it may be unrealistic to expect teachers and parents to make the transition from Swap's Protective Model, which is practiced at most schools, to the Partnership Model. Swazi teachers were open to Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model (see 6.4). Thus, **policy that adopts Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model as a stepping stone towards partnership** may be more successfully implemented. Swap (1993:37) notes, "If the experiences of school personnel are positive over time and good relationships are developed through sustained contact, school personnel's control over programs may give way to a more comfortable and mutual exchange of ideas and joint planning".

Further, it is recommended that **policy be comprehensive and include all six of Epstein's types of involvement**. Comprehensive programmes are most beneficial (see 2.4.1). Further, a comprehensive programme would provide opportunities for all Swazi parents to be involved in their children's education. Not all parents will be able to volunteer at the school, due to work commitments

(see 6.2.4.5), and only small numbers of parents serve on decision-making committees (see 3.3.3.2). Thus, types of involvement such as involvement in **learning activities in the home and parenting**, in which most parents can play a role must also be included. Moreover, these two types of involvement are particularly effective in improving academic outcomes (see 2.4.8). Hence, it is recommended that they **are emphasised** in the parental involvement programme.

It is recommended that this comprehensive policy include, at the very least, an **advisory role in decision-making for parents with a view towards future partnership** (see 2.4.6). This requires that the **Ministry of Education devolve many of its decision-making powers to the individual schools** (see 6.2.6). Policy should require head-teachers, teachers and parents to make decisions together on curriculum, teaching methods, staffing requirements, discipline and so forth. Further, **education policy should obligate private schools to accord parents some role in decision-making**.

For successful implementation, policy must be **effectively communicated to schools and backed by adequate resources** (see 3.3.4). Epstein (1991:348) recommends that school districts employ a **parent involvement facilitator whose job is specifically to promote parental involvement** by guiding school staff, providing in-service training for teachers, offering services to parents and so forth. Epstein (in Jones 2001:22), notes that this is a “thrifty investment” because each facilitator can be shared between up to 30 schools.

Competitive grants should be awarded to schools to fund parental involvement programmes. These grants have been used successfully in other countries (see 2.7.5). Chapman (1991:358) advises that **multi rather than single year grants** are awarded as it often takes longer than a year to involve parents effectively. Parental involvement cannot succeed without adequate financial resources (Epstein 1987b:4).

It is advised **that a budget be allocated to recognise the successes of teachers** in this area. Since Swazi teachers work hard and have little time or energy for the demanding task of involving parents (see 6.3.3.6), teachers need to be given incentives to motivate them to involve parents and teach parents how to be involved. While many alternatives exist, financial bonuses or awards from the Ministry of Education based on the recommendations of head-teachers and the parent involvement facilitators may serve to help motivate teachers.

Nevertheless, all the teachers interviewed were extremely dedicated and their lack of knowledge of parental involvement was primarily responsible for their low efforts to involve parents (see 6.3.3.8). As a result the greatest motivation for them to help establish and implement parental involvement would be a proper understanding of it, its techniques and benefits. Thus, it is recommended that **teacher certification require the completion of a course in parental involvement and that teachers receive in-service training in parental involvement**. These courses should have both an applied and a theoretical component (Comer 1987:14).

7.3.3 Teachers

Swazi teachers need to be taught what parental involvement is. They must be made familiar with different parental involvement activities and the benefits thereof (see 6.3.3.2). **These teachers must be taught that it is part of their role to involve parents and that parental involvement is primarily their responsibility** (see 6.3.3.3. & 6.3.3.4). The skills required to involve parents effectively must be communicated to Swazi teachers and they must be taught that it is possible to involve all parents productively including single (see 6.3.5.9) and uneducated parents (see 6.3.5.2). Thus, **a comprehensive pre-service or in-service parental involvement course that provides teachers with the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence**

they require to involve all parents successfully is recommended for all teachers.

Shartrand et al (in van Wyk 2001:128) have developed such a framework of attitudes, skills and knowledge that educators need to work effectively with families and the community. Further, they have described four different approaches to parental involvement that can be adopted by the teacher training institution. The approach adopted affects how these seven common areas of content are presented to the teacher (Shartrand *et al* in van Wyk 2001:131). **This flexible but comprehensive programme may serve as a good basis for an initial pre-service or in-service course on parental involvement for Swazi teachers.**

The vast majority of parents and teachers came from the same sociocultural background (see 6.4). As a result, teachers understood parents' barriers to involvement as they faced many of the same barriers and had similar values to, and very good relationships with, parents (see 6.3.5.8 & 6.3.5.15). Thus the majority of the parents were not isolated from the school culture. Consequently, a Swazi parent involvement course may not need to place as much emphasis on teacher understanding and respect of the values and cultures of other racial-ethnic groups as courses in other communities where sociocultural differences form a major barrier to involvement (see 2.7.2.1 & 2.7.2.2). Nevertheless, the urban parent community is not completely homogenous (see Table 4.2) and some racial-ethnic or language groups, such as Portuguese-speaking parents, may be distanced from the school (see 6.3.5.6). Consequently, it is recommended that **respect for and understanding of cultural differences, as well as ways to help these parents become more involved are addressed as part of the course.** Teachers must be open to and accepting of all types of parents. It is essential that schools and teachers realise that involving different families requires different strategies and that a "one style fits all" approach tends to result in some families not becoming involved (Edwards &

Jones-Young 1992:76). Consequently, **teachers must be taught to implement a variety of strategies and techniques** to encourage parental involvement (Tichenor 1998:256).

In-service programmes should specifically target head-teachers who communicate their vision of parental involvement to the teachers (see 6.3.4.2c). Downer (1996:45) notes that, "The future of parental involvement in education rests significantly on the energy, vision and will of the school principal".

After the initial course on parental involvement, more advanced annual or **bi-annual courses to motivate and update teachers and head-teachers** are recommended.

Swazi teachers and head-teachers work very hard at school (see 6.3.3.6), and have many commitments outside work hours (see 6.3.5.8). Consequently, it is recommended that **courses are accompanied by lunch, and that teachers' bus fares are paid**. This is likely to prevent teachers from feeling resentful about the additional demands placed on their time by course attendance.

7.3.4 Parents

Gettinger and Guetschow (1998:40) state, "Parents who hold positive efficacy beliefs assume that their involvement will be beneficial for children and are likely to participate actively in school activities even when faced with difficulties." Steps must be taken to ensure that **all Swazi parents, and particularly older parents and fathers** (see 6.3.5.12), **realise that their involvement will benefit their children**. All parents, **regardless of whether they pay high school fees** or not (see 6.3.4.2), must recognise that their role in their children's education is **essential and irreplaceable**. **Workshops, that explain the nature and benefits of parental involvement are**

recommended. These could be directed by the parent involvement facilitator, parent-involvement committee (see 7.3.5), and teachers. However, parents must not simply be told that they should be involved. Not all Swazi parents were confident or knew how to help their children (see 6.2.5.4 & 6.3.5.3). Workshops must also provide parents with the **specific skills** that they need to feel confident and be involved effectively (see 6.3.5.3). Parents also need to be **warned about involvement practices that may be detrimental to their children** (see 2.9.2). Jantjes (1995:300) advises that parents be reminded of their responsibilities once or twice a year.

Further, Epstein (1988:58) emphasises the importance of schools showing parents that their involvement is permitted and encouraged. Thus, it is recommended that the **head-teacher and teachers also make continual informal efforts** to invite parents to be involved, provide them with skills, and show approval of their attempts to be involved. Although most schools had an **open-door policy** and parents felt welcome (see 6.2.3), it is recommended that each school literally make room for parents by **establishing a “parent room” at the school** where parents can discuss ideas and obtain information and resources (Epstein 1991:349). All parents should feel that the school is a good place for them as well as their children (see 5.6.1).

7.3.5 Schools

Each school should have its own policy on parental involvement, as is the case in many other countries (Cullingford & Morrison 1999:253). This **policy should be created by the combined efforts of the head-teacher, teachers and all parents** working together (Edwards & Warin 1999:337). Epstein (1995:708) recommends that **each school create an action team**, which includes at least three teachers and three parents of children at different

grade levels, whose task it is to draw up and guide the implementation of this policy.

It is essential that this **committee be truly representative** of the teachers and all parents. This is necessary for the teachers' sense of ownership of this policy without which they are less likely to become involved (Lawson 2003:113). Further, according to Rasinski (in Parr *et al* 1993:36) the key to any successful parent-school collaboration is giving parents a **meaningful role in the planning of this collaboration. Consequently, the entire parent body must have the opportunity to comment on and modify policy before it is finalised.** Parent meetings, newsletters, and surveys can be used for this purpose. Existing surveys, such as that of Brown (2000:10), can be used as the basis for designing surveys to suit the specific school.

The school policy should **clearly outline the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and teachers and be effectively and regularly communicated to all involved.** As a result both teachers and parents must know that parents are expected to be involved and in precisely what ways. Comer (1987:15) recommends that this policy include a **"no fault" philosophy**, such that emphasis is placed on problem solving rather than assigning blame to either teachers or parents when problems do occur.

Like education policy, for successful implementation, school policy must include **clear and explicit guidelines for the practice of each of Epstein's six types of involvement.** Epstein (1995:709) recommends that initially the **parent involvement committee develop a three-year outline of goals** for each of the six types of involvement that will help the school progress from its starting point to where it wants to be in three years. In addition, a **detailed one-year plan** should be developed for the first year's work. It should include the **specific activities** that will be implemented, improved, or maintained, and a **time line of monthly actions** needed for each activity. Further the one-year

plan must **clearly identify the specific people who are responsible** for and who will assist with the implementation of each activity and must include how the **implementation or results of each activity will be assessed** (Epstein 1995:709).

Policy should be revised on an ongoing basis to improve parent involvement and include the beliefs and circumstances of new learners, parents and teachers. It is recommended that the parent involvement committee schedule a **meeting for the entire parent body at least twice a year** to present its goals and progress and receive feedback from the parent body (Epstein 1995:709).

7.3.6 Recommendations for each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement

Since a comprehensive programme is recommended, ways to increase each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement follow. Vast multitudes of different parental involvement activities exist (Epstein 1995:707). Since resources are limited and teachers have little experience of parental involvement in Swaziland, **inexpensive and easily implemented** activities are recommended for this programme.

7.3.6.1 Parenting

Parenting has been found to have a very strong relationship with school achievement, and to have a greater effect on academic success than SES variables (see 2.4.2). Thus, it is recommended that the Swazi parental involvement programme **emphasise parenting**.

Swazi parents, like parents everywhere, care about their children and want them to be well educated (see 6.3.4.2d). Although Swazi parents met their children's material needs (see 6.2.2.3), some parents became so annoyed and frustrated

when trying to help their children that they abandoned these attempts (see 6.3.5.5). Further, parents did not always employ ideal parenting styles (see 6.2.2.1 & 6.3.4.2d) and, teachers complained, and parents admitted, that parents did not always supervise their children adequately (6.2.2.3). Consequently, it is recommended that **schools hold workshops that focus on parenting skills and home supervision**. **Fathers** in particular, many of whom may not have learned positive skills from their own fathers (Frieman & Berkeley 2002:209), may need information about positive fathering (see 6.3.5.12).

It is recommended that **Jantjes's questionnaire** (Jantjes 1995:304), **serve as the basis of such a parenting workshop**. This questionnaire describes specific, manageable, inexpensive activities aimed at producing positive changes in the home environment and was used successfully to benefit learners, their teachers and parents, in an impoverished South African community (Jantjes 1995:289-304). Further, this questionnaire served as the basis of the well received parental involvement workshop used in this study (see 4.3.5.3 & 6.3.4.2d). Teachers must guard against using these workshops as opportunities to teach parents the values of the school (Edwards & Warin 1999: 337).

In addition, a number of specific recommendations are made, particularly, with regard to home supervision (see 6.2.2.3). Parents should **monitor** what their children are watching and **restrict** the number of hours their children spend **watching TV** (see 6.2.2.2). **Time-tables** that clearly demarcate time for school-work, chores, TV and homework should be drawn-up by parents and children to ensure an appropriate balance between these activities and to ensure that school-work is not left to a time when the child is exhausted (see 6.2.2.3). Parents should also arrange a **quiet place** for their children to study (Christenson *et al* 1992b:185).

7.3.6.2 Communication

Good two-way communication is the fundamental criterion for any successful parental involvement programme (Dimmock *et al* 1996:16). **Parents must understand** that it is not enough for them to respond to written communication from the school but **that personal communication with the teacher is essential** (see 6.2.3.4). **Parents and teachers need to realise that all parents have an abundance of knowledge about their children's skills, interests and backgrounds** that should be communicated to teachers (see 6.2.3.3). **The school must create opportunities for parents to communicate** this information. It is recommended that teachers and schools **provide many formal and informal occasions**, in addition to their open-door policy (see 6.2.3.4), for teachers to meet with and talk to parents. Each school should invite parents at all grade levels to attend an **orientation meeting** within the first month of the first term where teachers have the opportunity to meet with and talk to parents and the subject of parental involvement can be broached. Thereafter, teachers and parents should communicate personally at **teacher-parent meetings, PTA meetings, sports, cultural and social events, workshops** and so forth. On these occasions **teachers should make a deliberate effort** to talk to all parents. Schools should **maintain their reports and frequent effective written notes** to parents (see 6.2.3.4), however in addition, it is recommended that each child carry a **communication book** which is used by parents and teachers to communicate with each other.

Most schools in Swaziland have only one phone line and teachers are only available at break, thus it is difficult for teachers to communicate telephonically with parents from the school (see 5.7.3). However, the satisfaction of the few parents who did communicate with teachers telephonically (see 6.2.3.4) suggests that **teachers should make their home telephone numbers available to parents** and encourage parents to phone them at mutually agreed upon times.

In addition, Stouffer (1992:6) recommends that schools issue **regular newsletters** and that both **parents and teachers monitor daily or weekly check-sheets for learner progress**. These are inexpensive but effective methods of communication. Although teachers' time constraints and the fact that some parents live far away from the school probably make **home visits** to most parents impractical, these **are recommended for parents who are particularly hard to reach** in other ways.

Schools should certainly continue to **contact the parents in the case of a drop in the academic performance of a child or the development of behaviour problems** (see 6.2.3.3a). However, true partnership between teacher and parent requires that the teacher ensure that the **parent is thoroughly informed about every aspect of his child's education** (Chapman 1991:358). It is recommended that teachers ensure that every parent knows how his child **behaves in the classroom, the child's relationship with peers at school, which topics are being studied, and about all events occurring at the school**. This information gives the parents the knowledge and confidence they require to help their children, and make suggestions and contributions to the school (Epstein 1986:288). **Teachers must know that communication with all parents, not just those whose children have problems, is essential** (see 6.2.3.3a & 6.3.3.5). Stouffer (1992:6) recommends that **emphasis be placed on relaying positive news** to the parent. Further, to successfully involve parents, **all communications should be polite, respectful, warm, and friendly** such that the parent feels valued and welcome at the school. For example, parents should not view parent-teacher meetings as functions where they must account for the failures of their children (Johnson & Ramson 1980:121).

Swazi urban primary schools communicate to parents in either siSwati or English (see 3.2). Although most parents are comfortable communicating in these languages, a small proportion, particularly those that are Portuguese-speaking,

may experience a communication barrier (see 6.3.5.6). In order to involve these parents in their children's education it is recommended that where possible, **teachers who are able to communicate in the other languages be asked to translate school notes**. Further, all **teachers must make a special effort to invite and encourage these parents to attend meetings with a friend, relative, or even their own child, who can serve as a translator**.

Finally, it is recommended that because sometimes only one parent in the couple is highly involved (see 6.3.5.11), **teachers must ensure that they maintain contact with both the mother and the father** whether or not the parents are married. **If the child is living with someone other than the parents**, which is sometimes the case in urban Swaziland (see 6.3.5.10), then **both the parents and this other person must receive all communications from the school and be invited to communicate with teachers**.

7.3.6.3 Involvement at the school

Swazi urban parents are formally invited to the school too infrequently (see 6.2.4). **It is recommended that parents be invited far more often to formal events at times and dates that suit them**. Head-teachers do not seem to know what these times are (see 6.3.5.14). Thus, each school should carry out a **survey to determine the most suitable days and dates for school meetings**. Whenever possible **meetings and events should not be held during work hours, on weekend mornings when funerals are held, or on days where parents are known to have commitments to their local Chief** (see 6.3.5.7 & 6.3.5.8). The school could also arrange a **baby-sitter** as Stouffer (1992:6) suggests. This may encourage **non-Swazi parents** who may not have extended family available to look after their children to attend meetings (see 6.3.5.8). It is not necessary for the schools to arrange transport for parents (see 6.3.5.13).

It is recommended that **parent-teacher meetings are held at least once a school term** (see 6.2.4.1). **Class teachers should keep a register** noting whether and which family member attends these meetings. If the **primary caretaker of the child has not attended, this person should be contacted and an alternative date arranged**. The school must ensure that the **importance of parental attendance at these meetings is explained prior to these meetings** so that all parents are fully aware of the necessity of attending these meetings (see 6.2.4.1). The flexibility shown at School D where parents could arrange alternative dates may have been partly responsible for the high parent attendance of these meetings that these teachers claimed (see 6.2.4.1). Consequently, it is recommended that **parents are given a choice of a few times and days to attend parent-teacher meetings**. It is advised that **schools adopt Swap's guidelines** for productive and well-attended parent-teacher meetings (Swap 1992:70-71).

As Swazi schools are under funded (see 3.2) it is recommended that **schools hold frequent fundraisers**. Parents' willingness to raise funds (see 6.2.4.2) should be harnessed by **encouraging parents to be the major role players in fundraising**. In order that parents feel a sense of ownership for the fundraising effort, **parents should decide on how funds are spent and organise and manage fundraisers**. The election of parents to an **annual fundraising committee** is recommended. The majority of the members of this committee should be parents although a few staff members would be needed to represent the school.

Teachers, head-teachers, and parents need to be made aware of the importance of sports, social and cultural events to the development of the whole child. They must know that parents' attendance at these events not only motivates children but may also improve their grades and provides excellent informal opportunities for parents and teachers to get to know each other, share information, and build positive

relationships (see 2.4.4). These events which Swazi parents are particularly enthusiastic about, must be **held far more frequently** (see 6.2.4.3). Comer (in Jones 2001:21) says that his proven recipe for bringing parents into schools is to feed them and put their kids on the stage. It is recommended that **at least one of each of these sporting, cultural or social events be held each term, that refreshments are provided, and that parents are asked to help plan, organise and manage these events**. Further, schools should use these events as opportunities to hand out information, offer tours of the school buildings, and begin discussions about learners' work (Jones 2001:21).

Schools must invite parents to play a role in educational trips. Parents were willing to be involved and their contributions improved these trips (6.2.4.4.). **It is recommended that venues be decided upon through parent-teacher consultation and that parents be asked to help organise, and supervise these trips.**

Although most teachers were enthusiastic about parents volunteering in the classroom, **all teachers must be persuaded that all parents can contribute positively by volunteering at the school and not just those who are educated or have some training in education** (see 6.2.4.5). All parents should be invited to volunteer in the classroom at **all grade levels** and not just the lower grades. Teachers also need to be made aware of the many other ways that parents can volunteer at the school. It is recommended that **parents are invited to help volunteer at the tuck-shop, in the classroom, on the sports field, in the library, in the school administration, and to give talks to the learners**. McKenna and Willms (1998:34) note that to give all parents an opportunity to volunteer, **schools may need to provide training in some areas**.

Teachers and parents have similar commitments (see 6.3.5.8) and teachers understand that intensive involvement at the school is not possible for many

parents mainly due to work commitments (see 6.2.4.5). Nevertheless, **teachers should be persistent in their efforts to involve parents at the school** even if only for an hour or two. For the same reasons it may be unrealistic to expect both parents to attend all meetings and events at the school. However, if **teachers** note that the same parent attends all events (see 6.3.5.11) it is recommended that they **personally invite and encourage the other parent to attend as well. Parents should know that it is preferable for both parents to attend events and meetings** (see 6.3.5.11).

7.3.6.4 Learning activities in the home

Since it is easier for all parents to be involved in **home learning activities** and since these activities are particularly effective in improving children's grades (see 2.4.5), it is recommended that these activities **be emphasised**.

Teachers and parents need to be aware that home discussion has been shown to have a particularly strong relationship with learner academic achievement (see 2.4.8). It is recommended that **teachers explain the importance of home discussion to parents and encourage parents to talk to their children** about their friends, experiences at school, and their future goals, and offer them verbal encouragement and guidance. Teachers should inform parents of **specific strategies** that they can use to create opportunities for home discussion, for example, meal-times together with the TV off.

Swazi teachers value parents' help in ensuring that homework is done and many parents supervise homework (see 6.2.5.4). To encourage all parents to supervise their children's homework, it is recommended that all **schools have a policy that requires parents to sign the completed homework**. If this is not done, teachers should contact parents and personally request that they sign homework and explain the importance of doing this.

Most Swazi parents help with homework whether teachers want them to or not, but many parents do not know how to help (see 6.2.5.4 & 6.3.5.3). **Teachers need to know that all parents, even those that are less educated, can help with homework productively but that they need to be taught, by the teachers how to help** (see 6.2.5.4 & 6.3.5.2). McKenna and Willms (1998:34) state that the most important criterion for the success of home learning programmes is that parents receive adequate instruction in their role. **Parents must be taught strategies that are developmentally appropriate for the child. Skills workshops for parents** are recommended. Nevertheless, **parents should not be used as extensions of the teacher and taught to act in “teacherly” ways**. This has been found to have a negative effect on parents’ motivation to be involved in home learning activities (Edwards & Warin 1999:330-333). Teachers, while **providing clear guidelines for every homework assignment**, should enthusiastically embrace parents’ correct but different ways of helping their children with homework.

In addition to daily routine homework assignments that are mainly intended for learners to practice skills learned at school, **teachers must become aware that homework can be used as a tool for parental involvement** (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:182). It is recommended that with the help of the parent-involvement facilitator, **teachers design home learning activities that are specifically intended to be done by parents and children together and that maximise the unique positive qualities of the parent-child relationship**. These activities must be purposeful, engaging, manageable, and of high quality in order to appropriately and effectively involve parents, motivate both parent and child, and be of benefit to the child (Kliman 1999:140; Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:186). Epstein and van Voorhis (2001:186) recommend that this type of homework be given **once a week or once every two weeks** in order to accommodate family schedules. **Teachers may wish to base their designs on the “Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)”** interactive homework process designed by Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001:186).

TIPS has been designed to extend time for learners to practice skills and learn actively, increase teacher-parent communications about the curriculum, and improve parent-child connections on learning activities at home (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:189-190). TIPS has been shown to improve learner's grades in some subject areas and help parents of senior primary school children know what their children have learned in class (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:187-189). **TIPS manuals and prototype materials are available** (Epstein & Van Voorhis 2001:189) **and it is recommended that teachers consider using these as the basis for their design of interactive homework.** Alternatively, teachers can design and send home **inexpensive subject specific packages of manipulatives and activities** for parents and children to work on together. These can be based on one or more of the numerous home-packages that have been used successfully in foreign schools (see Gennaro & Lawrenz 1992:985-994; Carey 1998:314-319; Ehnebuske 1998:338-351; Gervasoni 1998:12-14).

Swazi parents and teachers must also be made aware of the advantages to the child of parents playing educational games with them, reading with them, helping them prepare for tests, and reading their compositions (see 5.7.3 & 6.2.5.3). Caldwell (1998:367) recommends including educational games in school libraries and holding "family board game nights". It is advised that **parents be given a monthly schedule of assignments and tests.** The practice used by Ms. Dube to **involve parents in their children's composition writing** is recommended (see 6.2.5.3).

7.3.6.5 *Decision-making*

Involvement in decision-making enables parents to feel a sense of ownership of the school and ensures a better fit between the needs of the children and school policy (see 2.4.6). Consequently, it is recommended **that parents of Swazi urban primary school children be given an advisory role in all decisions concerning their children's education.** This includes decisions on curriculum, teaching methods, amount and types of homework, how school funds are spent,

discipline, school uniform, school time-table, and the appointment of school staff. **A full partnership is not recommended initially** due to the reluctance of the parents interviewed, who were highly involved in other ways, to contribute to these decisions (see 6.2.6). It seems possible that, as found in other countries (see 2.4.6), many Swazi parents do not want much role in decision-making. Playing an advisory role in decisions may help parents see themselves as decision-makers and **make the transition to partnership** possible. Further, teachers who also have no experience of parents as decision-makers, are not likely to resist this advisory role for parents as most teachers were enthusiastic about parents contributing to most decisions (see 6.2.6.8).

Consequently, it is recommended **that education policy be amended to ensure that school boards are no longer allowed to make decisions in isolation** (see 7.3.2). Teachers and the school PTA, or some other **truly representative parent body must be invited to attend and contribute to any school board meetings where decisions are made**. Before decisions are made, PTA general meetings should include a presentation of various alternatives to the parent body. The parents should be given an opportunity to air their views publicly at these meetings and express their opinions through votes or surveys. **The opinions of the majority of parents should then be adopted unless these are contrary to the professional judgement of the majority of teachers**. Clearly, parents will not continue to express their beliefs if these are frequently ignored. When decisions are finalised, the **rationale for them should always be explained to the parent body**. It is recommended that over time parents who are representative of the school parent body should come to constitute the majority of the school governing body.

7.3.6.6 Community collaboration

The schools studied operated in virtual isolation from their wider communities (see 6.2.7). Interaction only took place between schools and their parent

community or religious community (see 6.2.7). **It is recommended that partnerships be established between the community and the school that will benefit both parties.**

It is advised, even though children of families living within the immediate vicinity of the school often attend other schools (see 3.2), that **schools become the centre of community life** as stated in South African policy (see 3.3.3.1). Community centres are in short supply in urban Swaziland and it is recommended that **school facilities be made available to the community** for community social, fundraising and educational events. Further, **school children can contribute to their communities** by visiting hospitalised children and the aged, collecting litter, providing choral and musical programmes for the community and so forth. As a result of such activities local businesses are likely to be far more enthusiastic about making donations, and sponsoring events, at schools.

Schools should draw up a register of local agencies and organisations.

It is recommended that, as was done by a South African school (Lemmer 2000:71), **each grade be allocated a “buddy organisation”** with whom they would work for a year. Further, local businesses could also be approached to **donate their outdated computer equipment to schools and any other materials** that they no longer require that may have educational value. Peressini (1998:324) suggests that restaurants and shops be approached to donate menus and grocery flyers that may be useful in maths classes. **Volunteer tutors** in various subjects could also be sought from the local community and the school could ask **experts in the community to help train school staff in financial and computer skills**. There are many **religious groups, businesses, and non-government organisations** in urban areas. It is recommended that like School D (see 6.2.7), all schools frequently invite members of these organisations to **make presentations** to the learners on subjects such as life-skills and career opportunities.

7.4 Summary of recommendations for a Swazi urban primary school parental involvement programme

For the convenience of policy makers and educators, a summary of the recommendations and implications of these recommendations for the major role players in parental involvement is tabulated (see Table 7.1). This is followed by Table 7.2, which presents a brief overview of the recommendations for each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement.

Table 7.1 Recommendations for the major role players in parental involvement

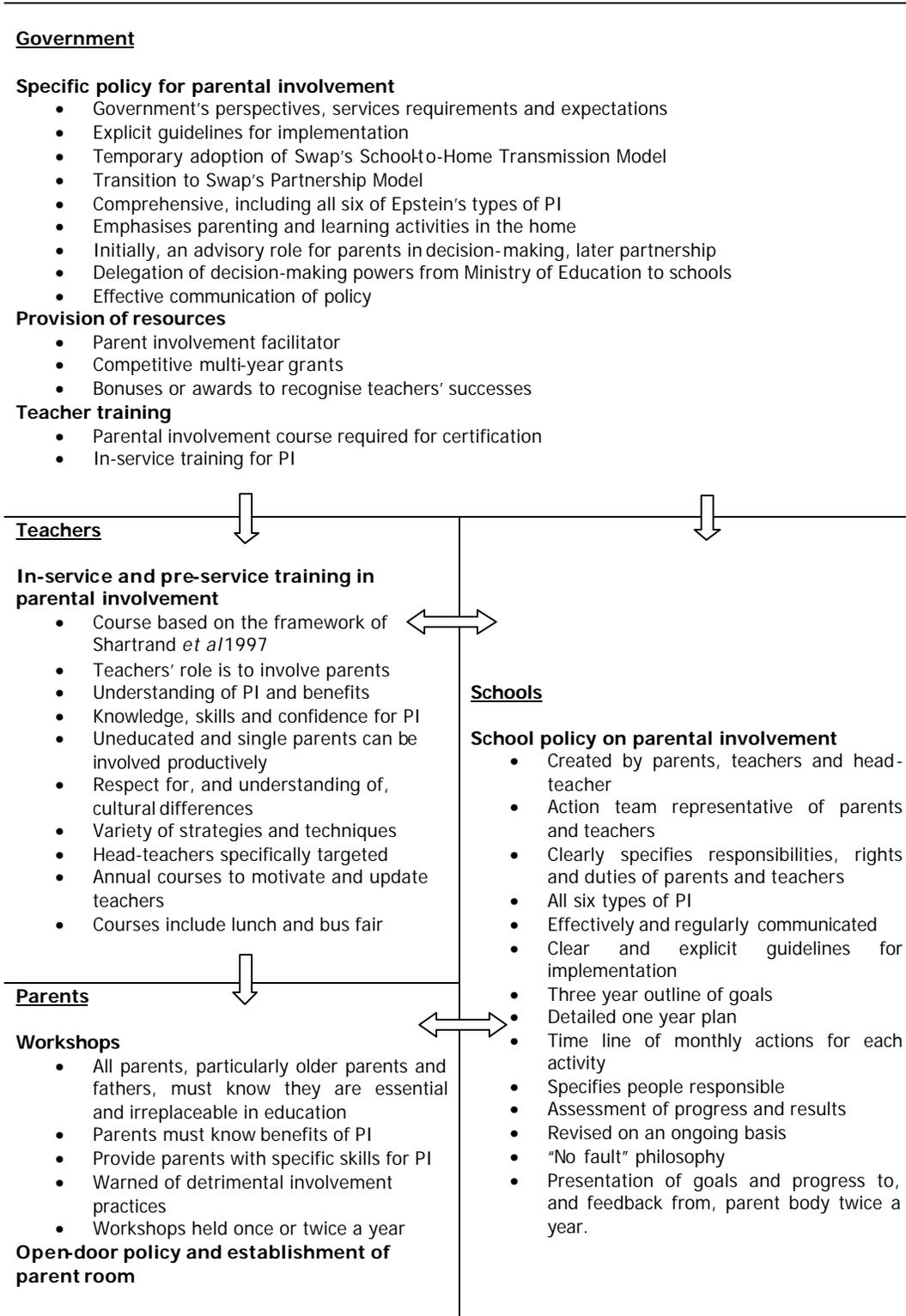


Table 7.2 Recommendations for each of Epstein's six types of parental involvement

<u>Parenting</u>	<u>Communication</u>	<u>Involvement at the school</u>	<u>Learning activities in the home</u>	<u>Decision-making</u>	<u>Community collaboration</u>
<p>Must be emphasised.</p> <p>Workshops on parenting skills and home supervision based on Jantjes 1995 questionnaire.</p> <p>Positive fathering skills.</p> <p>Parents must supervise and restrict amount of TV watched.</p> <p>Time-table of home activities</p> <p>A quiet place for study.</p>	<p>Personal two-way communication is essential.</p> <p>Teachers must realise parents have abundance of knowledge on child's skills, interests and backgrounds.</p> <p>School must create many formal and informal opportunities for communication including, orientation, PTA and teacher-parent meetings and sports, cultural and social events.</p> <p>Reports, written notes, and communication books.</p> <p>Teachers' home numbers made available to parents.</p> <p>Regular newsletters.</p> <p>Check-sheets for learner progress.</p> <p>Home visits to hard-to-reach parents.</p> <p>Child's behaviour, relationship with peers, topics and events communicated.</p> <p>Emphasis on positive communication.</p> <p>Polite, respectful warm and friendly communication.</p> <p>Notes translated for non-English speakers.</p> <p>Contact maintained with mother, father and other care-givers.</p>	<p>Frequent formal invitations to school.</p> <p>Survey to determine suitable dates and times.</p> <p>Baby-sitters provided.</p> <p>Parent -teacher meetings once per term. Flexible times and dates. Register of parent attendance kept. Swap's 1992 guidelines adopted.</p> <p>Frequent fundraisers organised and managed by parents. Fundraising committee elected.</p> <p>One sports, cultural and social event per term. Parents and teachers must be informed of the benefits of events and parent attendance. Parents help, plan, organise and manage.</p> <p>Parents invited to organise and supervise educational trips.</p> <p>All parents invited to volunteer at school at all grade levels and school venues. Schools provide training.</p> <p>Both parents encouraged to attend events.</p>	<p>Must be emphasised.</p> <p>Teachers emphasise home discussion and provide strategies.</p> <p>School policy requires parents to sign homework.</p> <p>Teachers must be informed that all parents can help and must teach parents effective, developmentally appropriate strategies and skills at workshops.</p> <p>Parents must not be regarded as extensions of teachers.</p> <p>Homework as a tool for parental involvement. Teachers design interactive homework based on TIPS and/or give subject specific packages of manipulatives once a week or every fortnight.</p> <p>Parents encouraged to play educational games, carry out reading activities, play a role in written compositions, and help prepare for tests and assignments.</p> <p>Parents given monthly test and assignment schedule.</p>	<p>Initially parents given an advisory role, as a step towards partnership in all decisions, including, decisions on curriculum, teaching methods, staff appointments, discipline, uniform, time-table, spending of school funds and homework.</p> <p>School boards not permitted to make decisions in isolation.</p> <p>Representative parent committee contributes to decisions.</p> <p>Presentation of alternatives to parent body and parents given opportunity to express opinions publicly and by voting or through surveys.</p> <p>Opinions of majority of parents adopted unless contradictory to professional judgement of teachers.</p> <p>In time parents must constitute majority of decision-making body.</p>	<p>Establishment of partnerships between community and schools.</p> <p>Schools as community centres.</p> <p>Services by learners to the community including, litter drives, choral and musical programmes, visits to the sick and aged.</p> <p>Schools draw up register of local agencies and organisations.</p> <p>Each grade allocated a "buddy organisation".</p> <p>Businesses approached for outdated equipment and materials.</p> <p>Volunteer tutors and staff trainers sought from community.</p> <p>Frequent presentations to learners by community groups and organisations.</p>

7.5 Concluding remarks

Without a structured parental involvement programme it is likely that Swazi urban senior primary school parents would continue to be only minimally involved in their children's education. Thus, recommendations for a parent involvement programme suited to this community have been given. These recommendations are tabulated for ease of application by policy makers and educators (see Tables 7.1 & 7.2). The implementation of this programme should enable teachers and parents to recognise the importance of parental involvement and assist them to become confident and comfortable to carry out their roles in this respect. This should result in many benefits to learners, teachers and parents and help overcome the limited opportunities and weaknesses in the schooling of some learners.

However, a final cautionary note is needed. Research has shown that the development of partnerships is a process that requires a great deal of time and effort. Instant involvement of all parents in all activities cannot be expected and not all learners will instantly improve their attitudes or achievements. Further, successful partnerships are difficult to establish even when resources are available, and teachers and parents committed (Cullingford & Morrison 1999:261). Thus, a considerable amount of time and effort are likely to be required to create partnerships between Swazi parents and teachers. Nevertheless, if this comprehensive, parental involvement programme is implemented this should result in more and more parents and teachers learning to work together on behalf of the children whose interests they share, to the benefit of learners, parents and teachers.

Epstein (1991:349) notes, "Shared vision and concerted effort have led to a variety of successful programs to connect schools, families and communities. There is no excuse for not taking the first sure steps down one of the many paths to partnership".