THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT

SATHIAPAMA MICHAEL

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT

by

SATHIAPAMA MICHAEL

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the subject

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF JN VAN WYK

FEBRUARY 2004

Student number: **3018-491-6**

I declare that

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

---------- **----------**

MRS S MICHAEL DATE

SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to examine the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District, Kwa-Zulu Natal. A literature study investigated existing programmes and models of parent involvement, multicultural education in South Africa, legislation pertaining to parent involvement in South Africa and the advantages of and barriers to parent involvement. In addition, the role of school management in managing parent involvement was reviewed. A qualitative investigation of parent involvement in three secondary multicultural schools in Umlazi was conducted. The opinions and experiences of thirty three participants were obtained via focus group interviews. Major findings included: all parents, irrespective of race or culture have an interest in their child's education All parents require guidance and support in parenting skills and also school managers lack understanding with regard to their role in managing parent involvement. The study concludes with recommendations to improve the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools.

KEY TERMS

Parent involvement

School Management

Multicultural school

Qualitative research

Umlazi District, Kwa-Zulu Natal

Focus group interviews

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to:

- Professor JN van Wyk for her support, motivation and guidance throughout this study.
- Professor EM Lemmer for the editing of the manuscript.
- Vasantha Naidoo for her help with the final preparation of the manuscript.
- The school management teams, school governing body members and parents for sharing their thoughts, ideas and experiences with me.
- Tyrone, for all the assistance given.
- My family, for their continuous support and sacrifices made on my behalf during this study.

DEDICATION :
To Anastasia and Mark

THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT

TABLE OF CONTENTS **PAGE NO.**

CHAPTER 1

1. BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS

1.1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION 4

1.3 THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT 5

1.4 PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND LEGISLATION 7

1.5 SOUTH AFRICA: A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY 8

1.6 UMLAZI AND SURROUNDING AREAS 9

1.7 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM 10

1.8 AIMS OF RESEARCH 11

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 12

1.10 THE USE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO RESEARCH 13

1.11 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS 17

1.11.1 Parent 17
1.11.2 Parent involvement 17
1.11.3 Management 17
1.11.4 Multicultural 17

1.12 PROGRAMME OF STUDY 18

1.13 SUMMARY 18

CHAPTER TWO

2. THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION 21

2.2 THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT 22

2.2.1 Types of parent involvement 24

2.3 MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION 28

2.3.1 Theory of multicultural education 28
2.3.2 Characteristics of multicultural education 29
2.3.3 Multicultural education within the South African context 30

2.3 **ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS** 33

2.4 **THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT** 34

2.5.1 The planning of parent involvement 35
2.5.2 The organising of home-school relationships 36
2.5.3 Providing guidance in the home-school relationship 38
2.5.4 Supervision and evaluation 39

2.5 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS 41

2.7 SUMMARY 45

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH DESIGN 48

3.1 INTRODUCTION 48

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH- A THEORETICAL BASIS 48

3.2.1 Characteristics of qualitative research 49
3.2.2 The role of the researcher 51
3.2.3 Data collection strategies 52
3.2.3.1 Focus group interviews 52
3.2.4 Data Analysis 55
3.2.5 Validity and reliability in qualitative research 57
3.2.6 Ethical considerations in qualitative research 59

3.3 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY FOR THE PRESENT STUDY 60

3.3.1 Paradigms and methods 61
3.3.2 Rationale for the choice of data collection strategies 61
3.3.2.1. Focus group interviews 62

3.4 DESIGN OF PRESENT STUDY 63

3.4.1 Factors influencing the study 64

3.5 CHOICE OF SETTING AND SCHOOLS 65

3.6 SUMMARY 69

CHAPTER 4

4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 70

4.1 INTRODUCTION 70

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS IN THE RESEARCH 70

4.2.1 The context of the schools 71
4.2.2 The schools in the research 74

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS 75

4.3.1 The school management team members 76
4.3.2 School governing body members 78
4.3.3 Parents 82

4.4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS 84

4.4.1 Perceptions of parent involvement 84
4.4.2 Policy on parent involvement 86
4.4.3 The school climate 89
4.4.4 Communication between the school and the home. 91
4.4.4.1 Parent meetings 91
4.4.4.2 Written communication 94
4.4.4.3 Parent-school communication 95
4.4.5 Parents as decision- makers 98
4.4.6 Giving parents support 101
4.4.7 Using parent volunteers 106
4.4.8 Accomodating cultural differences 108

4.5 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT 110

4.5.1 Apathy 110
4.5.2 Transport 111
4.5.3 Financial problems of schools and families 112
4.5.4 Working parents 113
4.5.5 Low self -esteem of parents 114
4.5.6 Lack of knowledge of parents and SGB members 114

4.6 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT 116

4.6.1 Aspect of ownership 116
4.6.2 Morale building 116
4.6.3 Reduction in costs 117
4.6.4 Improved learner behaviour 117
4.6.5 Parent awareness of school matters 117
4.6.6 Building a sense of community 119

4.6.7 Improving academic achievement 119

4.7 CONCLUSION 121

CHAPTER 5

OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES 122

5.1 INTRODUCTION 122

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION 122

5.2.1 Parent involvement: A theoretical basis 123
5.2.2 The introduction of multicultural schools 124
5.2.3 The role of school management in parent involvement 124
5.2.4 The research design 124

5.3 SYNOPSIS OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 125

5.3.1 Parent interest in education 125
5.3.2 Low expectations, negative attitudes and stereotypical behaviour 126
5.3.3 Knowledge and skills of school managers 127
5.3.4 The lack of an organisational structure to deal with parent involvement 128
5.3.5 The absence of a school policy on parent involvement 129

5.3.6 The effects of parents socio economic status on parent involvement 130
5.3.7 Restricted opportunities for interaction 131
5.3.8 Home-school communication 133
5.3.9 The lack of a homework policy 134
5.3.10 Inhibitors to substantive parent involvement 135

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 135

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY 136

5.6 CONCLUSION 137

BIBLIOGRAPHY 139

APPENDICES 147

APPENDIX I Admission letter 147
APPENDIX II General information: School managers, School Governing Body members and parents 148
APPENDIX III Interview guide: School management team 149
APPENDIX IV Interview guide: School Governing Body members 151
APPENDIX V Interview guide: Parents 153
APPENDIX VI Example of transcribed interview with school managers 155

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For many years researchers and educators have been discussing how educators, principals and counsellors should be prepared to work with learners' families and with other citizens and organisations in the community (Epstein, Sanders & Clark 1998:6)

Today most educators and school principals are still not equipped to understand, design, implement and evaluate productive connections with the families of their learners. Most principals are not trained to guide and lead their staff to develop strong school programmes and classroom practices that inform families about and how to involve them in their children's learning, development and educational plans for the future. The problem is serious for all educators, particularly for those who teach in economically distressed or disadvantaged communities (Epstein et al 1998:4).

As is characteristic of any impoverished society, economic survival supersedes any other need. This results in everyone, be it child or adult, having their lives affected in some way or another by socio-economic considerations. Poor school attendance, drop out, teenage pregnancy, low self- esteem are some of the many social and psychological effects that learners manifest in these economically distressed communities.

The focus of this study is Umlazi, an African township in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, which to a large extent depicts features of an impoverished community. A more in-depth discussion of this area follows in a later chapter, as well as in section 1.6.

However, it is now the task of schools to focus on resources that would assist in rebuilding a culture of learning in such societies. Researchers in many academic disciplines have recognised the positive attributes of parent involvement in education over many generations, and continue to place this resource among the most useful strategies in achieving learner success.

Of what significance is parent involvement and why is so much emphasis placed on this resource? It is widely accepted that good school-family partnerships lead to improved academic learner achievement, self- esteem, school attendance and social behaviour (Lemmer 2000:61). Other benefits to learners include decreases in dropout rate, positive parent-child communication and more parent community support of the school (Squelch & Lemmer 1994: 13; Hester 1989:23; Dekker 1986: 154; Chavkin 1993: 276; Jones & Blendinger 1994: 80).

According to Banks and Banks (1997: 409), parent involvement allows parents and educators to reinforce skills and provide an environment that has consistent learning expectations and standards. Parents become more knowledgeable about their child's school, its policies and the school staff when they are involved in schools. An added factor is that educators and principals treat involved parents with greater respect and more positive attitudes are shown towards their children. Epstein (1995: 701) concurs that parent school partnerships improve school programmes and school climate, provides family service and support, increase a parent's skills and leadership abilities, connect families with others in the school and in the community and help teachers with their work.

The importance of parent involvement is aptly summarized by Henderson (1988: 153):

> We cannot afford to sequester parents on the periphery of the educational enterprise. Parent involvement is neither a quick fix nor a luxury; it is fundamental to a healthy system of public education.

While the benefits of parent involvement demonstrate that this resource is a necessity to any learning institution, strong parent involvement continues to remain a problem area to many learning institutions as too many parents choose not to be involved. The challenge of working together with parents to reinforce learning has to be met by the school.

This ongoing problem has focussed educators and principals' attention on issues concerning what must be done in order to involve the parent actively in the schooling process. Epstein (1995:710) argues that a well implemented programme of partnership, which incorporates good planning, thoughtful implementation and well designed activities, will encourage more and more families can learn to work with schools on behalf of the children whose interests they share.

The success of any parent involvement strategy depends largely on how well this process is managed. This would entail school managers setting in place proper programmes / structures to guide and direct parents in the role they need to play.

In January 2000, the South African Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, invited parents to enter the educational arena and to participate fully in their children's

education in response to the poor matric results achieved in 1999. According to Hoover, Dempsey and Sandler (1995: 36), demands, opportunity, characteristics and invitations do little to vigorously encourage this. Chavkin (1989: 279) confirms this by stating that parents need clear mechanisms for parent involvement.

For qualitative involvement from parents, invitations to get involved in school programmes are not adequate. Parents have an opportunity to be significant change agents in the lives of children and schools. They are accorded both social and legal rights that need to be recognised by teachers and schools and must be managed accordingly (Henniger 1987: 229).

1.2 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Parent involvement is difficult to define, but in general, it is accepted that parent involvement should be broadly defined, including as many activities as possible so that as many parents as possible can become involved. Epstein's (2001:408-410) model of home-school community involvement is widely used in the USA and beyond and includes the following six types:

- Parenting;
- Communication;
- Volunteering;
- Learning at home;
- Decision-making;
- Collaborating with the community.

This typology of Epstein's (1995:704) which aims at involving parents in a multitude of ways and ensures that parent involvement is beneficial in many ways, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter two.

1.3 THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

According to Dekker (1996: 62), today, more than ever, it is necessary to prepare parents for their parenting role. Nobody can be indifferent to how children are brought up and educated and to whether parents themselves are capable of co-ordinating the role parents need to play in the education of their children. It is therefore often the responsibility of school management to ensure that parents are effective in the various roles they play in education. According to the South African Schools Act, management of a school rests with the principal, vice-principal and Head of Departments (HODs). In their management role, they have the following tasks to perform (Badenhorst 1988:7):

- Policymaking;
- Organising;
- Personnel management and administration (this includes training, promoting, motivation, leadership, procedure determination and controlling);
- Communication;
- Planning.

To this list of tasks Van der Linde (1997:1) adds decision-making and providing guidance. All these roles may be needed if effective parent involvement is to be established or improved in schools.

Schools are similar to organisations whereby a manager and leader ensures its success as an institution. Together with a variety of responsibilities and duties, school managers must take into account *the nature of parent involvement* at his/her school for effective learning to take place. The school manager

(principal) is thus the facilitator or leader of initiatives undertaken by the school, such as instituting a programme for effective parent involvement.

In managing a programme for parent involvement, Van der Westhuizen (1995:463) suggests four main management activities: planning, organising, giving guidance and exercising control. Planning is regarded as the foundation of all other management tasks (Squelch & Lemmer 1994:23). In planning the parent involvement programme, school leaders establish aims and specify how these aims will be attained.

The principal is the most important leader in the school but should be supported by an efficient team of staff and the parent community, as he/she is not solely responsible for school improvement (Squelch & Lemmer 1994:11). Accordingly the programme of parent involvement instituted by the school will be a project involving many people. Therefore, the management task of organising is crucial to the success of the programme. Badenhorst states (1988:17) that when two or more people are involved in the performance of the task, organising is necessary.

Also of importance and concern to any programme initiated will be the type of interaction that takes place between the educational leader and the people involved. To ensure that work is well done, it is essential for guidance to be provided. Van der Westhuizen (1995:183) highlights the following subtasks that follow under the management activity of guidance: leadership, building relationships, motivation and communication.

Subsequent to all other tasks in the programme for parent involvement is the management task of control which ensures that all inputs are being used in

optimum fashion to achieve the set objectives and that planning, organising and guiding are correctly implemented (Van der Westhuizen 1995:217).

However, while school principals are overall responsible for all programmes and projects within the South African school system, he/she is now fully supported by a school governing body that has been instituted by legislative mandates.

1.4 PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND LEGISLATION

Subsequent to South Africa achieving democracy in 1994, The White Paper on Education and Training (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1995:22) states that the principle of democratic governance be reflected in *every* level of the system. The South African School's Act (SASA) of 1996 (RSA 1996:5) highlights the role and responsibility of all stakeholders, parents, educators, learners and the local community members in the organisation, governance and funding of schools since the state has inadequate financial and organisational capacity to do everything for schools (Marishane 1999:33).

SASA mandates the establishment of school governing bodies in *all* schools in the country in order to ensure that parents, learners and non-teaching staff will actively participate in the governance and management of their schools with a view to providing better teaching and learning environments (Squelch 2000:137).

In South Africa, school governing bodies are compulsory for all schools and they have been tasked with, among others, improving parent involvement in their schools. Currently, this challenge of gaining effective parent involvement is accentuated. This has to be achieved in schools which are becoming increasingly multicultural.

1.5 SOUTH AFRICA: A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Historically, South African society was divided into four major groups: Black, White, Coloured and Asian. Each racial group can be further distinguished according to languages spoken. Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Venda, Sotho, and Swazi can be distinguished among the Black population language groups. Some of the cultural groups identified among the White group are English, Afrikaans, German, Portuguese and Greek. Among the Coloured group, one finds Griquas and Khoi, while the Asians comprise of people who came to South Africa from India. Asians fall under religious groups such as Hindus and Muslims and language groups such as Tamil, Telegu, Gujerati or Hindu speakers (Meier 2002:146). Accordingly, the composition of South African society is heterogeneous and multicultural.

Prior to 1994, schools reflected the separate nature of society whereby learners were placed in schools according to their race group – a policy of the apartheid government. However, with the demise of apartheid in 1994, the education system was no longer separated according to race, but controlled centrally with nine provincial departments. Thus for the first time in its history children from different racial/ cultural groups attended schools together. This has had implications for parent involvement.

Du Plooy and Swanepoel (1997:146) suggest the development of positive and supportive relations between the school and the community as the first step in implementing a multicultural approach in the school. They add that one of the best ways to learn about the cultural background of the children we teach is to get to know their parents. This contact can be used not only to inform parents of

school policy, but also to involve them in it so that staff, parents and learners become a mutually supportive group within the community.

1.6 UMLAZI AND SURROUNDING AREAS

South Africa is now divided into nine provinces, one of which is Kwa-Zulu Natal. Umlazi is an area, which was previously reserved for Blacks as a residential area in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Research conducted by the South Local Council-Durban Metro indicates that the existence and form of Umlazi is substantially an expression of the policies of racial segregation and the economic activities in the southern metropolitan area (Rothaug 1998:8).

Umlazi Township was designed to be the largest township ever built inside one of South Africa's bantustans. As has happened with most of the African townships in South Africa, no names were given to the sections, or roads of Umlazi in the original design of the township. Instead a system of Sections (starting with the first letter of the alphabet and using all the letters except I and O before going on to AA, Bb, CC, etc) or Units (using numbers) was used when referring to various parts of the huge township (Townsend 1991:33). The surrounding areas include Isipingo in the east, Chatsworth in the north, the Vumengazi Tribal authority in the west and the Sobonakhona Tribal Authority in the south (Rothaug 1998:3).

Much of the development in the area is characteristic of townships in general with major deficiencies relating primarily to residential accommodation, provision of facilities and services and lack of urban and economic opportunities (Rothaug 1998:3).

Following the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, many people moved out of Umlazi into the surrounding areas. Thus the demographics of these areas changed. Learners could attend schools outside areas in which they live. For management and control purposes schools in the surrounding areas, which did not necessarily fall within the Umlazi Township, fell in the Umlazi District. Thus the Umlazi District comprises many schools from different areas. However, many learners at each of the schools in the district stem from the Umlazi Township. In this study three secondary schools from the Isipingo and Queensburgh areas comprise the fields of research.

The Umlazi Independent Development Framework Comprehensive Report (Rothaug1998:8) states that prevailing unemployment are high, more emphasis needs to be placed on meeting the needs of the younger population and Umlazi in general may face a problem of breakdown in social fabric. The report also notes that there is a need for more reliable demographic information in order to meet these challenges.

In light of the above it is crucial for school management and parents to work together in trying to alleviate some of the problems the younger population faces in their endeavour for quality education.

1.7 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In her policy recommendation for curriculum transformation for multicultural education, Suzuki (1984:319) outlines, among others, the need for increased involvement of parents. She adds that school managers should be encouraged to experiment with ways of removing structural barriers between the school and family.

In light of the above a need exists to investigate the role of management in parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District. The following questions facilitate the demarcation of the problem:

- What are the prevailing theories on parent involvement?
- What role does school management play in facilitating parent involvement?
- What is multicultural education and how does this impact on parent involvement?
- What role is management playing in parent involvement in multicultural schools within the Umlazi District?
- How can these findings contribute to the effective management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District?

1.8 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

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

- The present investigation aims at providing a thorough background to the role and place of parents in general and within multicultural schools in particular, as well as the role of school management in facilitating parent involvement in education as it is presently manifested in culturally diverse societies in the world.

- The investigation will examine factors, which impinge on effective parent involvement at multicultural schools.

- The research intends to investigate the state of affairs regarding the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District by means of a qualitative study. In this way, data is collected which can be used:

a) To extend the body of knowledge concerning the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District.

b) To make recommendations with a view to improving the management of parent involvement in order to establish effective home school relations.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A brief outline of the research methodology together with the means of data collection and data analysis is provided in this subsection of chapter one. A more in-depth exposition of the research method is covered in chapter three.

The main purpose of this study is to understand and describe the role of management in the facilitation of parent involvement at multicultural schools. The research therefore follows an exploratory and descriptive route.

a) In an attempt to determine the role and place of school principals and his/her management team in facilitating parent involvement, a literature study of the management of parent involvement is undertaken. The focus of this phase of the research is on previous research findings about the management of parent involvement in culturally pluralistic schools. Due to the limited amount of literature available on the subject of parent involvement locally, much of the literature under study is from overseas. Such sources indicate a commonality that exists in culturally diverse settings both locally and overseas.

b) In addition, the focus of the research is on multicultural schools in South Africa. Thus a literature study of various legislation and official documents, educational directives and educational reports pertaining to the notion of the management of parent involvement at multicultural schools is undertaken.

c) To investigate the extent of the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District, a qualitative approach is used. Various data gathering techniques are employed. Focus group interviews is the main strategy of data gathering.

In this study three secondary schools are the sites in which three focus group interviews in each school is conducted. One focus group is with the management team, one with members of the school governing body and one with parents representing the cultural diversity of the school. In other words, nine focus group interviews will be conducted. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter three.

The rationale for choice of research methodology and design is attributed to the fact that the wide range or means of data collection demonstrates that qualitative research is user friendly. As Lemmer (1992:24) points out, qualitative research findings which are presented in the form of rich data (anecdotes, excerpts from diaries and interviews, photographs and video tapes) are easily accessible to lay readers.

1.10 THE USE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO RESEARCH

In accordance with Lemmer ‘s (1992:294) view that the qualitative tradition focuses on the in-depth, the detail, the process, and the context of schooling thus

offering the educationist a valid and worthwhile research method, the principal method of investigation in this study follows a qualitative exploration of the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools.

The roots of the qualitative tradition can be traced to a group of theorists, loosely termed the idealists, who posited that the investigation of social reality was in essence a study of the product of human minds and thus could not be separated from the thoughts, values and sentiments of the investigator. These idealists regarded the goal of social enquiry as interpretive understanding (Verstehen) whereby the social world has to be understood within its context (Lemmer 1992: 292).

The qualitative researcher therefore becomes immersed in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study. He/she values and seeks to discover participants' perspectives on their worlds, views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, is both descriptive and analytic and relies on people's words and observable behaviour as the primary data (Marshall & Rossman 1994: 4). This was deemed important in research, which aims, among others, to enter the world of different racial groups to understand their perceptions of parent involvement.

In expressing the importance of a qualitative exploration in educational research, Shermann and Webb (1988:45) assert that it assists us in raising new questions, by leading us to question assumptions and by cultivating an appreciation for complexity as well as expanding our frames of reference.

A preconceived hypothesis is of no significance in qualitative research. In an effort to avoid the imposition of a previous theory upon the subjects of research, qualitative research aims at generating hypotheses and theories that emerge from the data (Lemmer 1992:294). Thus in this study, the school management team

(principals, deputies and heads of departments) as well as parents of the respective schools are not presented with ready-made solutions to the problem of parent involvement by the researcher. They are rather offered the opportunity to describe their own experiences as well as analyse their own situations.

Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:32). The researcher reaches beyond the documentation of the structural features of the education system and describes the actual operation of the various processes in the schooling system. By using qualitative research, a relationship between the outside world of the formalized education system and the inside world of the participants is born. A revelation of the complexities of situations, processes of action and interaction takes place. Such an in-depth analysis and description is absent in large-scale statistical surveys or macro-studies of problems within the schooling system. Events are studied in their natural settings without any form of modification, as researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves (Shermann & Webb 1988:5).

In this study research is conducted at three secondary multicultural schools, which are attended by learners representing Whites, Blacks, Indians and Coloured racial groups. According to Epstein (1995:702) parent involvement decreases, as the child gets older. Although parent involvement decreases in secondary school it is probably more important here as the problems of learner achievement, dropout and disciplinary problems become more acute.

In this study focus group interviews with principals and parents are conducted. Kahn and Cannell quoted by Marshall and Rossman (1994:80) describe the research interview as a conversation with a purpose. An advantage of using the

research interview is that it allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection (Hoberg 1999:81).

The selection of parents, school governing body members and principals is done by means of purposeful sampling. According to Patton (1990:169) purposeful sampling may be seen as a process of selecting ‘information rich cases’ for gaining in-depth information. Such participants, according to Schumacher and McMillan (1993:378) are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating.

Interviews are recorded on audiotape and the tapes are later transcribed for closer examination. In this type of inquiry, data analysis and data gathering are interwoven. Almost as soon as action researchers begin to gather data, they also begin the process of sifting the data in search of patterns, ambiguities, questions and curiosities (Hoberg 1999:131). With data collection and analysis taking place simultaneously, information derived from initial interviews will be used to modify questions for later interviews.

The data is finally analysed by a process of systematically searching and arranging field notes and other materials assembled by the researcher to increase his or her understanding of them (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:145).

From the above it can be ascertained that the use of the qualitative research method is best suited to this particular research. The primary aim of this exploratory and descriptive study is to understand and describe how principals and parents experience the management of parent involvement at their respective schools.

1.11 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

1.11.1 *Parent*

The South African Schools Act (RSA1996:4) defines parent as:

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

Therefore when referring to parent in this dissertation the term will be used broadly as set out in the South African Schools Act.

1.11.2 Parent involvement

Squelch and Lemmer (1994:93) describes parent involvement as the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school based activities, which may be educational or non-educational.

1.11.3 Management

According to Smith and Cronje (1992:6) management can be defined as a process or series of activities that gives the necessary direction to an enterprise's resources so that its objectives can be achieved as productively as possible in the environment in which it functions.

1.11.4 Multicultural

The word multicultural stems from the word culture. Culture, according to Squelch (1996:43) is the language, beliefs, values and norms, roles, knowledge

and skills that make up the 'way of life' of any society. According to Webster and Roger's Dictionary and Thesaurus (1992:252) the word multi refers to many, thus multicultural can be defined as many cultures. Multicultural schools embrace a school population of diverse cultures. Within the South African context multicultural is often used to denote people belonging to different racial groupings.

1.12 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

The study can be divided into four distinctive components;

1) In Chapter two prevailing theories and studies of parent involvement in multicultural schools are examined. Emphasis is placed on the management of parent involvement within multicultural schools, as this is the focus of study.
2) Chapter three furnishes an in-depth discussion of the research methodology used to investigate the management of parent involvement at multicultural schools. This chapter, together with the rationale for the choice of research method, also deals with the data collection strategies used in the study and the analysis thereof.
3) In Chapter four a presentation of the results regarding the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District is given.
4) A synopsis of the findings together with the recommendations arising from this study will be presented in the final chapter.

1.13 SUMMARY

Numerous research data provide evidence that a positive relationship between parent involvement and children's education exists. The task at hand is to convey this message to the parents and the schools and more importantly to establish plans and policies for wider parent involvement (Mannan & Blackwell 1992:219).

The plethora of literature available on the benefits of parent involvement clearly indicates that this resource should be clearly and effectively managed so that it could assist the school in meeting the demands and challenges facing this new democratic society.

With the multicultural school setting in South Africa, local writers challenge educationists in developing a climate of multicultural acceptance and a curriculum that recognises the diversity and richness in the classroom situation of all participants. School managers are grappling with interracial relationships, and lack an understanding of the dynamics of racism and intercultural relations (Rajab 2002:7)

South Africa's achievement of democracy in 1994 brought rights and responsibilities to every citizen, including their role in school governance.

The key to successful parent involvement is the capability and overall nature of the principal who must assume and facilitate the extent of parent involvement (Pearson 1990:15). However, it is not he/she alone who can address the problem of ineffective parent involvement. For the benefit of the child, it is essential for principals to work together with the school governing body members and

parents. It is therefore a primary responsibility of the school management team to ensure the active involvement of parents in the child's education.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Studies show that school practices to encourage parents to participate in their children's education are more important than family characteristics like parental education, family size, marital status, socio-economic level, or student grade level in determining whether parents get involved (Dauber & Epstein 1993: 14). Parent involvement is regarded as an integral management area in school management. According to Vandegrift and Greene (1992: 57) improving parent involvement is one of the most challenging tasks facing educators today.

This challenge of achieving effective parent involvement lies with the principal whose responsibility it is to assure and facilitate the extent of parent involvement (Pearson 1990: 15). Through his/her position, the principal is able to control the degree of involvement within the school. However, today many educators and principals are still not trained to understand, design, implement and evaluate productive connections with the families of their learners. Most principals are not equipped to guide and lead their staff to develop strong school programmes and classroom practices that inform families about and involve them in their children's learning, development and educational plans for the future (Epstein, et al 1998:14). This poses a serious problem for all educators but more especially for those who work in a multicultural environment. Chavkin (1989:277) stresses that if educators hope to facilitate more minority parent

involvement, it is essential that educators become more knowledgeable about parent involvement in multicultural communities.

Parents and schools within the multicultural school context face a challenge to work together in guiding and supporting the children of diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Chavkin (1989: 284) believes that the multicultural perspective on parent involvement is a critical step in the essential linkage between home and schools. Given the problems in South African schools and the advantages associated with parent involvement it is time to accept the challenge and implement the policies and practices as illustrated in the literature.

2.2 THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

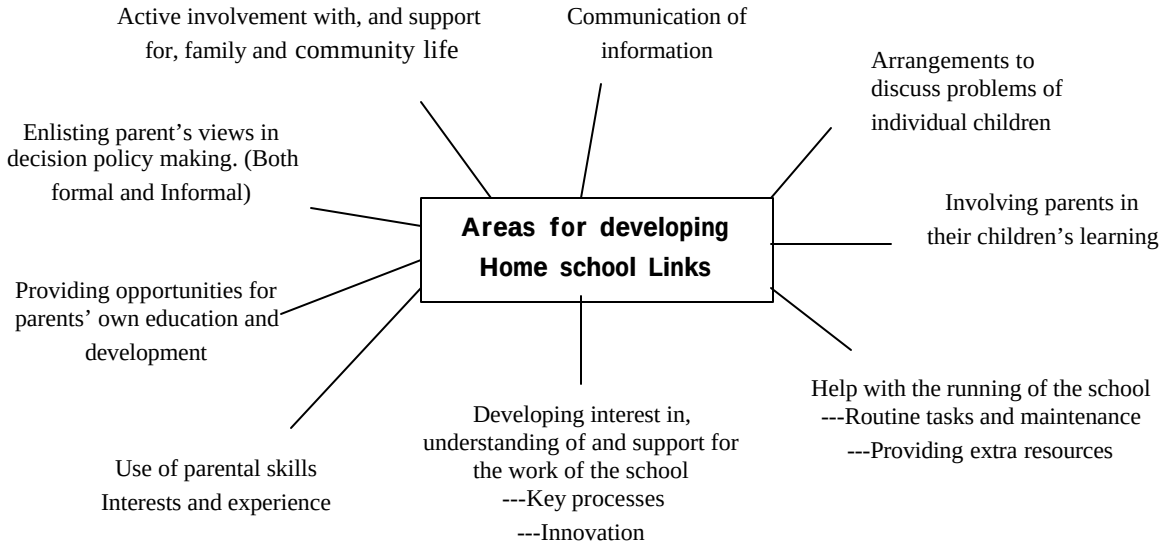
The unique circumstances of each school determine how parent involvement should be planned in that school (Botha 1999: i4). Williams and Chavkin (1989: 18-20) state that there is no 'one perfect' parent involvement programme that can serve as a model for all others. However, they do propose the following seven elements, which they find to be integral to parent involvement programmes.

- *Written policy*: This specifies the areas for parent involvement and formulates the powers and duties of parents.
- *Administrative support*: This means that resources (such as meeting venue and duplicating facilities), funds and people should be made available to carry out parent involvement programmes.
- *Training*: This means the continuous instruction of parents and teachers in elements of parent involvement.
- *Partnership approach*: If parents and teachers adopt this approach in curricular, management and non-curricular matters, they develop an attitude of ownership towards the school and take pride in it.

- *Two-way communication*: This means regular communication between parents and school. To this end schools can, for example, devise their own channels of communication such as a newspaper, visits and telephone calls.
- *Liaison*: This means liaison with other schools that are running parent involvement programs.
- *Evaluation:* This means the continuous evaluation of the school's parent involvement program or individual aspects of it.

Van der Linde (1997: 40) adapted Bastiani's models (1996) to suit the South African school situation and recommends it as an effective model for multicultural schools. A presentation of this model as adapted by Van der Linde (1997:38) follows in Figure 2.1.

FIGURE 2.1 AREAS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOME-SCHOOL LIASON (Adapted for South African circumstances)



These nine areas of involvement demonstrate that parents are actively involved in not just the child's learning but also in school governance and management.

Chavkin (1989:81) recommends that educators build infrastructures by reorienting existing policies and programmes as the only way to bridge the parent gap in education reform.

2.2.1 Types of parent involvement

Parent involvement is a term that cannot be narrowly defined as it encompasses many different responsibilities and roles. Epstein developed six different types of family-community-school collaboration (Heleen 1992:5). This encompasses the number of roles parents can play when they are involved in their children's education.

Epstein (2001: 408-410) describes types of parent involvement as follows:
Type 1 - **Parenting:** The school should help all families establish home environments to support children as learners via workshops and meetings where families share information with schools about culture, background, children's needs and talents, relevant to the child's success at school. However, one needs to consider the venue of such meetings and workshops. Vandergrift (1992:57) states that often parents, especially disadvantaged parents do not want to come to school as school brings back memories of their own failure. According to Chavkin (1989:277), parents with less than a high school education were twice as likely to feel awkward about approaching school personnel than parents with higher levels of education. It is also recommended that staff welcome parents and that the institutional structure of the school be more inviting if parents are attending workshops and meetings. Aaronson et al (1996:58) also stresses the need for a hospitable climate in order for parents to feel welcomed. She concurs with Moles (1989:34) that the first time many parents hear from the school is when there is a problem, which lends to a negative

association to school involvement. Patsy (1994:39) with whom Blatchford (1994:12) concurs, states that working with non-English speaking parents may be difficult but a friendly smile and atmosphere can make parents more at ease and could result in parents talking openly about their feelings.

Type 2 - **Communicating:** This includes print and non-print communications, taking into account parents who do not speak English or who are illiterate. It involves communicating about school programs and learner's progress and refers to two-way communication and many channels of communication that connect schools, families, and the community. Davis (1989:22), who conducted a successful parent involvement programme at Ralph Waldo Emerson School in California, points out that the key to parent involvement is appropriate recognition and constant communication. When communication between the home and school occurs frequently and on a regular basis, parents feel comfortable coming to school to share ideas and voice concerns with the school staff and they do not feel threatened but rather respond positively (Williams & Chavkin 1989:20).

There are numerous means of communicating with parents. These include:

Letters: Garca-Lubeck (in Chavkin 1989:283) recommends that letters to parents be written in more than one language and key educational terms should be translated to minority languages. Newsletters could be used to inform parents of schedules of multicultural events, which include notices of upcoming cultural experiences in the school as well as information to educate parents (Barta & Winn 1996:29).

Written reports/profiles: These should be presented to parents at least twice a year. The report should be the agenda for a consultation at least twice a year and a class meeting for every term (Macbeth 1989:20).

Parent evenings: These must be well structured especially in schools with learners from across the broad socio-economic spectrum (Dekker & Lemmer 1996:174).

Home visitations: Short home visits introduce educators to the world of learners. Even when educators do not understand the language spoken by parents at home, they are usually welcomed into homes and this increases the understanding of parents' attitudes to schooling, their traditions and beliefs and ways in which minority parents can become involved in the school (Brown & Martin 1996:18).

Type 3- **Volunteering:** A volunteer is anyone who supports the school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place and at any time. All families, time and talents are welcome. Flexible schedules should be made for volunteers, allowing those who work to participate. Training should be provided, matching time and talent with school, educator and learner needs and schools should recognise efforts so that participants are productive.

Type 4 **- Learning at home:** Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning (Epstein 2001:409). At the same time parents must fully understand the school set- up in order to assist their child in learning. Garca-Lubeck (in Chavkin l989: 282) emphasises that minority parents must be assisted to understand the school calendar, school schedule, staff roles, attendance rules, course requirements, participation in clubs,the benefits and responsibilities of extracurricular activities, homework policy, requirements for the holiday and closing of school. Too often invitations to parents related to

schoolwork are frequently couched in educational jargon, big words and lengthy prose (Moles 1993:34).

Type 5- **Decision-making:** This is a process of partnership, shared views and actions towards shared goals. It includes parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic and other groups in the school. Training should be offered to enable parent leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.

Type 6- **Collaborating with the community:** This means identifying and integrating resources and co-services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and student learning and development. The community includes those neighborhoods that can influence children's learning and development as well as all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools. Chavkin (1989:282) suggests the development of infrastructure, meaning connecting schools more formally to the rest of society, family and home environments outside of school in which children spend most of their time. Van der Linde (1997:36) suggests the church, the community or even sports fields as avenues to meet the 'hard to reach' parent. According to Rich (1993:240), wider community involvement such as senior citizens or even organisations such as The Red Cross can be utilised to help educators and families foster children's learning.

Epstein (1995:707) asserts that the six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive programme of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home with potentially important results for students, parents and teachers.

Pearson (1990:15-16) who strongly believes that the principal controls the degree of parent involvement within the school, aptly sums up Epstein's

description of the various types of involvement by referring to *parents* as *audience, participator, worker* and *educator***.**

2.6 MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

2.6.1 Theory of multicultural education

Schools today are confronted with the reality of educating students of different groups equally and equitably. Mda (1999: 219) describes the diversity of classrooms as racially, ethnically, linguistically and economically diverse. Learners in public school classrooms have striking differences in family structure, lifestyle, health and physical and mental ability. An educational concept that will address cultural diversity and equality in schools is referred to as multicultural education.

According to Nieto (1992:208) multicultural education should include a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms pluralism that learners, their communities and educators represent. He continues by adding that multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interaction among educators, learners and parents and the very way schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education furthers the democratic principles of social justice.

The ideal of multiculturalism involves achieving a positive sense and self- worth in a person’s own culture while not diminishing or denigrating any other cultural

forms. It involves pride in one's own culture along with tolerance, contact and sharing with the other, in other words, a thoroughly unprejudiced approach to people is needed (Sampson 1999:207).

Multiculturalism also seeks to promote equal educational opportunities, the preservation of cultural identity, the value of human dignity and self- esteem and the peaceful co-existence of diverse lifestyles (Squelch 1996:61). Multicultural education is seen as a program that should help learners develop a better understanding of their own backgrounds amid other groups that compose the society as well as to respect and appreciate cultural diversity, overcome ethnocentric and prejudicial attitudes and understand the socio-historical, economic and psychological factors that have produced the contemporary conditions of ethnic polarization, inequality and alienation (Suzuki 1984:305).

According to Gayle (1993:170), creating a multicultural school environment calls for several essential components: active involvement of the school community, high expectations of educators of all learners, redistribution of power and authority within the school and classroom curriculum issues and the school policy. Briscoe quoted by Gayle (1993:172) adds to this and recommends that the strength of the family be acknowledged and used to achieve positive change in order to better understand a learner's needs and implement changes in the learning environment.

2.6.2 Characteristics of multicultural education

In multicultural situations there are inevitably more problems and tensions between the home and school (Squelch 1996: 58). Educators alone cannot cater to the needs of learners in a multicultural environment. They require the full support and involvement of the parents if they want successful learning to take

place. However this is not an easy task. The reason being that a multicultural environment incorporates learners and parents of diverse needs. Some of the important individual differences that learners display in a multicultural setting as identified by Van der Horst and Lebeloane (1997:30) are: intellectual differences, psychological differences, psychomotor or physical differences, language differences, learning style differences, the needs of disadvantaged learners as well as exceptional learners. Du Plooy and Swanepoel (1997: 129) state that the educators are probably the first to see the devastation that occurs in the minority learner's spirit where the learner is cultural dislocated in social and psychological terms. The culturally different learner's true identity is often denied which leads to accepting a 'false' identity, differing radically from the child's true identity acquired at home. This results in a low self-image and low self-expectation, which in turn results in poor school performance.

In addition to the types of learners educators have to work with, Squelch (1996:46) mentions that parents from minority groupings may be illiterate or semi- literate and may have limited proficiency in the language medium of the school. Strategies thus have to be devised to accommodate the needs of these parents. Educators therefore need to be equipped to handle parents in a multicultural environment and the way forward is to first understand the context in which multiculturalism evolved.

2.6.3 Multicultural education within the South African context

Since 1994, after the birth of democracy, policy makers have been compelled to rethink the role and status of education in a democratic society. Separate education was no longer in keeping with the principles of democracy and had to be replaced.

On 31 March 1994 the Constitutional stipulations regarding Own Affairs, section14 (1) of the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 110 of 1993 and Annexure 1 of the Constitution were repealed. This ended the statutory protection of race groups. After 1994, all public and private schools were opened to all race groups and between 1994 and 1996 a host of policy documents, reports and acts have been published which integrated previously separate education and outlawed discrimination in education (Meier 2002:148). Among the many policy documents adopted by the South African government aiming at democratising education, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996) stands central. The transformation and democratisation of the education system is highlighted in Section 29 of this document.

While the transformation of education in the South African context involves changing education for the better, democratisation of education encompasses the idea of partnership in which stakeholders such as parents, learners, educators, and members drawn from the school community, not only play an active role in school activities and functions, but also jointly constitute a body that represents stakeholders and takes decisions on behalf of the school. The White Paper on Education and Training (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1995) reaffirms this principle of representivity by stating that "the principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system"(RSA 1995:22). Two years later these principles that were proposed in the White Paper on Education and Training were included in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996), hereafter referred to as SASA. The main thrust of the Act is that since the state has inadequate financial and organisational capacity to do everything for schools, all stakeholders, parents, educators, learners and local community members should be actively involved in the organisation, governance and funding of schools.

SASA (RSA 1996, section 23) mandates the establishment of school governing bodies in all schools in the country in order to ensure that parents, teachers, learners and non-teaching staff will actively participate in the governance and management of their schools with a view to providing teaching and learning environments. According to SASA (RSA1996: 18), the membership of governing bodies should comprise elected members, the school principal and co-opted members. In all cases the parents must be in the majority. Co-opted members did not initially have voting rights. However, in March 2000 section 23 of The Schools Act dealing with co-opted members was amended (RSA 2000). This section now reads:

> If the membership of a governing body is not representative of the racial composition of the learners of the school, the governing body must co-opt two parent members with voting rights from that part of the learner's community that is not represented.

In this way all racial groups in a schools are represented on the school governing body and can play an active role by being able to discuss and vote on all issues.

Goduka (1998:35-36) reports that the new constitutional developments have had tremendous implications for education. In his proposal for a reconceptualisation of educational policy regarding the many languages and cultures within South African schools, he suggests a mandate to involve parents and other community members in the school, who represent the culture and linguistic diversity learners bring to school.

As an essential strategy for managing diversity, Patrick (1997:24) also recommends working with parents from different groups and bringing them together for the benefit of learners.

2.4 ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

The benefits of parent involvement in education for *all* learners regardless of cultural background are well documented: higher scholastic achievement reduced dropout and reduced absenteeism (Lemmer 2002:56). Carrasqillo and Clement (1993:216) mention six positive results from including parents from diverse linguistic and cultural environments. They are:

1) Building rapport with parents through adequate communication.
2) Assisting parents or other interested members of the community to understand the school curriculum.
3) Soliciting parental help in developing the instructional programme.
4) Gaining parental support in implementing the programme.
5) Clarifying conflicting values and goals.
6) Providing literacy training in the school, so that parents can tutor children in the home language.

Despite evidence of the positive effects of family involvement in all schools, its potential is still largely ignored in schools. Educators do not systematically encourage family involvement and parents do not always participate when they are encouraged to do so (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez 1997: 18).

The management of parent involvement therefore requires attention if this resource is to be utilised effectively.

2.5 THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

For active and effective parent involvement it is essential for the process to be managed by careful long-term and short-term planning. A number of different management tasks are involved in parent participation. However, prior to developing plans to increase parent involvement, it is important to know the current feelings of parents and educators in the school communities. According to Landerholme and Karr (1988:12) as well as Mannan and Blackwell (1992:20), many programmes are designed based on what schools think the parents need rather than on the actual wishes and needs of the parents.

There are various management tasks that must be carried out if any programme is to succeed. Pearson (1990: 16) states that the principal's standards, morals and ways of thinking will influence what type (if any) of parent involvement will evolve and to what extent. It is therefore the principal together with his/her management team who determines the success of initiatives towards active parent involvement at the school.

The four main management activities that are essential for parent involvement at any learning institution, including multicultural schools are:

a) planning;
b) organization;
c) providing guidance;
d) supervision and evaluation.

Each of these management tasks in turn includes sub-tasks, which support the main tasks. It should be remembered that the various management tasks are

interdependent and mutually inclusive (Van der Westhuizen 1995:410). Each management task will now be discussed in broad terms.

2.5.1 The planning of parent involvement

Planning is the function performed by managers that determines the pattern of actions needed for meeting situations in the future in order to attain organisational goals (Massie & Douglas 1985: 106). Planning largely determines the potential and limitation of the home-school relationship. It includes the following sub-tasks: Determining goals, policy -making, problem solving and decision making (Van der Westhuizen 1995:410).

Badenhorst (1988:38) suggests the following guidelines when planning:

• Planning is usually geared to change;
• Policy determines the parameters of planning;
• Aspects of planning should be related;
• Planning should not be rigid;
• Human limitations should be taken into account in planning;
• Written planning is essential;
• Routine planning- not all planning is geared to change.

According to Van der Linde (1997:33), short term and long-term planning, which are applicable to the multicultural school situation, must be done. Chavkin (1989.283) makes the following recommendations for planning in a multicultural school. Educators need to collaborate with parents to develop a clear statement about the goals of parent involvement in their school; the statement needs to be based on the premise that parents are as important to children's academic success as educators and every school should develop written policies about working with parents from a multicultural perspective, with the cooperation of parents. According to Moles (in Chavkin 1993:37), the participation of parents in planning and implementing home-school partnership

activities can be expected to produce many further opportunities of meaningful collaboration.

To carry out planning, organisation should take place.

2.5.2 The organising of home-school relationships

Organising is the function of determining the structure for allocating individual (specialized) tasks and coordinating activities towards the organisational goals (Massie & Douglas 1985:516). To achieve the goals of a planned programme for school- community relationships by means of people and resources, organising must take place. Healthy school- community relationships are the responsibility of everyone associated with the school: educators, administrative personnel, learners, parents and the broad school community. The school principal should identify individuals and groups who should become actively involved with the school community relationships programme and the nature of each one's responsibility should be known to him/her (Van der Westhuizen 1995:412-413). The possibilities and effectiveness of collective parental participation in education lie firstly in the organisation thereof by means of structures (governing bodies, parent councils), which can conduct meaningful communication at all levels with other partners in the teaching sector (Dekker & Lemmer 1996: 166).

The function of the management body that is elected to govern the programme of parent involvement is to develop the co-operative ability of its parent corps and to ensure progress to a level of ability and skill in decision-making (Dekker & Lemmer 1996:167).

According to Carrasquillo and Clement (1993:81), school boards (School Governing Bodies) are expressions of the democratic ideal of ordinary laypersons to decide on what is considered best for themselves and their children. They do not administer, but rather exert their leadership role by formulating policy and evaluating performance.

To facilitate the process of organising a parent involvement programme the following questions, that are recommended by Van der Westhuizen (1995:163) serve as guidelines:

- What must be done? (Task)
- How should the work be divided? (Delegation)
- Who will do the work? Who is competent? (Competency)
- By which means will the work be done? (Resources)
- When should the work be finished? (Time schedule)
- How well should the work be done? (Qualities)
- Who must communicate with whom, in what way and about what? (Communication)
- Who will co-ordinate and check the work? (Leadership)

Chavkin (1989:283) proposes that when organising parent involvement in a multicultural school, parents should be asked how they would like to be involved with their children's education and a variety of opportunities based on the interests of parents should be provided. At the same time educators should be sensitive to parent's skill levels, estimates of available time, work schedules, and individual preferences as they plan **with** parents the most appropriate parent involvement activities. Also, educators need to make available the appropriate kinds of resources for parent-involvement efforts.

Van der Linde (1997:33-34) further adds that within a multicultural situation, each parent is an individual who can make a unique personal contribution to the smooth running of school activities and his/ her child's education. All parents are important but have to be directed.

2.5.3 Providing guidance in the home-school relationship

Parent participation is more likely to occur when the needs and circumstances of parents have been considered. The principal together with his/her management team must work out various strategies to win the support of parents. Carrasquillo and Clement (1993: 177) report that parent participation derives impetus when there is genuine demonstration that parents' presence is needed at school. Van der Westhuizen (1995:414) concurs with Pearson's (1990:17) belief that the person who is overall responsible is the school principal who must take the initiative. He/she is the person who should give guidance with regard to the entire programme. His/her style of leadership will determine how school community relationships are to be planned, organised and how control is to be exercised.

In a multicultural setting one finds educators who have had no training or experience in working with different cultural groups. Many educators and other staff members have not learned how to communicate and work effectively with parents and families, particularly those who have different cultural/ socio-economic, or language backgrounds (Aaronson, Carter and Howell 1995:58). Often parents have no idea of what is expected of them. Williams & Chavkin (1989: 1) suggest that training be provided for staff and parents in order to improve their skills for working together as well as working with children.

Van der Linde (1997:34) points out that leadership implies guidance towards an objective and the educator must direct parents by indicating how to approach a specific objective. Principals therefore need to possess knowledge, creativity, initiative, versatility and an orientation toward the future while keeping in touch with current needs. At the same time the principal must be flexible as each parent, particularly in multicultural schools, is unique and will make unique demands on the school.

Healthy personal relationships are a prerequisite for effective group action. People do not always give of their best if they are not provided with incentives. Communication is vital to the success of any relationship. Providing guidance therefore entails establishing relationships, motivation and communication (Van der Westhuizen 1995: 414-415).

In order to effectively manage a parent involvement programme, it is vital for the principal to possess the following characteristics of leadership recommended by De Witt (in Van der Linde 1997:34)

- Leaders should maintain good interpersonal relationships.
- They should be prepared to serve.
- Leaders must be willing to take full responsibility.
- They must have great self-control.
- They should be genuinely committed to the cause and people they serve.

2.5.4 Supervision and evaluation

Without this management task, the achievement of planned goal's and objectives are not guaranteed. It is essential therefore that all work put in towards the realisation of goals be monitored. Supervising or control is an essential

ingredient in the recipe for any organisation's management and the principal in his/her supervisory capacity should therefore not be seen as a 'policeman.' The reason behind this management task is that it ensures that the programme of school-community relationships will be realised in an optimum manner. The principal carries out this task by determining control directives, evaluation and corrective action (Van der Westhuizen 1995: 417).

It is imperative for those who are involved in the programme for parent involvement to know how and who exercises control. Control is most effective where it is least obvious. Principals therefore should carefully plan their control efforts so that the amount will not exceed that which is needed to get desired results. Control methods should be chosen with a view to their objectionable features. Control becomes more bearable, if it is part of a general atmosphere of competent, successful work and where the principal makes clear the reason why he/she is instituting control and why he/she has selected particular methods (McFarland 1970:402).

De Wet quoted by Van der Westhuizen (1995:222) remarks that evaluation is a useful means of determining whether a person has carried out his/her given task, whether a person is helping to achieve set objectives and also helps determine where a specific person, with his/her unique qualities and specific talents, may give the best service.

The final phase in the task of controlling is that of corrective action. Once evaluation takes place, remediation follows or else all other tasks completed will be in vain.

Corrective action can be defined as steps taken to rectify all that is deviant in the

most efficient manner possible with the intention of preventing further repetitions of the same kind (Van der Westhuizen 1995: 222). This task thus ensures that mistakes in the management of the parent involvement programme are corrected and that no repetitions of problems occur.

From the above it can be ascertained that all management tasks are interdependent and that for any programme to succeed efficient management is a prerequisite. Within a multicultural school environment the school manager's role is even greater as he/she is dealing with a diverse school community with diverse needs that he/she has to satisfy. Understanding families in their complexity is one continuing challenge identified by Scott-Jones (1993:250) in a pluralistic society. Educating children in a pluralistic society may be more difficult than in homogenous nations. Pluralism is difficult to maintain when families from different cultural groups are not equally powerful. It is therefore to the manager's advantage to be well informed of the dynamics involved in establishing programs and the means towards ensuring the success of any programme/s that he/she wishes to institute in the upliftment of his/her organisation, in a multicultural environment.

2.6 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

Lemmer (2002:56) argues that in schools with large numbers of linguistically diverse learners, differences in ethnicity, education and social class between teachers and parents can create barriers and misunderstandings. Moles (1993:33) states that limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration as well as restricted opportunities for interaction and cultural and language differences, inhibit parent involvement at multicultural schools. He further believes that various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions, and misunderstandings, negative

expectations, stereotypes, intimidation, and distrust may entangle disadvantaged parents and educators. Lemmer (2002:56) concurs by adding the following to her argument. Many educators do not know the backgrounds and communities of the learners that they teach. They have never visited the neighbourhoods from which their learners come. They are unaware of family structures, community practices and the problems typical of these communities. As a result educators regard the learner's home environments as deficient and inadequate to prepare them for academic success. They may tend to regard parents of language minority learners as apathetic and indifferent to their children's education or they may feel that parents who do not speak English are incapable of helping their children with their schoolwork.

Most researchers highlight cultural barriers. Language barriers of immigrant families and communication barriers of English speaking families who have had little education or bad school experiences limit school contact. This is a highly impeding factor in gaining the full support of parents at multicultural schools (Riley 1994:19; Patrick 1997: 24).

According to Shartrand, et al (1997:19), changing demographics and employment patterns may further complicate the development of strong home-school partnerships. As the population becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, educators and parents will likely come from different cultural and economic backgrounds, leading at times to contrasting values and beliefs. Pretorius (1999:160) who agrees with Shartrand et al’s (1997) belief that changing demographics have had negative implications for home-school relationships further illustrates the diversity of the population, by adding working mothers, divorces, single-parent families, second and third marriages, children having children and an increase in poverty to the list.

The following barriers to effective parent involvement which applies not only to multicultural schools but to all schools are (Riley 1994: 19):

- Time: Both parents and educators who want to do more have difficulties arranging the time.
- Uncertainty about what to do and their own importance: Many parents say they would be willing to spend more time on activities with their children if educators gave them guidance. Educators also need guidance as very few colleges and school systems provide new or experienced educators with course work in working with families.
- Lack of a supportive environment: High rates of poverty and the concentrations of poverty in neighbourhoods limit student opportunities at home and after school.

Shartrand et al (1997: 18-19) further adds to this list by offering the following reasons for educator's lack of encouragement of parent involvement:

- Schools may discourage family involvement, due to lack of adequate time and training of educators and principals and predominant institutional cultures in the schools that place little value on the views and participation of parents.
- Large classes may preclude substantial family involvement because educators have less time to spend with individual students during class time and their family members outside the class.
- In light of the pressing demands on educator's time and energy, a lack of administrative support may inhibit family involvement because educators often need incentives such as administration's recognition before they will extend themselves to family members.

Blatchford (1994:13) states that at all schools parents may hold negative views about educators as well as the institutions they represent. They might even be sceptical or suspicious of professionals in general, particularly in areas where they perceive professionals as dominating and controlling their lives. This is especially true of unemployed parents and those dealing with social workers. Past experiences and loss of control can make parents feel disempowered and lacking in confidence and inner articulation of themselves as incapable could make them doubtful about their ability to be good educators to their own children, let alone get actively involved in their child's education. Machet (2000) argues that many parents are alienated because they feel their traditional culture is no longer of value to their children. In South Africa, apartheid education ensured that many parents were denied basic education, including literacy. This further discourages parents from taking an active role in their children's education.

Van der Linde (1997:27) further attributes the lack of parent involvement to the structure of the family, which has changed a great deal. The divorce rate has increased. Single parents are becoming far more common in South African society. Grandparents also play a very important role in raising their grandchildren. There are many reasons why parents may not be in a position to become involved in their children's education.

Carrasquillo and Clement (1993: 88) state that schools are also to blame as they have within the context of their traditional operation, defined limited and ancillary roles for parents. Another factor is that schools have, by reason of their structure and function, presented themselves as forbidding institutions, which have held parents at bay. In such situations parents have found it difficult to work with educators and principals of their children's schools. According to Aaronson et al (1995:58) many schools that claim to welcome parent

participation do not provide a hospitable climate for parents. She agrees with Moles (1993:34) that schools tend to communicate with disadvantaged parents mainly when their children are in some kind of trouble which lends to a negative association to school involvement. Aaronson et al (1995:58), reports that visitors typically encounter notices directing them to the main office, a largely symbolic request that can be intimidating to those who are already reluctant to approach the school.

Schools have to realize that involving parents in the educational process should be part and parcel of the school's mission. Educators and principals have to be trained to understand this important mission and develop strategies to attain this goal. Mannan and Blackwell (1992:223) and Pretorius (1999:160) identify the lack of information about how to establish parent-school partnerships as a barrier to parent involvement. They state that inadequate training for educators about possible problems in designing, implementing and evaluating partnerships is the order of the day, while positive leadership is essential in achieving good results. Chavkin and Williams (1993:281) report that while there is a positive, relationship between the number of written school policies encouraging parent involvement and increased parent activities at all levels in the school district, there are few written policies at any level that promote parent involvement at schools. I strongly agree with Dauber and Epstein 's (1993: 61) belief that **school programmes and teacher's practices** are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home.

2.7 SUMMARY

Racism, bias, prejudice and discrimination continue to exist within our multicultural society. Schools, as agents of society, house learners who may carry harmful attitudes and behaviors (Barta & Winn 1996:28).

The situation within the multicultural school clearly illustrates a dire need for greater collaboration between the home and school in order to overcome some of the problems that learners have to contend with. Carrasquillo and Clement (1993:175) points out that more than any other educational movement, the participation of parents, the first and most important teachers of school children, will inevitably produce dramatic changes in the governance of schools and schooling. For it stands to reason, without outside participation and support, schools cannot really succeed. Parents are prevented or refuse to become involved due to various factors, such as negative past experiences, fear for communicating with educators who are of another socio-economic status, lack of time and energy due to demands of the economic world, language and cultural barriers. It is therefore the school that has to make a concerted effort in closing the gap so that parents and educators form a partnership in assisting the child.

It is time that parents, an available but untapped resource, be acknowledged and recognised by educators in helping children master and maintain needed skills for school (Van Wyk 1996:70). However, as much as one recognises the necessity and value of parent involvement in education, one needs to ask why is it still lacking at most schools? It can be asked who is to blame.

Review of the literature indicates that the **management of parent involvement** is vital in maintaining the participation of parents as well as the extent to which they will be involved. Epstein (1990:274) mentions the educator's leadership in organising, evaluating, and continually building parent involvement practices as essential in keeping parents involved.

If the management tasks of planning, organising, providing guidance as well as supervision and evaluation are carefully implemented, then only will any parent involvement programme attain success and achieve the desired goals and objectives. Numerous programmes have been developed globally. However, each was developed according to the needs of that particular school, parent and learner.

I fully support Heleens (1992:6) remarks that effective partnerships and practices must be responsive to both common and unique family needs as there is no such thing as a model family or a family community programme. Every successful programme must be rooted in its own distinctive school community and the most important operating principle is that of inclusiveness, especially the traditionally 'hard to reach' families.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to answer the research problem, relevant research data is necessary. Research data can be secured and collected by using various techniques. The means of data collection and analysis in this study follows a qualitative research methodology. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design employed by the researcher in order to acquire information on the topic under discussion.

What follows therefore is a brief description of the qualitative research method as well as the research design. Attention is also given to focus group interviews, as this is the means employed by the researcher in data collection. The relevance of the qualitative research method for this study is also discussed as well as the validity and reliability of the research design.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A THEORETICAL BASIS

According to Lemmer (1992: 292) during the last two decades, qualitative research methods have aroused the interest of educational researchers as a valid and useful research method, thus resulting in the proliferation of qualitative studies of educational settings and problems. Qualitative research methodology involves documenting real events, recording what people say (with words, gestures and tone), observing specific behaviors, studying written documents, or examining visual images (Neuman 1999:320).

In accordance with the aim of this study, that is, to explore the attitude of parents and school management in the management of parent involvement in multicultural settings, the researcher found this research method apt for a number of reasons, which will be discussed later. At this stage, it is sufficient to say that what sets qualitative research apart most clearly from other forms of research is the belief that a particular physical, historical, material and social environment in which people find themselves has a great bearing on what they think and how they act (Smith 1987: 175).

Most researchers agree that the qualitative research paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits a participant's accounts of meanings, experiences or perceptions. It also produces descriptive data in the participant's own written or spoken words. It thus involves identifying the participant's beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen 1992: 2; DeVos 1998:243; Lemmer 1992:293). In essence, this is what this study is all about: to try to *understand* how school managers, parents and school governing body members *experience* the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in particular.

3.2.1 Characteristics of qualitative research

According to Neuman (1999:331-335), qualitative research has the following six characteristics:

a) Qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of social context for understanding the social world. They hold that the meaning of a social action or statement depend in an important way on the context in which it appears.

b) A qualitative researcher may use a case study approach. The researcher becomes immersed in the data collection. Immersion gives the researcher

an intimate familiarity with people's lives and culture. He/she looks for patterns in the lives, actions and words of people in the context of the complete case as a whole.

c) Researcher integrity is a real issue. Readers of qualitative research ensure that their research accurately reflects the evidence and they include checks on evidence. They also assume it is impossible to eliminate the effect of the research completely. A researcher's presence is always an explicit issue. A qualitative researcher takes advantage of personal insight, feelings and perspectives as a human being to understand the social life under study, but is aware of his/her values or assumptions.

d) A qualitative researcher begins with a research question and little else. Theory develops during the data collection process. It is an inductive process whereby theory is built from data or grounded in the data. Conceptualisation and operalisation occur simultaneously with data collection and preliminary data analysis. A qualitative researcher builds theory by making comparisons.

e) The passage of time is an integral part of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers look at the sequence of events and pay attention to what happens first, second, third and so on.

f) Qualitative research reports rarely include tables with numbers. The only visual presentations of data may be maps, photographs or diagrams showing how ideas are related. The data are in the form of words, including quotes or descriptions of particular events. A qualitative researcher interprets data by giving them meaning, translating them or making them understandable.

3.2.2 The role of the researcher

Hoberg (1999:25) contends that in qualitative studies the researcher is the ‘instrument’. Much depends on what he/she sees and hears and much rests on his/her powers of observation and listening. Crucial in obtaining data are the personal characteristics, the value system and the stance assumed by the researchers. Validity depends upon the degree to which an informant faithfully represents certain cultural experience (Lemmer 1992: 294).

Blanche and Durrheim (1999:126) maintain that interacting with people in naturalistic, everyday settings, is only an extension of what we do all the time. However, the qualitative researcher still requires special skills. While these are derived from everyday skills, they need to be developed in particular ways to become research skills.

Higgs (2001:57) report that one of the rich opportunities and challenges in qualitative research is bringing the self into the research. In part this is the intrusion of the real-world context of the researcher and the personal frame of reference and the lived experiences of the researcher shaping the research.

McMillan and Schumacher (1997: 453) maintain that the researcher’s role is really many roles, as the ethnographer acquires language fluency with the participants, is interactive to obtain data, establishes social relationships and moves from role sets appropriate in one groups (or person). Because the researcher’s role affects data collection, the role is stated in the study.

3.2.3 Data collection strategies

The qualitative researcher employs a variety of techniques for gathering information. There is no single prescription for which data collection instruments to use, rather the issue here is fitness for purpose. There are several types of data collection instruments that are used more widely in qualitative research than others.

Data include materials the people doing the study actively record, such as interview transcripts and participation observation field notes. Data also include what others have created and the researcher finds, such as diaries, photographs, official documents and newspaper articles (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:106). However, only focus group interviews will be discussed in the following section, as this is the primary strategy that this researcher employed in gathering data.

3.2 3.1 *Focus group interviews*

Focus group interviewing can be defined as a group discussion in which a small number of participants, typically six to twelve, talk about topics of special relevance to a study, under the guidance of a moderator (Hoberg 1999:136). According to Cohen and Manion (2000:288) focus groups are a form of group interview, though not in the sense of a backwards and forwards between interviewee and group. Rather the reliance is on the interaction within the group who discusses a topic supplied by the researcher. It is from the interaction of the group that the data emerge.

Schumacher and McMillan (1997: 453) maintain that by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by the perceptions and

ideas of each other, one can increase the quality and richness of data through a more efficient strategy than one-to-one interviewing. Cohen and Manion (2000: 285) concede with this view and add that since their focus is on a particular issue, this strategy will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview. Focus group interviews are economical on time, producing a large amount of data in a short period of time.

In focus group interviews groups of people are brought together to talk about their lives and experiences in free-flowing, open-ended discussions. The researcher generally uses a non-directive approach (Bogdan & Taylor 1984:111).

The success of the research interview depends largely on the person conducting the interview. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1984:77) the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool. It is therefore necessary for the interviewer to develop certain skills and traits. Bogdan and Taylor (1984: 92-101) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992:98-101) list the following:

- Interviewers must be non-judgmental.The informant must be assured that he/she will not meet with denial, contradiction, competition and other harassment. If you ask people to share part of themselves with you, it is important that you not be evaluative or they will feel demeaned. Try not to feed informants responses or make them feel uncomfortable with their own thoughts.

- Allow people to talk. Good interviewers need to display patience. Force yourself not to interrupt even though you are not interested in a topic.

- Pay attention. Listen to what people say. Ask for clarification if you do not understand. This is of special importance when interviews are conducted in a multicultural setting. Question, not to challenge, but to make clear.

- Be sensitive about the effects personal characteristics may have on the interview.

- Probe. A key strategy for the qualitative interviewer is to avoid as much as possible questions that can be answered by 'yes' or 'no.' Particulars and details will come from probing questions that require an exploration.

- Carry out cross checks. Be alert to exaggerations and distortions.

- Establish good relations with informants. An interviewer should not hold back his/her feelings completely.

- Interviewing requires flexibility. To be flexible means to respond to the immediate situation, to the informants that are sitting before you, not to some predetermined set of procedures or stereotypes.

To assist the interviewer in conducting focus group interviews, an interview schedule or guide is used. The interview guide establishes the agenda for the group discussion and provides the structure within which the groups may interact (Hoberg 1999:140). Bogdan and Taylor (1984: 93) state that the interview schedule serves solely as a reminder to the interviewer to ask certain questions and cannot be seen as a structured schedule or protocol. They are guides that allow for open- ended responses and are flexible enough for the

researcher to note and collect data on unexpected dimensions of the topic (Bogdan & Biklen 1992: 77).

To ensure that the interview moves quickly and responses are recorded exactly as given, a tape recorder is used. Gay (1990: 205) states that mechanical recording is more objective. The tape recorder allows the interviewer to capture so much more than he/she could rely on memory (Bogdan & Taylor 1984: 103). The tapes are later transcribed. In addition, Bogdan and Taylor (1984:103) suggest the use of the interviewer's journal where the researcher makes notes of emerging themes, interpretations, hunches, and striking gestures and nonverbal expressions essential to understanding the meaning of a person's words.

3.2.4 Data analysis

The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of qualitative enquiry are analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings (Bergh & Van Wyk 1999:64). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 130) data analysis is an on-going, creative and dynamic process whereby the researcher attempts to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and continually refine their findings.

Birley and Moreland (1998:58) maintain that data analysis along with data collection is the real essence of the research process. Miles and Huberman (1994:23-24) identify three components of analysis, namely, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. He defines data reduction as a process of selecting, abstracting and transforming the raw data that appear in edited field notes. This process is a part of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified.

In the same vein Taylor and Bogdan (1984:130) mention the following phases essential to data analysis:

- The ongoing discovery phase whereby themes are identified and concepts and propositions are developed.
- Coding the data and refining one's understanding of the subject matter.
- The researcher attempts to discount his/her findings, that is, to understand the data in the context in which they were collected.

Coding schemes is a critical data reduction tool also recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994:25), which, they state, may either be descriptive codes as well as second level explanatory (pattern) codes.

Coding is the process of dividing data into parts by a classification system (McMillan & Schumacher 1997:509). Birley and Moreland (1998:58) concur that coding is a process of structuring data into an analyzable form. They add that the purpose of coding is to render the data into a form in which it can be presented and analysed. It also serves to identify any important and significant trends that may be presented. Coding allows the researcher to get to know the data.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984:137-140) propose the following steps in coding qualitative data:

a) Developing coding categories: the researcher starts by listing every theme, concept, interpretation, typology, and proposition identified or developed during the initial analysis.

b) Code all the data: this means all field notes, transcripts, documents and other materials should be coded.

c) Sort the data into coding categories: this is a non-interpretive, mechanical operation whereby all the data coded are assembled according to each category.
d) See what data are left out, bearing in mind that not all data that is collected are used in the study.
e) Refine the analysis: this ensures a clear illumination of all themes, concepts and propositions.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984:140) emphasise that what is critical is that one has to look at how the data were collected in order to understand them. In this study, the use of focus group interviews to gain an understanding of the management of parental involvement within a multicultural context influences the interpretation of the findings.

3.2.5 Validity and reliability in qualitative research

While all of the above assists the researcher in gathering information successfully, the question of the validity and reliability of this research strategy needs to be addressed.

Methodologists recommend that qualitative researchers adopt criteria such as reliability and validity to judge their work, thereby enhancing its contribution to the general scientific enterprise. They propose not only to discover but also to verify (Smith 1987:179).

According to Shimahara (1988:86), validity and reliability of research are crucial in all social research. Collected data must be accurate, authentic and represent reality.

While validity and reliability may sound congruent, they are two separate concepts with distinctive meanings. While ethnographic validity refers to the authentic representation of what is happening in a social situation, ethnographic reliability refers to the repeatability of a given study by researchers. This refers to the extent to which independent researchers discover the same phenomenon in comparable situations (Shimahara 1988:86).

Triangulating multiple sources of data is a strategic choice that can enhance a study's validity. Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point. It involves designing a study in which multiple cases, *multiple informants*, or more than one data gathering method are used (Marshall & Rossman 1994: 144).

When more than one person participates (as in this study), the interview process gathers a wide variety of information across a large number of subjects than if there were few participants (Marshall& Rossman 1994: 81).

On the one hand group interviews triangulate the data of formal methodological techniques by adding to them the human element of the voices of multiple subjects. On the other hand, stemming from its group nature, group interviews triangulate with cross-referenced multiple opinions (Van Wyk 1996: 135). Van Wyk (1996:136) further adds that since focus groups are grounded in the "human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups," focus group methodology has a degree of external validity.

Measures to enhance reliability involve a complete description of the research process, so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedures in comparable settings. This includes a delineation of the physical, cultural and social contexts of the study, a statement of the ethnographer's role in the

research setting, an accurate description of the conceptual framework of research and a complete description of the methods of data collection and analysis (Shimahara 1988:87).

Validity on the other hand necessitates demonstration that the propositions generated, refined or tested match the causal conditions, which are obtained in real life (LeCompte & Goetz 1982: 43).

Establishing validity involves a process of checking, questioning and theorising and should not be seen as a strategy for establishing rule-based correspondence between our findings and the 'real world' (Miles & Huberman 1994: 279). According to Lemmer (1992:294) crucial in obtaining valid data are the personal characteristics, the value system and the stance assumed by the researcher. Validity depends not so much upon the number of cases studied as upon the degree to which an informant faithfully represents a certain cultural experience.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 262-275) suggest the following tactics that a researcher could use to test or confirm findings to enhance validity: checking for representativeness; checking for researcher effects; triangulating; weighting the evidence; checking the meaning of outliers; using extreme cases; following up surprises; looking for negative evidence; making if-then tests; ruling out spurious relations; replicating a finding; checking out rival explanations and getting feedback from informants. While these are some techniques that can be employed to validate the results of the research, obviously not all needs to be carried out.

3.2.6 Ethical considerations in qualitative research

According to Marshall and Rossman (1994:71) the qualities that make a successful qualitative researcher should be revealed through sensitivity to the ethical issues that are present when we engage in a moral act. Ethical considerations are generic such as informed consent, protecting participant's anonymity, as well as situation specific factors.

In addition, Bogdan and Biklen (1992:54) suggest the following:

- Treat subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in the research. Researchers should never lie to subjects or record conversation on hidden mechanical devices.
- In negotiating permission to do a study, the researcher should make it clear what the terms of the agreement are and he/she should abide by that contract.
- The researcher must report his/her findings truthfully. Fabricating or distorting data is not acceptable.

In summary, it can be stated that whatever ethical decisions researchers make, they should not deceive the participants in any way (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:29).

3.3 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this research is to *manifest the experiences* of the management of parent involvement of the school management team, the school governing body and that of the parents. It is therefore imperative that a methodological approach be adopted, which will allow the researcher to follow a tradition, which focuses on the in-depth, the detail, the process and the context of schooling. This results in the generating of hypotheses and theories from data collected rather than testing preconceived hypotheses and theories upon the subjects of research (Lemmer 1992: 294). In addition, by using qualitative methodology, the researcher is able to obtain access to hidden data, that is information from actors

(school managers, school governing body members, parents) which is both unexpected and unintended. This kind of information is not easily disclosed in official responses to formal questionnaires (Lemmer 1992:294).

3.3.1 Paradigms and methods

Both qualitative and quantitative styles are widely used, but each is rooted in a distinct logic or approach to social science. Each has its strengths and limitations, topics or issues where it glitters and classic studies that provide remarkable insights into social life (Neumann 1999:16-170). Firestone (1987:20) argues that the choice of methodology is often indicative of one's values about what the world is like, how one ought to understand it and what the most important threats to that understanding are. In addition to these contributing factors, other considerations such as the deployment of researcher's time and resources and negotiating access also played a vital role (Marshall & Rossman 1994:60).

3.3.2 Rationale for the choice of data collection strategies

In determining the data collection method, Marshall and Rossman (1994:99) suggest that the researcher consider whether the method will provide adequate information, be cost effective, and be feasible in terms of the sensitivities in the setting and the resources available for the study. In addition the choice made should be logically linked to the conceptual framework and research questions, the overall strategy of the study and early decisions about the role.

In this research use was made of focus group interviews, to study the management of parent involvement within the multicultural school context in the Umlazi District.

3.3.2.1 *Focus group interviews*

The primary technique of data gathering was focus group interviews with the school management team, members of the school governing body and parents at three multicultural secondary schools in the Umlazi District.

The focus group was used as the method of data collection because this method is socially oriented, studies participants in the natural, real life atmosphere, the format allows the facilitator the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues as they arise in the discussion, the results have high face validity- the findings appear believable, it is relatively low cost, it provides quick results, and it can increase the sample size of qualitative studies by interviewing more people at one time (Marshall & Rossman 1994:84).

The researcher's decision to conduct focus group interviews began with a general interest in the role that informal socialisation plays in a person's acquisition of information about foreseeable life problems. The researcher is particularly interested in interactions in which people try to make sense of each other's experiences.

The major advantage of focus groups is that they offer the chance to observe participants engaging in interaction that is concentrated on a selected set of attitudes and experiences, which are of interest to the researcher (Morgan & Spanish 1984:259). Therefore this technique is especially appropriate to this study.

Focus groups are contrived settings bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particularly given theme or topic where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes (Cohen & Manion 2000: 288).

This researcher felt that as many of her participants would be Black parents and grandparents, a group discussion would be more effective, whereby these parents would not feel 'alone' in their thoughts or feel intimidated when questioned by a young Indian female. Morgan and Spanish (1984:260) also maintain that focus group interviews allow the researcher the opportunity to observe what kinds of things participants choose to present in the group.

The size of each focus group were in accordance to Marshall and Rossman's (1994:84) recommendation, that is the groups are usually composed of seven to ten people who are unfamiliar to one another and have been selected because they share certain characteristics that are relevant to the question of the study.

All focus group discussions were guided by means of an interview guide or schedule. This guide was used mainly to provide a structure within which the group may interact. The nature of each session is characteristic of a conversation, with the researcher refraining from engaging in a dialogue of questions and answers. Each session was audiotaped so that the researcher could focus on the actual conversation and respond appropriately rather than spending the time listening and writing each person's responses down for analysis at a later stage. The focus group session is much more fruitful if the researcher is able to probe, delve into and seek clarity on issues that are being discussed on hand.

3.4 THE DESIGN OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Since the present investigation is a study of the acts and meanings ascribed to events by actors in a particular social context, it can be said that this qualitative study follows an interpretative approach within the ethnographic tradition of research (Smith 1987:176).

3.4.1 Factors influencing the study

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect their own subjectivity may have on the data they produce (Bogdan & Biklen 1992: 46). In qualitative research, a study cannot be carried out by people who see themselves as detached, neutral observers concerned with the kinds of observation, measurement, and prediction that are presumed to be unbiased, unaffected by the inquirer's vantage point or location in the world (Sherman & Webb 1988:175). Smith (1987:175) states that notions about the 'personhood' of the qualitative researcher must be considered. She adds that the researcher is not a faceless replicate and those subject's intentions, beliefs, views of the researcher and interests must be taken into account. In addition, Van Wyk (1996:153) includes the researcher's background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, occupation and age as possible attributes that could enhance or hinder the research.

In this study the researcher is a young Indian woman carrying out research in a multicultural community. The fields of research chosen include members of the black community to a far greater extent than any other race group. The researcher is an English first language speaker and cannot converse in any of the African languages. An interpreter was therefore essential during all focus group interviews with parents at all three schools. The interpreter is a colleague of the researcher who teaches Isizulu at the school at which she teaches. Prior to the

interviews she was advised on what was expected of her, that is, to make verbatim translations and not to 'interpret' comments made by parents in Isizulu.

Many of the learners at the schools in the study live with grandparents who belong to 'the old school of thought.' They believe that it is the job of the school to educate their children. They do not see the need for them to be involved, as their parents were not when they were growing up. Many are on a different educational level and feelings of intimidation posed a problem when relating to members of the governing bodies and parent community. The researcher therefore needed to be tactful to win the support of these groups by emphasisng the role grandparents played as surrogate parents in uplifting educational standards. The researcher's status as parent was used whereby she explained her experiences as a parent in her own child's education.

School management teams needed to understand the aims of this study fully prior to the interviews so that they too did not feel that they were under scrutiny. The researcher therefore briefed the school management teams on the exact purpose of the study with the intention of making them comfortable to support this project.

3.5 CHOICE OF SETTINGS AND SCHOOLS

Schools were chosen according to the area in which the researcher works and lives. School A and B fall within the Isipingo circuit and School C falls in the Chatsworth circuit. These two circuits are two of many circuits, which fall under the Umlazi District. All schools used in this study are secondary schools.

The researcher firstly requested permission from the district manager, Mr. N. Zungu, of the Umlazi District. He suggested that the researcher contact the schools personally if she wanted to move at a faster pace, as she would experience a delay if a letter were sent via the district office to gain access to these schools. The researcher therefore sought permission telephonically with the three principals.

Initially one principal was sceptical and indicated that he would not be able to furnish me with confidential information. The researcher emphasised her role as an independent researcher who would be using information for the sole purpose of research and had no intention of divulging information on any particular school/individual to the Department of Education. The researcher also emphasized that anonymity would prevail throughout the study. The principal at School C was not very keen to participate in this study as she felt that priority should be given to the matriculation examinations that were in progress. However, after discussing the study with her, she agreed to participate and allowed for interviews to take place.

Particulars of the three schools selected are provided in Table 3.1

TABLE 3.1 Characteristics of participating schools

	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Medium of instruction	English	English	English
Number of learners	1 179	1 136	1 075
Number of learners according to			

race group:			
African/black	500	352	336
Indian	662	774	270
Colored	17	10	42
White	0	0	427
Number of learners according to home language:			
English	684	787	728
Afrikaans	1	1	20
Isixhosa	13	11	17
Siswati	3	2	1
Isizulu	472	331	304
Sesotho	5	4	4
Number of learners whose mothers are deceased	64	80	23
Number of learners whose fathers are deceased	148	131	77
Number of learners whose both parents are deceased	71	39	4
Number of teaching staff	35	37	26
Number of administrative staff	2	2	4
Racial composition of staff			
Teaching staff:			

Indian	35	37	6
African	0	0	2
White	0	0	26
Administrative staff:			
Indian	2	2	1
White	0	0	3
Support staff:			
Librarian	0	0	1
Social worker	0	0	1
Maintenance manager	0	0	1

The above information was obtained from the EMIS survey conducted by the Department of Education for the year 2003.

In choosing participants for focus group session with parents, the researcher had to seek the help of principals. At each of these schools the principals referred me to either the deputy principal or secretary to assist me in my selection. The principal of each school informed their school governing bodies of my intention to carry out research at their school as well as their role in this study. They provided me with the names of school governing body members who would participate in this study. These were given to me telephonically. Eventually I included nine members of the three school governing bodies, fifteen parents and nine members of the school management team. Thus a total of thirty three participants were included in the study.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter presented an overview of the research method employed to gather data required for this study. In addition, the design of this study was briefly discussed. Information pertaining to the schools under study was also presented.

According to Bergh and Van Wyk (1999: 64) the culminating activities of qualitative enquiry are analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings. Chapter 4 follows accordingly with this information.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the data generated from focus group interviews with school management teams, school governing body members and parents of three multicultural schools are represented and described. In total nine school management team members, nine school governing body members and fifteen parents were interviewed. Thus, in total, thirty three participants were included in nine focus group interviews.

It must be emphasised that a large number of participants were second language English speakers whose mother tongue is Isizulu. Therefore it was necessary to use a translator to assist in overcoming problems due to language barriers in the three focus group interviews with parents. A fellow educator who teaches Isizulu at the researcher's school fulfilled the role of translator. The use of a translator was only necessary with the parent interviews.

The ensuing sections (4.3 to 4.8) present the key themes that emerged from the interviews.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS IN THE RESEARCH

As an agent of society, schools are influenced and shaped by their community and environmental context. In addition, schools alone cannot shoulder the

enormous reform challenges confronting the education systems of the world. The community as a whole must accept the shared responsibility for educating children. Joint action contributes to greater success than can be achieved by individuals and by isolated ventures (Lemmer 2000:169). For this reason schools must be understood in their social context.

4.2.1 The context of the schools

Umlazi is located approximately 15km south of the Durban CBD and constitutes one of the largest townships in South Africa.

According to the eThekwini Region Information Brochure (2003: 9 – 10), the Umlazi district, which is the area of study, has been divided by the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Education Department into sixteen wards. They are: Amanzimtoti, Folweni, Mafa, Umbumbulu Central, Isipingo, Dukumbane, Maphundu, Merebank, Chatsworth West, Chatsworth East, Umbilo, Queensburgh, Port Natal, City, Mayville and Umgeni North. Only three (Mafa, Dukumbane and Maphundu) of the sixteen wards fall within the Umlazi Township. None of the schools that fall within these three wards are multicultural schools.

Within the Umlazi District there are 565 schools, 498 public schools and 67 independent schools. In this district there are 42 pre-primary schools, 408 primary schools, 153 secondary schools, 30 combined schools and 22 schools for learners of special educational needs.

In this study research was conducted at three multicultural schools within the Isipingo and Chatsworth West wards. School A and School B fall in the Isipingo ward and School C falls in the Chatsworth West ward.

While School A and B are ex -House of Delegate schools found in Isipingo, a former Indian area bordering the Umlazi township, School C is an ex- model C school found in Queensburgh which is approximately twenty kilometers from the Umlazi Township.

The bulk of the learners that attend School A and School B come from the Umlazi Township while the majority of learners attending School C stem from the Queensburgh and Chatsworth area. Due to the number of the residents of Isipingo who take their children to former white schools, space was created in these schools, thus making way for Black township learners to attend these schools. Although School C still has a substantial number of white learners, black learners from Umlazi Township and Indian learners from Queensburgh and Chatsworth form a significant percentage of the school population (cf. Table 3.1).

Since many learners attending all three schools under study come from the Umlazi Township, it is necessary to describe the nature and characteristics of this community to a much greater extent than the Isipingo and Queensburgh communities, which these schools serve.

Umlazi Township is divided into approximately twenty nine sections. It contains approximately thirty six thousand formal residential sites, some multi-storey hostels and approximately nineteen thousand informal residential structures (Rothaug 1998:3). In the Umlazi Independent Development Framework Comprehensive Report, Rothaug (1998: 9-10) summarises the existing situation in Umlazi as follows:

a) Low education and training levels and limited opportunities for local economic development contributing to the prevalence of low-income levels and widespread poverty.

b) Inadequate levels of safety and security and consequently high crime rates.

c) The virtual non-existence of community sense and identity.

d) A lack of established communication channels, therefore limited community involvement and limited understanding of development realities.

e) Inadequate physical and social support facilities and services as well as limited access to economic opportunities and support structures.

The Isipingo area, which borders the Umlazi Township, has seen substantial change since the repeal of the Group Areas Act. Many residents of Umlazi moved into Isipingo and many Isipingo residents moved into former white areas, thereby changing the monocultural nature of schools in the area. However, in general, schools within the Umlazi Township retained their monocultural status. While School A serves the Umlazi community to a great extent, residents of surrounding areas such as Malukazi (an informal settlement that lacks basic facilities such as running water and electricity), Lotus Park, Illovo, Kwa-Makutha and Adams Mission also depend on this school to meet the educational needs of their children. Black people predominantly inhabit the latter two areas.

School B on the other hand, includes many Indian learners from the better parts of Isipingo and many of the parents are professionals and business people. Such learners are sent for extra tuition after school and enjoy a richer lifestyle. However, the Black learners of this school who hail from the Umlazi Township struggle to survive and many live in shacks.

Latecoming is a common problem at all schools in the Isipingo area as learners travel to and from school by foot or use taxis and trains. Learners prefer to take taxis which have high- powered music systems and wait for the next taxi should they not be satisfied. Girls are easily influenced by taxi drivers and conductors and often enter into relationships with these men. Fights between girls frequently occur as they compete for the attention of these men. Many learners have fallen victims to criminal activities and some of them have been robbed and raped on their way to school.

The former white area of Queensburgh in which School C is situated, is characteristic of an affluent area and most learners are dropped off and picked up by parents. Learners coming from Umlazi travel to school by train. The train station is approximately five hundred meters away from the school. These learners come from families which are economically comfortable and can afford the higher school fees and travelling costs. Queensburgh is a truly multicultural community with almost an equal number of Blacks, Indians and Whites in the area. Since it is one of the more expensive areas to live in, the inhabitants are well educated, and enjoy a more comfortable life than Isipingo and Umlazi residents.

4.2.2 The schools in the research

Three multicultural secondary schools were chosen for this study. School A and School B are very similar in nature. While the both emphasise neatness, both are located in old buildings and need of repair. Although School C is also old, a maintenance manager and his team have ensured that the school is well kept and maintained. School A and B are co-educational schools and School C is for girls only. At all three schools learners wear school uniforms. Learners in School C, however, are much more neatly attired and adhere to the school's

uniform policy strictly. Learners at School A and B often deviate from the school uniform policy and are often sent home and told to return in full school uniform. Playing truant and absenteeism is not a major problem at School C whereas School A and B are constantly addressing these issues.

In terms of school infrastructure, all three schools have water, toilet, classrooms and computer facilities. The access roads to School A and C are tarred but the access road to School B is in a poor state and needs to be repaired and retarred.

The staff complement of each school varies as this depends on the number of learners as well as the type of school. School C has a high female staff membership because it is an all girl's school. Altogether there are forty four female educators (twenty seven state paid, fourteen governing body appointees and one part- time educator) and six female adminisrative workers (three state paid, two governing body appointees and one part time) at this school. At School A there are twelve state paid male educators and twenty three state paid female educators. In addition the school governing body has employed one male educator and three female educators. With regard to administrative workers, there are one male and one female state paid, and one male and one female governing body appointees. At School B, state paid staff is composed of fourteen male and sixteen female educators and one administrative worker. There are no governing body appointees on staff.

4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The personal characteristics of all participants are presented in this section. The personal attributes of any individual influences the role he/she plays in any situation and therefore must be considered. In this study participants include

school management team members, school governing body members and parents (cf. 1.10.)

4.3.1 The school management team members

Table 4.1 to 4.3 presents the personal characteristics of all school management team members interviewed in this study. A correlation of a participant's background information and responses must exist if one has to make meaning of the situation under study. The data in these tables were obtained from responses to questionaires included as appendices

TABLE 4.1 School management team at school A

MANAGERS	**1**	**2**	**3**
Race group	Indian	Indian	Indian
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Age	47	38	43
No. of years in position	3	2	4
Languages spoken	English Afrikaans Isizulu	English Afrikaans Isizulu	English Afrikaans Tamil
Residential Area	Glenwood	Reservoir Hills	Kenville

TABLE 4.2 School management team at school B

MANAGERS	**1**	**2**	**3**
Race group	Indian	Indian	Indian
Gender	Male	Male	Female
Age	46	37	55
No. of years in position	5	2	9
Languages spoken	English Afrikaans Isizulu	English Afrikaans Isizulu Hindi	English Hindi Isizulu
Residential Area	Chatsworth	Queensburgh	Isipingo

TABLE 4.3 School management team at school C

MANAGERS	**1**	**2**	**3**
Race Group	White	Indian	White
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	49	42	50
No. of years in position	10	1 1/2	11
Languages spoken	English Afrikaans	English	English
Residential area	Glenwood	Queensburgh	Queensburgh

The majority of managers interviewed have less than five years experience in their positions. Of these nine managers five of them can converse in Isizulu, four

can speak Afrikaans, two can speak Hindi and one can converse in Tamil. All are English first language speakers.

At School A and School B, which are ex- House of Delegate schools and previously served the Indian community, the school managers are all Indian. At School C there is one Indian manager and the rest are White. Of all the managers interviewed three resided in the same area as the school in which they teach. The rest live between twenty to thirty five kilometres away from their respective schools.

School managers were interviewed after school at School A, during the lunch break at School B and at School C the principal arranged for the researcher to conduct the interview during normal working hours.

Discussion

The principal and members of the school management team play an important role in initiating, planning and managing parent involvement (c.f. 2. 5) This means, inter alia, putting in place parent involvement programmes which take into consideration the learner and parent component of the schools they manage. However, in all these schools the management team does not reflect the racial composition of the learners and their parents. This can have a negative effect in establishing or improving parent involvement in their schools.

4.3.2 School governing body members

The researcher interviewed parents who are on the school governing body as they play a vital role in school governance and are also tasked with improving

parent involvement. Tables 4.4 to 4.6 depict the characteristics of school governing body members who were interviewed.

TABLE 4.4 Parent members of SGB at school A

PARENT	**I**	**II**	**III**
Race group	Indian	Indian	Indian
Gender	Female	Male	Male
Highest level of education	Grade 4	Grade 11	Grade 12
Residential area	Malukazi	Lotus Park-Isipingo	Lotus Park-Isipingo
Languages spoken	English	English Isizulu	English Isizulu

TABLE 4.5 Parent members of SGB at school B

PARENT	**I**	**II**	**III**
Race Group	Indian	Indian	Indian
Gender	Female	Male	Male
Highest level of education	B.Paed Degree B.Ed	Diploma in Computers	Grade 12
Residential Area	Amanzimtoti	Isipingo Hills	Isipingo Hills
Languages spoken	English	English	English

TABLE 4.6 Parent members of SGB at school C

PARENT	I	II	III
Race Group	Indian	Black	White
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Highest level of Education	B.Paed Degree	B. Ed	PHD
Residential Area	Hillary	Queensburgh	Sunningdale
Language/s spoken	English Afrikaans	English Isizulu Xhosa	English

In School A there are five parent representatives, four are Indian and one is Black. In School B all five parent representatives are Indian and in School C the seven parent representatives comprise of two Indians, three Whites and two Blacks.

The SGB members included in the research are as follows. Altogether nine parents on the school governing bodies participated, comprising of seven Indians, one Black member and one White member. At School A, the governing body did include one Black member, however, work commitments prevented him from participating in this study. Altogether four females and five males were interviewed. The education level of members varies to a great extent. At School A one SGB member had a grade 4 pass as her highest educational qualification while at School C one member interviewed possesses a doctorate degree. The education level of members may impact on their extent of involvement.

Of the nine parents all were English first language speakers except for one who was a second language English speaker with Isizulu as his mother tongue. Only two others can converse in Isizulu. One member could communicate in English and Afrikaans and another mentioned Xhosa as an additional language that she could speak.

All interviews with school governing body members were conducted over weekends. At School A, the researcher was informed by the principal of a meeting to compile the annual budget that was to take place and the researcher was invited to make a presentation to school governing body members and parents about the research and related expectations. Having made the presentation, the school governing body members agreed to be interviewed directly after the meeting. At School B the principal helped the researcher set up a meeting with the school governing body as was done at School A. The focus group interview with SGB members of School B took place directly after their annual budget meeting.

At School C, governing body members were keen to participate in this study and agreed to be interviewed on a Saturday afternoon at the school.

Discussion

The SASA (RSA 1996: section 23) makes provision for schools to co-opt members to the SGB to ensure that the racial composition of the SGB reflects that of the school. However, in all the schools included in this research, this has not been done. This could negatively impact on the SGB's ability to formulate a mission statement for the school or encourage parents to become involved in school activities.

4.3.3 Parents

This section summarises the characteristics of parents interviewed in this research. While the identity of participants is not revealed, the reader can gain an understanding of each individual who was interviewed by a presentation of the characteristics of each participant. These characteristics are included in Tables 4.7 to 4 .9.

TABLE 4.7: Parents at school A

PARENT	I	II	III	IV	V
Race group	Indian	Black	Indian	Black	Indian
Age	33	49	33	47	37
Residential Area	Lotus Park-Isipingo	Y-section Umlazi	Malukazi	Adams Mission	Isipingo Rail
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female
Marital Status	Married	Single	Single	Married	Married
Language/s spoken	English	Isizulu English	English	English Isizulu	English

TABLE 4.8: Parents at school B

PARENTS	I	II	III	IV	V
Race group	Black	Indian	Indian	Indian	Indian
Age	Not available	46	44	39	37
Residential Area	S Section-Umlazi	Isipingo	Isipingo	Isipingo Rail	Isipingo Rail
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Marital Status	Single	Married	Married	Single	Married

TABLE 4.9 Parents at school C

PARENT	I	II	III	IV	V
Race group	Coloured	Indian	White	Black	Black
Age	38	48	46	40	45
Residential Area	Escombe-Queensburgh	Shallcross-Chatsworth	Escombe-Queensburgh	Malvern - Queensburgh	Malvern-Queensburgh
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Marital status	Single	Married	Married	Single	Married
Language/s spoken	English Afrikaans	English	English	Afrikaans English Isizulu Xhosa Sotho Tswana	Isizulu English Xhosa

Although a concerted effort was made to include parents from diverse groups included in the schools, a proportional representation was not aimed at for practical reasons. The fifteen parents interviewed comprised of five Blacks, eight Indians, one White and one Coloured. All Black parents interviewed were proficient in English to a limited extent and tended to use phrases now and again from their home language. However, the translator proved useful in this situation. None of the other race groups could converse in Isizulu.

Of the fifteen parents five resided in areas that were a walking distance to the school and seven depended on taxis to transport them to the school when necessary. Altogether twelve women and three men were interviewed. At School A and B the request was made for parents to take part in this study at a budget meeting held by the school. The majority of the small number of parents who attended this meeting were women. It is due to this fact that more mothers

were participants in this study. Of these mothers six were single and therefore carried the responsibility of caring and educating their children on their own.

Discussion

The parents interviewed represented all racial groups represented in the school community, belong to different socio-economic groupings, live in different areas and include both married and single parents. However, given the diversity of the South African society, the parents cannot be said to be representative of caregivers in general.

4.4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

4.4.1 Perceptions of parent involvement

In determining what a parent's basic obligations are regarding the learner, one gains an understanding as to the expectations which the school management team and the school governing body members have of parents. At both School A and School B the managers indicated that financial obligations, that is, school fees and uniforms must be provided. A manager at School B remarks, " Ja, I'd say giving children tools for school, like pens, rulers and paying school fees." Another manager at School B included attending parent meetings as an obligation of the parent.

School C managers and SGB members felt that parents have a tremendous role to play. A manager at School C confirms this by adding, "Commitment to the payment of school fees, seeing to it that children abide by the schools code of conduct, support schools and their daughters by attending school meetings,

functions, fundraising efforts and assisting where possible like providing transport to sport events," as part of parent obligations. A SGB member at School C states that in his opinion parent involvement means, "… representing and reflecting the socio-economic cultural values of my community to ensure that the education and teaching is appropriate and relevant and that the management of the school is effective and sustainable."

While the management teams of Schools A and B have a number of expectations of parents, some parents interviewed displayed a very limited understanding of what parent involvement means. A Black parent at School A and a Black parent at School B felt that the parent's basic obligations include paying school fees and buying school books and uniforms. With regard to the Indian parents at both schools, there was an indication that they were reluctant to be involved due to work commitments. At School C on the other hand, a White parent indicated that basic obligations would include, " knowing what was going on in my child's life and forming a partnership with the school in order to effectively manage school matters."

Discussion

From the above it can be ascertained that there is a discrepancy in the expectations that school managers have of the role parents should play with what most parents are actually doing at schools. This could be due to the education levels and knowledge of the parents. According to Vandegrift and Greene (1992:57), schools do not always know what parent involvement really means. From the interviews carried out it is clear that each school as well as each individual has an own definition of parent involvement.

However, Chavkin (1989:281) indicates that sometimes even the definition of parent involvement is a barrier. She adds that while agreeing on the general concept of parent involvement, people mean different things when they use the term parent involvement. She suggests that the definition of parent involvement be clarified and a consensus is reached on exactly what the term means so that the needs of the community can be satisfied.

4.4.2 Policy on parent involvement

There is a lack of a written formal policy on parent involvement at all the schools under study. All school managers, however, have recognised the strengths of parent involvement and tend to call on for parent assistance when the need arises either verbally or by means of a written request. A school manager at School A acknowledges that they do not have a written policy on parent involvement. He explains:

> Actually, we do have a verbal policy, however from time to time, written requests are sent to parents when the need arises, but no written / binding policy is available.

In addition to this, the principal at this school argues that the school does not need a policy, as it is not the job of the school to ensure parent involvement. He says:

> Let's get one thing straight; it is not the school management team's job to get parents involved, it's the state's job. We need state intervention. I can get a 100% pass rate without any parent involvement. We need financial resources. If funding

> was available then we would see results – we don't need parent involvement for effective learning.

A parent at this school says that the school governing body should get the parents together and ask them how they would like to be involved. This could thus lead to a policy on parent involvement at the school.

The principal of School B argues that the booklet entitled The Rights of Parents, which is given to learners on admission to school, is sufficient. The school does not need to draw up a specific policy on parent involvement.

A manager at School C states: " We do not have a policy that has been formalised. The deputy principals, social worker or principal calls on parents who offer their services and request aid."

Despite the absence of a formal written policy, most role players, that is, school managers, school governing body members and parents believe that parent involvement has a positive influence on the child's learning and on the actual running of the school.

An SGB member at School A feels that if there was a policy on parent involvement, more parents would become involved and much more could be done in upgrading the school and more effective learning would take place. However, what parents rather do at this school is " blame the teachers and principal if their child has been caught doing wrong."

An SGB member at School B feels that in order to uplift the standard of education parents need to know about activities taking place outside the

classroom situation and be able to render help where possible. This could be achieved if the school had a policy on involving parents.

In the same vein a SGB member at School C states that in order to create an environment that is suitable for effective learning, parents should support and encourage the effective running of the school.

A school manager at School C mentions that the absence of a policy on parent involvement has been noted. She states:

> The issue of a policy on parent involvement comes up regularly at SGB meetings. Presently we ask for assistance either telephonically or in writing, this is not proving to be effective.

None of the schools made allowances for parents coming from different areas, socio-economic backgrounds or diverse cultural and language groupings.

Discussion

According to Moles (in Chavkin 1993:37), every school should develop written policies about working with parents from a multicultural perspective, with the cooperation of parents. The fact that no school has moved in this direction so far indicates that strong leadership is lacking in this regard. While the strengths of this resource have been recognised, management has not taken the initiative to build on it.

Some managers believe that it is not their task to empower parents. As a result the support of parents has not been utilised to the fullest. If school managers do not want to take the lead, then this is an indication of the poor leadership qualities that they possess.

Dauber and Epstein (1993: 61) have mentioned that school programmes and teacher practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement. If school managers refuse to acknowledge their role in setting up such programmes then obviously effective parent involvement will be lacking and it is most likely that the difficulties that school managers are experiencing in coping with multicultural schools will remain for a long time to come.

4.4.3 The school climate

A friendly, inviting school climate will obviously result in people wanting to visit without any inhibitions. According to all school managers, parents are made to feel as welcome as possible and every one of them maintains that at no time was a parent made to feel uncomfortable. According to a school manager at School B:

> We have a secretary who receives our visitors in a very warm manner. There is a room, which is very comfortable where parents await to meet whom they have come to see."

A manager at School A remarks, " You can come here at any given time, and you will find someone from the community either making a friendly visit or keeping an appointment. So I don't think parents feel uncomfortable at this school."

An Indian parent at School A maintains that when he comes to the school, " everyone is so friendly." A Black parent at School A describes some practical problems she encounters when coming to the school:

> No, I don't have no problem, they talk nice. Only sometime I come. I take off from work. I sit for so long, sometimes they

> say teacher teaching, sometimes say wait, after teacher's break he see you. But I have to go back to work.

A parent on the SGB at School C describes a school visit:

> I enjoyed seeing learner's work on display. But I don't like the us and them' feeling one gets from educators. I enjoyed being allowed to be part of school and especially of the opportunity given to me to make an input on methods and approaches to teaching on industry focussed subjects.

At School B a Black parent describes his frustrations:

> Ja, I take off from work, I come here and they tell me the teacher is teaching. They let me sit in this room and I wait. Sometimes they ask if I want to come back another day. How can I take off again? But they speak nicely to me, just like everyone else.

Discussion

A visit to a child's school should be such that the parent would feel motivated and encouraged to come back. Aaronson et al (1996:58) reports that many schools that claim to welcome parent participation do not provide a hospitable climate for parents (cf. 2.6). Chavkin (1989: 258) maintains that parents should be made to feel welcome at school if schools want them involved. Bauch (1993:154) reveals that physical and social barriers can also transmit unintended messages. She points out the following aspects that need to be checked to facilitate effective school visits:

Are doors and gates unlocked so that parents can enter the gates easily?

Can the parents find the office, and are they greeted courteously when they get there?

If the parents do not speak English, is someone there to help them communicate?

Will parent's mode of dress (e.g. traditional dress or working clothes) make them feel uncomfortable?

Therefore the school management team together with the SGB must promote a positive school climate in order to gain effective parent involvement.

4.4.4 Communication between the school and home

4.4.4.1 Parent meetings

Parent meetings seem to be the primary means of contact with parents at all the schools visited. Each school differed in the number of meetings held with parents. However, common to all the schools was the meeting with parents of Grade twelve learners at least once a term, a meeting held in the third term for Grade nine parents to discuss course selection for Grade ten and the annual budget meeting in the fourth term.

School A and B work very similarly, whereby a parent meeting is held at the beginning of the year and one after the mid-year exams, to discuss learner's academic progress. However, a manager at School C says, " We accommodate a particular grade per term when it comes to parent meetings but ask parents of other grade learners to make appointments should they need to come and see us."

According to the management team at School A and School B the nature of the meeting determines the attendance of parents. At both schools approximately fifty parents attended the annual budget meeting. A school manager at School A states:

> Ja, when we discuss learners work at school, attendance is not so bad, but when we have meetings like the budget meeting which you attended, then, ja, parents got better things to do than come and sit here to talk about school fees for next year. Let's face it, we are parents too, how many of us, teachers, go to our children's school budget meetings. We don't, and yet we expect them to come to our meetings.

A SGB member at School A was much more critical of the lack of attendance at meetings, " Parents are disgusting. They prefer to do other things, than attend their children's meetings."

The principal of School B says:

> Attendance is generally poor at our general parent meetings but should we call a meeting to address academic progress only, then our parents go all out to attend. But we don't get many of the Black parents attending. You know, we are one of the best achieving schools and we have made a reputation when it comes to academic achievement, so for that, ja, parents will give their time.

A school manager at this school adds, " You, know, we get the parents of our bright learners more often coming to meetings. We don't want to see them, and we tell them this. We want to see the parents of the learners who give us a hard time at school, but their parents don't come."

However, the principal has not made any effort to find out why these parents are not attending meetings and what can be done to better accommodate these parents. School C managers indicated that all their meetings are well attended. It also seems as if all groupings are well represented at school meetings.

With regard to times and venue of meetings, School A and School B work similarly and invite parents to the school on a Saturday afternoon. A School A manager says:

> Well, learners come from Umlazi, Kwa-Makutha, Umbogintwini, mid- Illovo and Isipingo. We have to consider what's appropriate for the majority; therefore, we feel that the school is the most convenient. We focus more on timing, as transport is a problem. All our meetings are therefore scheduled for 2 0' clock on a Saturday.

A manager at School B says, " Usually we hold our meetings on a Saturday afternoon after two in the hall, sometimes we feel we need to spend more time with parents – we extend it by starting earlier."

Unlike School A and B, School C holds its meetings during the school week. One manager states," We have our meetings at school at 17h30. Parents find it easier to pop in after work and then go on home." Another manager at the school mentions that there will always be the few who will not be able to make it.

All schools indicated that the language of communication at all meetings is English. At School A, a manager says, " We do ask parents to indicate whether they need to be spoken to in Isizulu. Nobody so far has seen it necessary. But we do have an Isizulu educator available should anyone want a translation."

However, judging by the responses of parents, it seems as if there are language problems which schools are not aware of.

A parent at School A says, " Me, sometimes I understand, sometime I don't. They ask us to say if we don't understand, but me, I stay quiet. They think I'm stupid."

The extent to which the home language of parents is dismissed as irrelevant is captured by the words of the principal from School B, "We may have thirty five percent Black learners but this is an English medium school therefore we use English." A manager at this school adds, "Well, the Black parents don't come. So we don't cater for them." Another manager says, "We get one or two, but I don't think we get parents from farms or locations, the ones we've met speak good English." The fact that these parents form a significant percentage of the school population does not seem to be considered.

At School C a manager says, "Our meetings are in English but presentations at our meetings are made using visual aids in addition to discussion, to aid understanding."

A parent at School C found a problem with time allocated to each parent. He says, "We are given five minutes per subject teacher. How much can we discuss in that time? And then, when we go to the science or maths teacher there is long queue of parents, and we have to wait."

4.4.2. Written communication

At all schools letters are sent to parents in the form of newsletters, term end letters to inform them of forthcoming meetings and circulars. A manager at

School A says, “Funding is a problem. It costs R300 each time to send out a letter to all parents. Once we used a loud hailer in the community to inform parents of a meeting – this was really not effective”.

However, a parent at School A complains that letters can also be ineffective as they rely on learners delivering the letters: “You know, one day I took my child’s bag and found a letter. Ja, that letter had been given to him a week before, but he didn’t give it to me.”

Letters are sent to parents in English by all three schools. The majority of letters sent to individual parents are to inform them of problems experienced with their child at school. An SBG member at School B says, “ The grade supervisor of each grade determines whether a parent should be informed of any wrongdoing and sends a letter to the parent to indicate a warning given to the child or whether the parent should call at school.”

A parent of School B adds language as a barrier to effective written communication by saying “ Sometimes I tell my child read for me, I can’t read English nice. I don’t know if he reads the truth or what.”

4.4.4.3 *Parent – school communication*

Creating opportunities for parents to communicate with the school, other parents and community members is vital to a school’s success as a learning institution. At School A the principal says:

> My doors are open to the community. I never ask them to make appointments. We have parents walking in any time for advice on personal matters. Parents are told at meetings to come in whenever they find it convenient or telephone us.”

Another manager at School A adds:

> We have many clubs at our school and we get a fair share of Blacks and Indians attending, like we have the Environmental Club, Pupil welfare Club, we have our drama learners doing presentations to parents, Sports Day and even Market Day. So parents are given ample opportunity to come in and talk to us."

A parent at School A confirms this by saying, " We can visit the school anytime if there's an issue."

A manager at School A says:

> The school is quite accessible. There are no obstacles as far as we are concerned. We don't follow an appointment system because it becomes intimidating, also creates a bit of distance. You see we have to accommodate parents who are working, so we don't' give them a hard time. Like when you called for this interview, we didn't give you a whole lot of stories. However when parents call the secretary, that has to be programmed. If a parent of a grade 8 learner calls and the teacher has a full teaching day then we tell the parent the teacher is not available for the day. This implies that while the parents are welcomed to contact the school it does not gaurantee that parents will get to speak to the teachers when they have the time.

A Black parent mentions a problem she had when she telephoned the school," Ja, sometime I call the school, the man who answer, he not understand what I'm saying. He say, speak English, speak English."

At School A parents are invited to all club activities and are welcomed to telephone or write to grade controllers or to make appointments with the principal. A school manager says, " But generally parents whose children excel academically or in co-curricular make use of these opportunities."

All SGB members at this school expressed a need for a Parent Support Committee in order to encourage parents of 'weak' learners who do not communicate with the school. One says, " I think parents may be having difficulty communicating with their children, or having financial difficulties and cannot pay school fees, or even maybe they have complaints about educators and fellow learners, so we should have a committee to whom they could go."

Another SGB member mentions " that families are increasingly insular and individualistic and support is seen as weakness or failure and therefore they don't interact."

Beside parent meetings, parents at School B have very little opportunity to meet with educators. All parents interviewed at School B met educators only at a parent meeting. An Indian parent at School B confirms that there is a lack of activities to involve parents at her child's school by saying, " We don't even have Sports Day, to see our children participate. I would really like to come to school where we don't only talk about school work, but to meet other parents and socialise."

Discussion

While each school differs in the nature of meetings and communication with parents, there are aspects of communication, which need to be addressed.
Managers confirm that most written communication are letters to parents relating to learner misbehaviour. This concurs with Davies (1993:206) who maintains that most of the low-income parents had little or no positive contact with the school. What communication there is is generally negative. Most of the parents hear from teachers and school officials only when their child is in

trouble, due to behaviour and academic problems. There is a lack of respect towards the African languages, as they are not accommodated although black learners form a significant proportion of learners at all three schools. Their parents and the languages they speak should be respected and accommodated. Epstein (2001:409-410) proposes the following with regard to home- school communication, which can be applied to all schools, including multicultural schools. Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow- ups as needed; language translators must be used to assist families, as needed; weekly or monthly folders of student work should be sent home for review and comments; arrange for parent-student pick-up of report cards, and plan conferences on improving grades; a regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and other communications; provide clear information on choosing schools or courses, programmes, and activities within schools as well as provide clear information on all school policies, programmes, reforms and transitions. While Epstein, has recommended these guidelines for USA schools, multicultural schools in South Africa would benefit in the application of these principles.

4.4.5 Parents as decision-makers

As an agent of society schools had to follow accordingly when South African society became democratic in 1994. Parents now have the right to be involved in school matters and have a say in the actual governance and management of the school. Interviews showed that parents as a general body depend on the SGB to take decisions on behalf of them. In all three schools the management depends solely on school governing bodies to assist in making decisions and parents as a general body are not involved in decision-making.

However, the SGB in School A and School B is not a reflection of the racial composition of the school. School A has two Black parents on the governing body and School B has no Black parents serving on the governing body, yet it has a 35% Black learner population. A manager at School A defends this disparity in numbers of parents on the SGB per race group by saying, " Well, it comes to who attends the election meetings. When too few of a certain race group attends, it poses a problem." A manager at School B says, " We tried to do something in the last election meeting – there was very little interest. There was just one Black parent present who wasn't interested." An SGB member adds, " They have the perception that attending election meetings is not important."

A manager at School C indicates that the governing body represents the community and all racial groups. Their SGB is composed of three White parents, two Indian parents, and two Black parents. Another manager at School C says, " Parents are included in decision making through the SGB. Unfortunately, a major portion of parents remains apathetic yet complain of decisions taken without their inputs. You can't have the cake and eat it".

Since parents on the SGB make decisions on behalf of the general parent body it is necessary for them to possess certain skills and knowledge in order to make a constructive input. A manager at School A says:

> The system is all-wrong. Since the end of apartheid the state has asked for parent involvement and the state used SGB's to get parents involved. This is not the answer. We have differences in levels of education due to apartheid. SGB's for ex-model C schools come from an educated background – they still uplift their own schools. Blacks parents in our schools need to be trained and educated. We have too many parents in our school who are

> illiterate, they may have high intellectual levels, but they can't communicate."

None of the SGB members at School A have received training. One parent on the SGB says, "I have a Grade four education, and I am willing to learn."

At School B parents on the SGB are drawn from an educated sector and are able to represent the parents adequately. One parent says, " Because of my work background, I have planning and organisational skills as well as fundraising experience. I am also au fait with the South African Schools Act and the role of the SGB."

A parent at School C says, " At this school we have to submit our CV's to the school should we want to stand for election. The principal circulates our CV's to the parent community who are given enough time to study our CV's and then vote at the election meeting."

None of the schools have attempted to train their SGB members. The principal of School A says, " That is the job of the state, we have our hands full as it is, we can't go now and even train people to help govern our school."

Parents outside the SGB have a limited say in school matters. A SGB member at School B says, " Ja, we decide on whether a school should close for a religious holiday and we help in choosing staff members, but when it comes to school fees, ja, I think that's the only time when we call the parents to the meeting and listen to them and then make a decision."

Of the fifteen parents that were interviewed, seven indicated that they knew who their SGB members were. None of them had had any form of contact with an

SGB member. A parent of School B from the Umlazi Township says, " We don't have anyone on the SGB from my area. I don't have a phone at home so I can't phone anyone if I need to speak about a problem I'm having."

Discussion

While all schools are satisfied with the contributions of the SGB to the effective running of the school, they are weary of getting all parents involved in decision making. They believe that the SGB serves that purpose, that is, they are there to represent the parent body. At all schools parents only have a say when the budget for the following year is being determined.

Epstein (2001:411) states that parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and other groups in the school must be included; training must be offered to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents and students should be included in decision making. This is not happening presently. At local schools, learners are represented on the SGB. A member of the Representative Council of Learners is part of the SGB. The former suggestions must be considered especially at multicultural schools.

4.4.5 Giving parents support

Many learners either come from single-parent homes or live with their grandparents. A parent at School A confirms this, " Ja, there's so many of us. We don't know where the father is. Sometimes, I get work, and then I leave my child with my mother. There, he gets very naughty. He don't listen to my mother- what I must do. I have to work. Who gonna support us?"

While this is a disturbing situation, the school does try to assist parents. A manager at School A says:

> We try to help them by referring them to Child Welfare or Psychological services. But that is the most we can do. There is just too many of them to deal with. Sometimes these children come to school hungry. We have teachers in this school who have started a feeding scheme; they take money from their own pockets and feed these children. But still, there's only so much we can do.

A manager at School B contends that they help parents with their parenting task by giving guidance to parents more when examinations are to be written. He explains:

> When we send out learner exam timetables, we always send a letter where we tell parents, please monitor your child's progress and we give them study tips, etcetera.

School C on the other hand has the advantage of having a social worker on their staff. The principal says:

> Generally parents who are experiencing family difficulties, destitute families seeking assistance and concerned parents regarding children's behaviour and progress often turn to us for help. We have an open door policy whereby the school social worker and school management team are available to see to such parents.

An SGB member at this school remarks, " Parents and staff often bring matters to me, example, Medical Aid, Raise in Income, school fees, uniform issues, etcetera. Such matters I take to the SGB meeting." Asked whether a SGB

member assists members of his/her own race group, an SGB member answers " The school is multiracial and multicultural. Race does not form the basis of intervention or assistance."

SGB members at both School A and B indicated that parents have not approached them for assistance. With regard to a parent support committee, an SGB member at School B says, "While I do admit the merits of such a committee we have not actually formed a committee to assist parents".

Robbery, rape and abuse are rife in the Umlazi area and very often the schools assist parents and learners to deal with this trauma. A manager at School A says:

> We offer pastoral care to both parents and learners, and when the problem is of a more serious nature we make referrals to the Welfare Department of Isipingo, Psychological Services and even to Rehabilitation Centres. Parents together with learners are referred.

None of the schools offer workshops on parenting skills for caregivers.

With regard to the parent's support of learning it home, it was evident that only School C has a homework policy in place. According to a manager at School A:

> A schedule is drawn up at the beginning of the year – stating what aspects learners are covering. This includes all assessments for the year. There is no follow up as to whether parents check this or not- it's their (parents) responsibility.

A manager at School B mentions the contribution of the Representative Council of Learners in motivating learners to do their homework. They do not provide any guidance to parents regarding homework. The principal at School B states

that some guidance is provided. He explains: “At Awards functions and parents’ meetings parents are reminded of checking homework, monitoring late coming and absenteeism and school uniform.”

This information is given to parents whose child is receiving an award (as other parents do not attend such a function) and to the few that attend parent meetings.

At School C the manager explains their homework policy:

> Parents are required to purchase a homework diary at the start of the school year. A homework timetable is given to each learner to record the day’s homework. Parents are asked to sign on the timetable for each day. Learners are punished should homework not be done.

However, it is clear that beside knowing what the educator expects of a learner, parents are not assisted.

A parent at School B maintains that learners these days do not approach parents directly for help when it comes to academic work. She says:

> I think they know that what they are doing these days are different, so they don’t bother us. But all of them want to go for tuition after school and weekends. That seems to be the in thing now. And we have to find the money for this too. Sometimes I tell them I don’t know what your teacher teaches you in school. Because the same teachers are offering tuition after school hours and are charging us. I have to send them, they need to pass and all their friends are going.”

A Black parent at the same school says, “ Ja, I heard of this tuition thing. But I got no money for that. So my child just come school to learn. Me, I do Standard

four. Aayi, they no come by me to ask if no understand. My child, other day she say me stupid. Aaiy, never mind, she gone clever now, she go Indian school. She speak English so nice."

Discussion

From the above information one gathers that parents in multicultural communities need help urgently with parenting tasks. Schools can play a major role in developing a proper parent involvement programme to cater to the needs of the parent community.

Carrasquillo and Clement (1993:216) maintain that by assisting parents or other interested members of the community to understand the school curriculum and by providing literacy training in the school, so that parents can tutor their children in the native language, positive results will be achieved in diverse linguistic and cultural settings (cf 2.4). Epstein (2001: 409-410) also suggests that parents need assistance in ways of supporting learning at home. This should include: provide information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade; provide information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss school work at home; give information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments; a regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class should be available; and calendars with activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community should be provided.

With regard to parenting the following advice offered by Epstein could be considered. An attempt should be made to provide information to all families who want it or need it, not just the few who can attend workshops or meetings at

the school building; try to enable families to share information about culture, background and children's talents and needs, provide workshops, videotapes and computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing for each age and grade level; develop family support programmes to assist families with health, nutrition and other services and organise neighbourhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

4.4.7. Using parent volunteers

Recruiting and organising parent support and help can prove beneficial to the school. All schools in this study have utilised parent volunteers to a certain extent. At School A the principal identifies maintenance work, repairs and running the tuckshop as work carried out by parent volunteers. Another manager at the school adds administrative work, transport and stock taking to the list. One manager mentions that generally the Indian parents assist because they are from the area. Another manager feels that it is generally members of the SGB executive committee who assist in many tasks. However, no effort seems to have been made to encourage parents from all cultural groups to volunteer their services at school.

At School B managers felt that there were no spontaneous volunteers as such, as parents are approached for assistance. A manager says:

> At the beginning of the year we send out letters with categories like gardening, sport, fund raising, etc, asking parents to volunteer their services according to their abilities. Nobody responds. They take us for granted because they send their kids to school thinking it's their teachers job to do everything because this school has a reputation of producing good results.

Another manager adds, “You see parents see the school from an academic point of view. They forget that the structure of the school is part of education. Nobody will come and check whether the furniture is in order or whether we have water.” The principal maintains, “Sometimes learners come up to you and say ‘ look my father works in a paint factory, ‘so it’s through learners and at meetings that we gain parent support. We try not to be intimidating to parents but try to invite them to offer their services.”

At School C parent volunteers are present and assist with invigilation, feeding scheme, curtain making and transport. An SGB member at School C says,
“ Parents who attend meetings generally offer to work at the school. They read our newsletters and are aware of our needs and are public spirited.”

Parents have been used at all schools for relief teaching but this has stopped at School A and B. Both schools indicated that there were too many problems with this as parents were not trained in classroom management and problems arose.

Upon questioning parents on their involvement in school activities, parents indicated that they would like to help but are too involved with their own lives. A parent at School A explains:

> I would like to get involved, but I have little time cause I’m taking care of some children. Also my own. So it’s hard for me. Another thing is, it’s so dangerous to go in the evenings or weekends to help. Here we can’t take a chance and walk alone on the roads. There’s so many bad things happening.

The conclusion can thus be made that the school has a problem with recruiting volunteers due to numerous reasons for example parents are not easily accessible. This means that the talents and potential of this resourceful body is not used to the school’s benefit. But there are the few who want to help. The

principal at School A mentions " Certain parents in the area have a close bond with staff. They come and visit. We could use them if we want to."

Discussion

All three schools lacked a policy for volunteering and thus have not reaped the benefits of parental assistance. This is largely due to school management not having a structure in place whereby parents are trained for a particular role. The problem with relief teaching at both School A and B is a case in point. In order to use parent volunteers effectively, Epstein (2001: 411) makes three recommendations: recruit volunteers widely so that *all* families know that their time and talents are welcome; make flexible schedules for the volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable employed parents to participate and organise volunteer work, provide training, match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognise efforts so that participants are productive.

4.4.8 Accommodating cultural differences

Each school governing body was questioned as to how racial issues were handled due to the multicultural nature of the schools. All schools strongly emphasised that their school had no reason to believe that racism was a problem at their respective schools. The governing body at each school maintained that parents of any cultural group were encouraged to participate in school activities.
A SGB member at School B argues, " We have had no real racial upsets or issues to discuss but have often discussed cultural events and their importance eg, Diwali Celebrations. Special Heritage Day Programmes and so on and always invited parents to such events. This is our way of showing religious tolerance."

Upon questioning SGB members as to whether racial issues are ever discussed at SGB meetings, a SGB member at School C says,

> No, since the school enrolls humans. We do however discuss cultural issues like measures to assist underprivileged learners, to accommodate their living conditions and transport arrangements. We hold special events to encourage various cultures. We adjust schedules to accommodate religious festivals as well as parent's ability to attend such meetings and events.

Due to the low level of involvement at School A and B the school does not do much to accommodate cultural differences. A manager at School B says: "Mostly its Indians that come, ja. We may get maybe a drop, very few; we can count the number of Black parents that come."

The medium of communication at all schools is English although School A and B have a high percentage of non-English and second language learners. Upon questioning a manager at School B as to whether parents understand, he responds:

> Our understandings, to be honest, I think by and large the Black kids at our school understand us, they're well spoken so we expect them to interpret for their parents and I know form teachers tell them to interpret for their parents. But we don't know what's happening there. But many of us, speak Zulu and understand it, so if there's a need then we will do something about it.

This suggests that school managers have not made a significant effort to overcome language barriers, as they have not recognised it as a barrier.

DISCUSSION

The SGB at all schools play a vital role in holding all cultural groups together by equally empowering them and providing them with a platform to educate each other on their culture and traditions. In doing so, parents of diverse cultures feel accepted and in turn acquire religious and cultural tolerance. Hosting a variety of cultural events at the school promotes a sense of pride in the diversity of children and by involving parents in sharing their culture affects attitudes positively (Barta & Winn 1996:29).

Patrick (1997:24) recommends that parent groups need to be especially mindful of making people from other cultures feel welcome in the school. Often what is thought to be a lack of parent involvement is really the result of cultural expectations. Therefore, attention should be directed towards understanding and respecting differences among students and parents.

4.5 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The following barriers to parent involvement at multicultural schools were mentioned by school managers, members of the SGB and parents.

4.5.1 Apathy

Managers at all schools cited uncooperative parents as one of the reasons for the absence of active parent involvement. A manager at School C says that parents just do not turn up when invited to meetings and activities for parents. A manager at School A supports this and states:

> I think, the management is trying, look at the various activities they've organized this year, ja, they're trying, we've just got unappreciative parents. What must we do when they refuse to even acknowledge the

> invites that we send them. Ja you know, we ask parents to sign an acknowledgement form to say they received our letters, even that doesn't come back.

An SGB member at school B confirms: "Parents in our area consider other things like visiting the shopping centres or watching television more exciting than school matters. Educational managers, therefore need to make to encourage parents to get involved in education. On the other hand, none of the schools have attempted to determine if there are any reasons for this apathy.

4.5.2 Transport

Travelling distances to schools has proved to be a problem at all the schools under study. The Principal of School A states that their school caters for learners from five different areas, ranging from fifteen kilometers to forty kilometers away from the school. A manager from School A says because of this, "… we do not get many Black parents involved in our activities as they come from the outlying areas where they have to pay for public transport order to get here."

A parent at School B says:

> You know, we can't depend on the taxis, sometimes they tell us they can't make a load so they can't take us. Other times the driver charge us extra to make a special trip to the school. We can't afford that.

An SGB member at School A confirms that it is difficult to get parents from outside areas involved. He says, " We are thinking of getting a key member of each area to attend our meetings and maybe he/she can communicate with those who can't attend. We can't go in there ourselves, as you know we are dealing

with Blacks and it's their area. We don't know what can happen to us if we go in there."

The idea of a Parent Support Committee is an idea worth considering in this situation whereby a key member from each area is identified and is a member of this committee. This person is responsible for circulating information as well as getting parents involved in their own areas.

4.5.3 Financial problems of schools and families

With the demise of apartheid, the government promised free education to all. Currently no school can afford to give learners a free education. Schools are endeavouring to raise funds to maintain good standards at their schools. Parents are expected to contribute to finance and fundraising. Parents, as a result, keep their distance as they feel that if they become too familiar, then they are going to be asked for additional financial contributions. A parent at School C puts it this way:

> I think the schools need us for our money, or for making the money. They are forever sending us forms asking us to go and get sponsors or to give them donations. We are fed up. Schools are really draining us. I know one parent who refused to pay the school fees because the government promised a free education. This parent was sent a letter by the school threatening legal action.

A manager at School C confirms parents' frustrations regarding finances, " Ja, some of them feel that their money is going to the teachers. Some of them send us nasty letters for offering prizes to learners who bring in the highest amounts. What they don't understand is that we are stuck in this system too. How are we to run this school and provide quality education without funds." A parent at School B says, " Well I'll agree that some of us don't come to meetings or come

anywhere near the school because we are owing school fees. We feel so embarrassed when we are reminded of outstanding monies."

It is clear that school managers need to separate financial issues from other school activities. They should appreciate parent involvement and not discourage a parent by reminding him/her of not meeting their financial obligations to the school at social functions.

4.4.6 Working parents

Many parents are not involved in school activities due to work commitments. A manager at school A puts it this way:

> I think we need to understand the type of parents we are dealing with. They are trying to survive, any job that comes their way, be it on a Saturday afternoon or be it nightshift work, they'll grab it because they need money. Asking them to rather come to school and offer their services with no remuneration is a joke to them. They need money desperately, that's their priority.

An SGB member at School B concurs: " The problem is that all parents do not live at home with their children. Some of these children, as young as twelve years old live alone in the shacks that their parents pay a low rent for. They buy them food for the week and tell them that they will see them at the end of the month. These parents work far away and have no time to get involved in school activities."

Although this is a difficult problem, school management should contact such parents and educate them on childcare and parenting. Meetings with such parents could be arranged at the end of the month when these parents come to visit their children.

4.5.5 Low self –esteem of parents

Many parents feel that they cannot communicate adequately with the educators due to language barriers and a poor education. A parent at School A says:

> My child don't want me to go to the school. She says I got no nice clothes, her friends will laugh at me I'm wearing Zulu clothes. She tell me I can't speak nice English. Her teacher won't understand me. That's why I not go. I make me child happy, she learning so nicely.

A manager at School C says, " Ja, they believe that only we can help the child with regard to learning. They leave everything to us as they feel that they are inferior due to their limited language proficiency. It's sad."

Parents' poor self-esteem has led to a situation where many learners take advantage of their parents to the extent of showing disrespect. Parents need to be empowered so that they recognise the role they should be playing in their child's education irrespective of their own lack of education.

Managers need to encourage learners to get their parents involved. An appreciation for the different languages and cultures must be stressed at schools to avoid such situations.

4.5.6 Lack of knowledge of parents and SGB members

A manager at School A believes that parents and educators are ignorant on a number of issues. An SGB member at School B confirms this by indicating what should be done in order to overcome this problem. He says:

> A training programme should be in place. Many of us on SGB's are not

> adequately prepared to deal with issues like selecting staff members. Teachers need to be informed too of the different family situations and their needs, so that they are not too demanding on certain children. I think it is very important for all staff members and SGB members to be au fait with the different customs and traditions of the cultures that learners belong to.

A parent at School C indicated that she was not involved in any activity, as she did not know what was expected of her. School managers need to clearly outline the various tasks to be carried out. A person must be available to guide and direct the activity.

A manager at school A believes that parents were not ready for the new legislation that entitled parents to be involved in school matters. He explains:

> There is nothing wrong with getting them involved – but our timing was wrong – were parents ready for this type of involvement in 1994. How educated are they in school governance matters to really play an effective role. The influence of the state still plays a major role.

Discussion

While a number of barriers to parent involvement in multicultural schools has been listed, they are obstacles that one can work around and maybe even remove. Some of the barriers mentioned are noted in 2.6. The school management team should take leadership in this regard and develop a policy that takes such barriers into consideration especially in culturally diverse schools so that no group will feel excluded, embarrassed or threatened in any way.

4.6 BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

All participants agreed that there were more advantages to active parent involvement than disadvantages. A manager at School B says, " I think that only when parents become overbearing and want to interfere with the running of the school, will it be a problem, otherwise I'd say there are more advantages to having parents involved." In this study, managers and SGB members recognised the benefits of parent involvement more than the parents themselves. The benefits identified from the interviews are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

4.6.1 Aspect of ownership

A manager at School C says that when a school performs well in either an academic or sporting endeavour parents who are involved feel proud to be associated with the school. They feel that they are part and parcel of the school and have somehow contributed to the achievement. A sense of belonging prevails. It is important for the parent community to share ownership with the staff members in their successes and failures, as this motivates them to improve their involvement.

4.6.2 Morale building

"When parents and educators work together, an ethos of teamwork in the community prevails, " says an SGB member at School C.
A manager at School A says, " In these difficult times we need each other, to uplift each other as well as to learn from each other."

When people work together in any situation, it is imperative that one enters into the relationship with the intention of learning and not only teaching.

4.6.3 Reduction in costs

When members of the community volunteer their services at schools, the financial burdens of the school are reduced to a certain extent. An SGB member at School B concedes:

> As a member of the financial committee I see the difficulties that the school experiences in order to meet their financial obligations. We had a parent who telephoned the principal because his son had tripped on a stone and fell. He felt that the grass at school is too long and therefore his son did not see the stone. What the parent did not realise is that the school did not have the money to hire gardening services.

Parents should be informed of school expenditure and approached for assistance in this regard.

4.6.4 Improved learner behaviour

Learner discipline is a point for concern at all schools. Parent involvement can be identified as a strategy of dealing with discipline problems.
A manager at School A says:

> Greater supervision of learners would lend to less opportunities for learners to bunk, tell lies and make stories. Their will be greater scope to rectify problems either academic or behavioural.

On the other hand, a manager at School B is perturbed that parents cannot see when their children misbehave. He puts it this way:

> When we call parents to school to discuss a problem we've experienced with the child, the parent is quick to side with the child. They insult educators, telling us we are incompetent as educators. These parents spoil their children, buying them all brand name stuff and making them feel that they are above other children as well as educators.

Thus, while managers maintain that parents can assist with learner behaviour, they also acknowledge that parents need guidance in this regard. Teaching a child respect is a parenting task and managers should assist parents in this regard.

4.6.5 Parent awareness of school matters

Very often parents are not aware of what a teacher's job entails. When parents are called in to deal with a delinquent, teachers meet difficult parents who question the job of teachers. A manager at School B says, " The greatest advantage is for parents to be here during the day, so that they would understand what we go through."

Being involved as a parent places one in a better situation to deal with school issues, as one has an understanding of the 'ins and outs' of the school setting and its staff.

4.6.6 Building a sense of community

On questioning managers at School A on the advantages of parent involvement, a manager responds:

> Parents are from the community. We look at providing a wider service and have wider goals of nation building and community building. You can't do that in isolation. Look at the whole process of democracy as well, we look at the values of education We can't discount parents from the whole process. They need to be intricately involved to build a stronger school. When parents buy into that, they feel part of the structure. We need to create the opportunity for strong relations.

Schools are agents of society. If society is democratic, then schools need to be a reflection of this. When communities are involved in school organisations, such communities actually grow stronger and more progressive and implement democratic principles.

4.6.7 Improving academic achievement

Learners are often left on their own while parents are at work. Often there is nobody monitoring a child's schoolwork. As a result the child believes that his/her schoolwork is not important. School managers and SGB members claim that this is more prevalent in the Black communities. A manager at School A maintains that few Black parents attend parent meetings and most of them do not check a child's schoolwork. She says, " Some children are at this school for five years, and we have not yet met the parent."

A SGB member at School C maintains that when parents constantly check on the child's academic work and encourage the child to work harder, the child is more likely to improve. A manager at School B confirms this:

> At our school when it comes to academic parent meetings, parents respond very well. They come in with questions as well as ask for additional material that would assist their child. Therefore you would find that academically many of our learners excel, as their parents focus on their education.

Since a parent involvement is vital to academic success, school managers should maintain parent cooperation at all times.

Discussion

While managers and SGB members have listed some benefits of parent involvement, as they perceive it, they seem to possess a limited understanding to other numerous advantages this social body has on schooling. In comparison to the benefits outlined in Chapter 1 of this study (cf. 1.1) the participants made no mention of decrease in dropout rates, positive parent-child communication, increase in learner attendance and assistance to teachers. In addition, parents did not recognise the strength of working with educators to provide the correct home environment for the learner. These are important given the numerous problems educators face at these schools due to learner's social and economic circumstances. Moreover these benefits (cf. 1.1) are achievable in spite of the socio-economic group to which the learner belongs. These benefits are even more important when learners are not doing well, therefore a concerted effort is needed to involve the parents of these children. No group should be labeled 'uncooperative.' <u>All</u> parents want their children to succeed. Thus if there is a perception that one group of parents is not so involved an effort should be made

to establish what is preventing involvement. These factors should be addressed so that all learners can reap the benefits of parent involvement.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Parent involvement occurs to a limited extent at all three schools visited. There is a higher level of involvement at School C than at School A or B. This could be attributed to the fact that this school is better resourced and caters to the needs of a more affluent community. However, with the absence of a formal written policy on parent involvement at all schools, it seems that parent involvement takes place when the school deems it fit to get parents involved, and this is not an ongoing process.

In this regard, a clear lack of proper management skills is evident. The principal together with his/her management is ultimately responsible for the management of parent involvement (cf. 2.7). While the SGB has been tasked with representing the parent body, the SGB is also tasked with improving parent involvement and they therefore carry some of the responsibility. However, the main roleplayer is the school management team.

In the next chapter a synthesis of the findings as well as recommendations emanating from the research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this concluding chapter a general overview of the investigation is given in order to demonstrate that the aims originally expressed in 1.4 have been addressed and achieved.

The theory underlying parent involvement and models of parent involvement, the role of school managers in parent involvement as well as the context within which learning takes place in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District have been presented. This has been integrated with the experiences and perceptions of school managers, SGB members and parents with regard to parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District.

A synopsis of the main findings is given. Finally, recommendations for improving the role of school management in parent involvement are briefly presented. The chapter concludes with the identification of possible areas for further research.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION

Parent involvement is often difficult to define as the term can be used to encompass a broad range of activities. In the same vein, the role of school management in parent involvement is complex as it entails a variety of aspects

such as planning, organising, providing guidance, supervision and control. In addition, school managers should know the parents, understand the benefits of parent involvement, possess skills for implementing parent involvement as well as provide options for parent involvement in order to attain success in implementing parent involvement.

5.2.1 Parent involvement: a theoretical basis

A literature study was undertaken to determine the role and place of parents. The emphasis throughout was on parent involvement within multicultural school communities.

The barriers to parent involvement in multicultural communities are discussed in section 2.6. The findings emphasise that the main barrier is the lack of school policy and lack of facilitation of parent involvement. This endorses Dauber and Epstein's statement (1993:61) that school practices and not family characteristics determine the extent of parent involvement.

The advantages of parent involvement are presented in section 2.4. Evidence in the literature suggests that parent involvement in multicultural communities improves academic achievement, reduces dropout rate, decreases discipline problems and reduces absenteeism.

Epstein's typology of parent involvement is discussed in 2.2.2. This includes the various roles that parents can fulfill in the school. While this is a model that has been established for the American community it can be adapted for the South African multicultural context.

5.2.2 The introduction of multicultural schools

Prior to 1994, racial segregation ensured that each race group was educated separately by fragmenting South Africa's education departments into different education departments based on race. Following the democratic elections of 1994, South African learners can now attend schools irrespective of race or culture, thus giving rise to multicultural schools. (2.3.1) At the same time the government acknowledged the importance of parent involvement in the White Paper on Education and Training (2.3.3). This resulted in the establishment of school governing bodies, which have powers by law (2.3.3). While parents have been granted some recognition in the establishment of this body, it however, does not encompass the involvement of all parents. Furthermore, their involvement has been restricted to decision-making and not to all the areas of parent involvement indicated in this research.

5.2.3 The role of school management in parent involvement

A background to the role of school managers in parent involvement is given in 2.5. This section discusses the various management tasks of the school managers. These were linked to parent involvement and are as follows: planning, organising, and providing guidance, supervision and control.

5.2.4 The research design

In this investigation of the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District, the qualitative approach (cf 3.2) was considered appropriate. The characteristics of the qualitative research approach serving as reasons for choice of this method were discussed (cf 3.2.1). Focus-group interviews with school managers, SGB members and parents were the primary

means of data collection. Data were organised qualitatively and were presented according to emerging key themes (cf 3. 2. 4)

5.3 SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The themes uncovered in this qualitative investigation are presented and integrated with prior research as reviewed in chapter two.

5.3.1 Parent interest in education

The low level of meaningful contact with the schools among parents, more especially Black parents, have led to some educators and principals to conclude that such parents lack sufficient interest in their children's education and do not want to work with the schools. This viewpoint is manifested in all three interviews conducted in the three schools. In each of the schools, apathy was the most frequently mentioned educational problem.

Recommendations

School managers must challenge the myth that Black parents do not care about their children's education. In fact, the research has shown that these parents want to be involved as much as any other race group (cf 4.5). Other factors prevent them from getting involved and school managers need to establish the reason for lack of involvement prior to assuming that apathy is the underlying factor.

5.3.2 Low expectations, negative attitudes and stereotypical behavior

The research has shown that school managers have low expectations of parents. They expect certain groups of parents to not attend meetings and therefore do not cater for the language needs of the non-English speaking parents. Principals and educators tended to refer to the different race groups as 'they' and 'our' children- thereby illustrating that all parents were not seen in the same way (cf 4.4.4.1).

Another factor that was illustrated is the stereotypical behavior of school managers. An English medium school does not necessarily mean that all role-players, that is, learners, educators and *parents* are English speaking, and that English should therefore be the medium of communication at all school activities. This is a negative assumption that can lend to certain language groups not participating or attending school events (cf 4.4).

Moreover, it should not be assumed that certain groups would not want to assist the school in maintenance or fundraising. School principals and educators tended to ask for assistance from certain persons or groups of people, assuming that other race groups would not have anything to offer the school (cf 4.4.7).

Recommendations

Dauber and Epstein (1991; 1993) maintain that educators have very different views of parents than parents have of themselves. Thus, school managers can inhibit parent involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes. School managers need to accept *all* parents on the same level have talents and potential that can be utilised for the upliftment of the school.

5.3.3 Knowledge and skills of school managers

The responses given by principals and educators show that they possess a limited understanding of the concept, parent involvement and are therefore unable to establish a comprehensive parent involvement programme whereby all parents from the different cultural groups participate in a variety of roles (cf 4.4.1). The absence of a formal written policy on parent involvement at all schools in the research indicates that no principal sees parent involvement as an effective strategy for school improvement (cf 4.4.2). The types of parent involvement that parents are engaged in suggest, that although parents have been empowered via the establishment of school governing bodies, traditional parent involvement roles such as fundraising and attending school meetings are still the order of the day at many schools. However, an exception is the level of involvement at the ex-model C school when compared to the other schools in the research (cf 4.4.4.1, 4.4.7). This could be attributed to the opportunities available to certain race groups during the apartheid regime and the consequences of this are still being felt.

Recommendations

The responses given by school managers in this research shows that they lack understanding of parent involvement. According to Dauber and Epstein (1993: 61), school programs and educator practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of partnership between the school and the home. Poor parent participation can therefore be addressed by principals and educators.

It is recommended that school managers in the Umlazi District be trained on ways of establishing or improving parent involvement. Within the South African

school context few educators have been formally trained to work with parents or to work in multicultural schools. It is now left to school districts as well as school management teams to hold staff development programmes with regard to parent involvement to equip school managers and educators with the skills and knowledge required in working with parents in a multicultural school.

A starting point in establishing content for such staff development programs would be Epstein's (2001: 409-411) typology or framework for parent involvement.

5.3.4 The lack of an organisational structure to deal with parent involvement

All principals and educators indicated that they worked directly with parents and had no problems with this (cf 4.4.4.2). Parents' responses indicate that they would like a Parent Support Team with whom they could interact regarding school matters (cf 4.4.6). Principals and educators' responses also show that they believe that the school governing body is the organisational structure that represents the general parent body. At some schools parents do not know who the members of the school governing body are (cf 4.4.5). Moreover, the racial composition of the SGB is not always in line with the demographics of the school population. None of the school governing bodies has a sub-committee tasked with parent involvement (cf 4.4.3).

Recommendations

For effective parent involvement it is important for school managers to work **with** parents in establishing a comprehensive programme of partnership. It is therefore recommended that school managers institute an organisational

structure that would plan, organise, provide guidance, supervise and evaluate a parent involvement programme. Epstein's (1995:707) Action Team can be considered as an apt example of an organisational structure that can be utilised in managing a parent involvement programme. She recommends the Action Team to consist of three educators from different grade levels, three parents with children in different grade levels and at least one administrator. In a multicultural school context it is essential for all cultural groups to be represented in the Action Team to maintain a balance of involvement by all parents. The diverse constitution of such an Action Team would contribute to satisfying the aspirations of all role-players needs, that is, the learners, educators and parents.

Principals and educators at the same time cannot recluse themselves from this project as their support and guidance is essential for an effective Action Team. Action Teams will depend on principals for direction and they would therefore be expected to devise strategies with the Action Team in gaining active parent involvement. Another type of organisational structure that can be utilised and has worked successfully at nine Hawaiian schools is the Parent Community Networking Centre (Aronson et al 1996:59). A parent facilitator, who is paid to be a part time liaison between the school and parents, directs each networking centre. Facilitators' work included contacting parents and encouraging them to attend meetings, reviewing and translating material sent by the school to parents and conducting surveys to identify needs and concerns of parents.

5.3.5 The absence of a school policy on parent involvement

All principals and educators indicated that they do not have a formal policy on parent involvement.

Recommendations

Chavkin (1989:283) asserts that every school should develop written policies about working with parents from a multicultural perspective. Written policies often encourage more involvement activities and foster enthusiasm for them. Chrispeels (1991: 368) maintains that policies serve several functions. They create an institutionally sanctioned framework to guide practice, they express 'official' beliefs that can influence others and they can apply pressure for change by recognising, supporting and rewarding specific attitudes and behaviour.

Responses from school managers and parents reflect differences in opinion of what each thought parent involvement meant (cf 4.4.1). In establishing a school policy on parent involvement, a shared understanding of what form parent involvement would take, would be reached.

5.3.6 The effects of parent's socio-economic status on parent involvement

Educator responses at the ex-model C school show that they enjoy greater parent participation than what is experienced at the other two schools (cf 4.4.2). Parents from this more affluent area are in a better position to assist as they have a better education and therefore have a better understanding of parent involvement, hold better jobs and are able to cope with economic demands without stress and frustrations. In this way, they are able to focus better on their children's schooling than parents from School A and B. At the latter schools parents struggle for economic survival leaving them frustrated, bitter and with hardly any consideration for their child's learning (cf 4.5.4). Such parents often find it difficult to play a meaningful role in their child's education.

Recommendations

While it is not the responsibility of principals and educators to deal with the economic burdens of the parent population, support and guidance from them would be appreciated and would result in parents giving more attention to those who care about their well-being.

It must also be noted that learners learn not only at school, but that the parent is the primary educator of the child and therefore for the child to achieve success it is imperative that both educators and parents work together towards this goal. When the parent is deviant in his/ her responsibilities, a caring school manager must try to establish the reason for this, and provide opportunities to strengthen parenting skills, enhance parent networks and assist the parent so that parenting does not add to their stressful circumstances.

Responses given by school managers show that nothing has been done to establish why parents of learners from the Umlazi Township, or the poorer areas have not been involved in school activities (cf 4.4.8). Such parents have been largely ignored.

I fully endorse Shartrand et al's (1997: 40) recommendation that schools support families through parent education programmes, parent centres and referrals and other community and social services. In addition school managers should train educators to work in full-service schools that provide families additional support services, health and mental care, adult education and social services.

5.3.7 Restricted opportunities for interaction

Responses from both parents and school managers show that they have to contend with other demands on their time that restrict their ability to communicate and collaborate (cf 4.4.4.1). While schools in this research have meetings set to suit the needs of the parent body, other factors such as transportation and taking care of younger children obstruct parent attendance (cf 4.5.2, 4.4.7).

Parent responses indicate a tight work schedule so that volunteering to assist in the school is at most times out of the question (cf 4.5.4). Assisting in the evenings and weekends also pose a problem at School A and B. These schools fall in areas that have a high crime rate and parents are reluctant to volunteer at these times for the sake of personal safety (cf 4.4.7). School C on the other hand enjoys the active involvement of more affluent parents who live in the area.

Parent evenings are set within a time limit that can be seen as too brief overviews of learner's schoolwork (cf 4.4.4.1). The lack of an appointment system results in parents and educators becoming frustrated. Working parents take off from work to visit an educator or school manager who may be teaching or otherwise occupied and therefore cannot see the parent.

Recommendations

To alleviate these problems, it is essential for parents to be notified of meetings well in advance so that arrangements with regard to transport and child- care can be made. It is also recommended that an appointment system be affected so that both parents and educators can manage their time accordingly. Principals and educators could make voluntary work exciting and compile a list of the various activities that parents can be involved in, other than cleaning the school or

fundraising. This could result in parents trying to overcome problems and feeling that they are part of the school.

5.3.8 Home-school communication

Most participants in this research indicated that written communication (cf. 4.4.4) and parent meetings (cf. 4.4.4.1) were the only means of communication. Using these strategies are not at all times fruitful, especially with regard to non-English speaking and second language English speakers. The lack of translators at meetings and the fact that all written communication is in English results in many parents who are unaware of school activities.

Educator responses with regard to written communication sent home show that most letters to parents inform them of their child's deviant behavior. Obviously good relationships between parents and the home cannot be established on such grounds.

Recommendations

Parent involvement can be strengthened with effective communication strategies. Choosing to ignore the language abilities of certain cultural groups can be seen as racist behavior and could have dangerous consequences. It is therefore recommended that school managers be culturally sensitive in their communication with the diverse parents that constitute that parent body. Riley (1994:19) states that reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special accommodations. Translating material into their first language can be useful for these parents but written communication alone is not enough. Ideally a resource person, perhaps another parent could communicate with parents in their first language face to face or by telephone.

He adds that interactive voice mail systems that have bilingual recordings for families are useful.

Parents would appreciate hearing from the school about positive issues such as programmes of support and assistance, rather than only negative forms of contact. This may result in parents avoiding the school, as they may be embarrassed about their child's behavior problems. It is recommended that letters to parents regarding behavior problems be minimal and that letters be sent when a problem is so serious that it warrants parent's attention.

5.3.9 The lack of a homework policy

Responses from principals and educators indicate an absence of a homework policy (cf 4.4.6). Parent participant response shows that they do not offer assistance to learners with regard to homework, as they do not understand the content of their child's various subjects (cf 4.4.6).

Although educators in most cases indicate that they involve parents in homework by making them sign learners' books and by giving them a homework schedule at the beginning of the year, no guidelines or support is provided to parents on the role they should play in homework (cf 4.4.6).

Recommendations

It is recommended that parents be trained in how to handle or cope with a learner's homework. Epstein (1995: 705) proposes that a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bi-monthly) be designed and organised. This gives learners the responsibility for discussing important things they are

learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's homework.

5.3.10 Inhibitors to substantive parent involvement

Many barriers that inhibit substantive parent involvement listed by the participants during the interviews refer to lack of a common understanding of the term parent involvement (cf 4.4.1), tight work schedules (cf 4.5.4) , language barriers (cf 4.4.4.1), uncooperative parents (cf 4.5.1) and transport problems (cf 4.5.2)

Recommendations

While these inhibitors are valid, school managers need to assist parents so that they can meet the challenges that are associated with achieving learner success. Epstein(1995:710) maintains that with good planning, thoughtful implementation and pointed improvements effective parent involvement can be achieved. In addition, principals must ensure that educators are educated in a variety of strategies to engage multicultural parents effectively.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this study on the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District suggest the following priority areas for research in future:

- Communication strategies with multicultural parents as well as low-income parents in the Umlazi District;
- Ways in which school managers can assist multicultural parents in contributing to learning;

- Training educators to work with parents of diverse cultures;
- Establishing written policies and programmes in parent involvement in multicultural schools;
- Establishing homework policies for multicultural parents;
- Strategies to involve non-English and second language parents in their children's learning.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study of the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools is limited to the Umlazi District.

An obvious limitation of the study is the relatively small size of the sample, which is typical of qualitative research. As different schools will reveal different findings, the results of this research cannot support the general theory of parent involvement.

This study was purposefully limited to multicultural schools in the Umlazi district. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of participants. Schools and participants were chosen on the grounds of their own willingness to participate, which implies that different results might be obtained in different circumstances. The main aim of this research was to understand the experiences and perceptions of school managers, school governing body members and parents in managing parent involvement. These findings are reported in detail in Chapter 4. While these findings are reflective of multicultural schools in the Umlazi District specifically, the problems experienced by principals, educators and parents in managing parent involvement in multicultural schools could hold true for schools outside this district.

Despite these limitations, the rich data that emerged from this study may be used for further research. Simultaneously, the role of principals and educators in the management of parent involvement was illustrated. Furthermore, certain key themes contributed to a better understanding of the role played by school managers, school governing body members and parents in parent involvement and suggested areas in which further research needs to be done. (cf 5.4).

5.6 CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation reveals that the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools in the Umlazi District occurs to a minimum extent. School managers possess little understanding of parent involvement, the benefits of this resource and strategies that can be utilised to engage parents effectively at school. Their skills and knowledge regarding parent-school collaboration at multicultural schools should be developed to a great extent.

While schools have not done much in educating educators in dealing with multicultural parents, school managers tend to blame parents for the lack of involvement and have not yet realised their role in making parent involvement happen at their schools.

Multicultural parents each have their own understanding of what the term means. Schools need to establish a common understanding of this term and organizing workshops and training parents in the overall aims of the parent programme can do this. Without this training the situation of minimal parent involvement would continue to exist.

Epstein's (2001: 409-411) framework of parent involvement or Van der Linde's model (cf. 2.2) as presented in chapter two can be adapted to form an effective programme of parent involvement for multicultural schools.

Finally, cognisance must be taken of the fact that school practices and not family practices determine the extent of parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein1993: 61). Principals and educators should acknowledge this as well as plan accordingly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaronson, E, Carter, CJ & Howell, M 1995. Preparing monocultural teachers for a multicultural world. *Equity and Excellence in Education,* 28 (1): 5-9.

Badenhorst, DC 1988. *School management: The task and role of the teacher.*Pretoria: Haum Educational Publishers

Banks, JA. & Bank, CAM 1997. *Multicultural education. Issues and Perspectives.* Boston*:*Allyn & Bacon.

Barta, J & Winn, T 1996. Involving parents in creating anti-bias classrooms. *Children Today, 24 (10): 28-30.*

Bastiani, J 1996. Parent involvement. Paper presented at a seminar on Parent involvement, 26 March, Rand Afrikaans University.

Bauch, PA 1993. Improving education for minority adolescents: Toward an ecological perspective on school choice and parent involvement. In Chavkin, NF (ed.) *Families and schools in a pluralistic society*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bergh,AP & Van Wyk, JN 1999*. Interpreting qualitative research findings.* Unisa Study guide 2 for MEDEM2-R. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Birley, G & Moreland, N 1998. *A practical guide to academic research*. London: Kogan

Blanche, MT & Durrheim, K 1999. *Research in practice.* South Africa: University of Cape Town.
.
Blatchford, S 1994. Practical strategies for collaboration between parents and early years educators. *Multicultural Teaching,* 12 (2) : 12-16.

Bogdan, RC & Biklen, SK 1992. *Qualitative research for education; an introduction to theory and method.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bogdan, R & Taylor, JS 1984. *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings.* Second edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Botha, RJ 2000. *Managing the school as an organization.* Unisa Tutorial letter 104/2000 for MEDEM5-R. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Brown, CS & Martin, HM 1996. Are home visitations still a viable tool? *Childcare Information Exchange,* 109: 15-16.

Carrasquillo, A & Clement, BG 1993. *Parents and schools: a source book.* London: Garland Publishing House.

Chavkin, NF 1989. A multicultural perspective on parent involvement: implications for policy and practice. *Education Spring*, 109 (3) : 276-285.

Chavkin, NF. (ed) 1993. *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany:State University of New York.

Chrispeels, JH 1991. District leadership in parent involvement: Policies and actions in San Diego. *Phi Delta Kappan,* January : 367-371.

Cohen, L & Manion, L 1998. *Research methods in education*.London: Routeledge

Dauber, SL & Epstein, JL 1991. School programmes and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *Elementary School Journal*, 91(3): 289-305.

Dauber, EL & Epstein, JL 1993. Parent attitudes and practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. In Chavkin, NF. (ed) *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Davies, D 1993. Benefits and barriers to parent involvement: from Portugal to Boston to Liverpool. In Chavkin, NF. (ed) *Families and schools in a pluralistic society,* Albany State University of New York Press.

Davis, BC 1989. A successful parent involvement programme. *Educational Leadership,* 47 (2): 21-23.

DE (Department of Education) 1995. *White Paper on education and training* (Notice 196 of 1995*)* Cape Town.

DE (Department of Education) 2003. *Ethekwini Region Information Brochure*. Province of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Dekker, E & Lemmer, EM 1996. *Critical Issues in Modern Education.* Johannesburg: Heinemann.

De Vos, AS (ed) 1998. *Research at grassroots. A primer for the caring profession*.Pretoria: JL van Schaik.

Du Plooy, J & Swanepoel, Z 1997. Multicultural education: problems faced by minority groups in schools. *Acta Academica*,29 (3): 129-153.

Epstein, JL 1990. School and family connections: Theory, research and implications for intergrating sociologies of education and family. In Unger DG & Sussman MB (eds) *Families in community settings: interdisciplinary perspectives*. New York: Haworth.

Epstein, JL 1995. School, family, community partnerships: caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, May: 701-712.

Epstein, JL 2001. *School, family and community partnerships: preparing educators and improving schools.* USA: Westview Press.

Epstein, JL, Sanders, MG & Clark, LA 1998. Preparing educators for school, family and community partnerships. *International Perspectives: Childhood education* , 74(6): 340-394.

Firestone, WA 1987. Meaning in method: a rhetoric of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*,16 (7): 16-21.

Gay, LR 1990. *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application* Third Edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Gayle, P 1993. Multicultural education. *Contemporary education*, 170-173.

Goduka, IN 1998. Linguistic and cultural diversity: implications for learning education and curriculum transformation. S*outh African Journal of Higher Education*, 12(1): 34-43.

Heleen, O 1992. Is your school family friendly. *Principal*, 72 (2): 5-8.

Henderson, A 1988. Parents are a school's best friends. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October: 148-153.

Henniger, ML 1987. Parental rights and responsibilities in the education process. *The Cleaning House*, January: 226-229.

Hester, H 1989. Start at home to improve home school relations. *NASSP Bulletin*, January: 25-27.

Higgs, J 2001. Charting standpoints in qualitative research. In H Byrne-Armstrong, J Higgs & D Horsfall (eds) *Critical moments in qualitative research*.Oxford: Butterworth

Hoberg, SM 1999. *Research Methodology.* Unisa: Study Guide 2 for MEDEM 2-R, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Hoover- Dempsey, K & Sandler, HM 1995. Parent involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record,* 97(2): 310-331.

Jones, LT & Blendinger, J 1994. New beginnings: Preparing future teachers to work with diverse families. *Action in teacher education,* 16(3): 79-86.

Landerholm, E & Karr, JA 1988. Designing parent involvement activities to deal with parent needs. *Lifelong learning: an omnibus of practice and research,* 11 (5): 10-12.

LeCompte, MD. & Goetz, JP 1982. Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52: 31-60.

Lemmer,EM 1992. Qualitative research methods in education. *SA Journal of education,* 12(3): 292-295.

Lemmer, EM 2000. The Epstein Model of family school partnerships: teachers experiences in South African schools. *Educare,* 29(1&2): 60-75.

Lemmer, EM 2002. Fostering language development in multicultural schools. *Educare,* 31 (1&2)*:* 38-62.

Macbeth, A 1989. *Involving parents.* Oxford: Heinemann.

Machet, M 2000. Parent power. In *Sunday Times: Read & Right:* June 4.

Mannan, G & Blackwell, J 1992.Parent involvement: Barriers and opportunities. *The Urban Review, 24(1): 219-225*

Marishane, RN 1999. Partnership in school governance: Foundation for reform and restructuring. Unpublished MEd. Dissertation. Pretoria:Unisa

Marshall, C & Rossman, GB 1994. *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Massie, JL & Douglas J 1985. *Managing: A contemporary introduction.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.

McMillan, JH & Schumacher, S 1997. *Research in education. A conceptual introduction.* New York: Addison Wesley Education Printers.

McFarland, DE 1970. *Management: Principals and practices.* London: Macmillan Publishing Co.

Mda, T 1999. Education for diversity. In Lemmer, EM (eds). *Contemporary education: global issues and trends.* Sandton: Heinemann.

Meier, C 2002. Coping with diversity in South Africa. In Van Wyk, J & Lemmer, EM (eds). *Transforming education: the South African experience.*New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc.

Miles, MB & Huberman, M 1994. *Qualitative data analysis – An expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Moles, OC 1993. Collaboration between schools and disadvantaged parents: obstacles and openings. In Chavkin, NF (eds). *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Morgan, DL & Spanish, MJ 1984. Focus groups: A new tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology,* 7 (3): 253-270

Neuman, WL 1999. *Social research methods. Qualitative and Quantitative* a*pproaches*. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.

Nieto, S 1992. *Affirming diversity: The socio-political context of multicultural education.* New York: Longman.

Patrick, MJ 1997. Making cultural diversity work in sub-urban Georgia. *High school magazine*, (5): 22-25.

Patsy, A 1994. Working with parents when parents speak a different language. *Day Care and Early Education,* (22): 38-39.

Patton, MG 1990. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* Newbury Park: Sage.

Pearson, N 1990. Parental involvement within the school. *Education Canada*, Autumn: 14-17.

Pretorius, F 1999. Partnerships in education. In Lemmer, EM (ed). *Contemporary education: global issues and trends*. Sandton: Heineman.

Rajab, 2002.Country still divided by self-segregation:*The Natal Mercury* : March 4.

Rich, D 1993. Building the bridge to reach minority parents: education infrastructure supporting success for children. In Chavkin, NF (ed). *Families and schools in a pluralistic society*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Riley, RW 1994. *Strong families, strong schools: Building community partnerships for learning.* A research base for family involvement in learning. USA: US Department of Education.

Republic of South Africa (RSA). 1996. *South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2000. *Education Laws Amendment Act*, Pretoria: Government Printers.

Rothaug, I 1998. *Umlazi Intergrated Development Framework Comprehensive Report.*Town Planning and Development Control Department : South Central Local Council.

Sampson, EE 1999. *Dealing with differences: An introduction to the social psychology of prejudice.* USA: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Scott-Jones, SD 1993. Families as educators in a pluralistic society. In Chavkin, NF (ed). *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Schumacher, S & McMillan, JH 1993. *Research in education: A conceptual introduction.* New York: Harper Collins.

Shartrand, AM, Weiss, HB, Kreider, HM & Lopez, ME 1997. *New schools for new schools. Preparing teachers for parent involvement.* Cambridge MA Harvard Family Research Project.

Shermann, RR. & Webb, RB 1988. *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods* London: The Falmer Press.

Shimahara, N 1988. Anthro ethnography: A methodological consideration . In Shermann, RR & Webb, RB (eds) *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods* London: The Falmer Press.

Smith, ML 1987. Publishing qualitative research. *American Educational Research Journal,* 24 (2): 173-183.

Smith, PJ & Cronje,S 1992. *Management principles: A contemporary South African edition.* South Africa: Juta and Co. Ltd.

Squelch, J & Lemmer, E 1994. *Eight keys to effective school management in South Africa.* Halfway House: Southern.

Squelch, J 1996. *Multicultural education.* Unisa Manual for FDEMC1-E. Pretoria: Unisa.

Squelch, J 1996. *Parent participation: How to help your child succeed in school.* Pretoria:Acacia Books.

Squelch, J 2000. Governance in education. In Lemmer, E (ed). *Contemporary Education: Global issues and trends.*Sandton: Heinemann.

Suzuki, B 1984. Curriculum transformation for multicultural education. *Education and Urban Society,* 294-322.

Townsend, M 1991. The rebounding wave. Umlazi Land Invasions 1989-1990. MA dissertation in Town and regional planning. University of Natal, Durban.

Vandergrift, JA & Greene, AL 1992. Rethinking parent involvement. *Educational leadership,* 50 (1): 57-59.

Van der Horst, H & Lebeloane, L 1997. Managing multicultural schools. Unisa manual for FDEMC 3-G. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Van der Linde, N 1997. Managing multicultural schools. Unisa. manual for FDE MC1-E. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Van der Westhuizen, PC 1995. *Effective educational management.* Pretoria: Kagiso Tertiary.

Van Wyk, JN 1996. Parent involvement in black urban communities in Gauteng D Ed thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Webster & Roger 1992. *Dictionary and thesaurus.* New York: Book Essential Inc.

Williams, PL & Chavkin, NF 1989. Essential elements of strong parent involvement programs. *Educational leadership,* 47. (2): 19.

APPENDIX 1

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Mrs S Michael (Student number: 3018-4916) is currently enrolled for the degree *Master in Education Management* at Unisa. She has now reached the phase where she has to do research, which may necessitate doing interviews during working hours. If this can be accommodated, it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Prof JN van Wyk

APPENDIX 11

GENERAL INFORMATION: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

Race group**:**

Age:

Gender:

Number of years in present position:

Languages spoken:

Place of residence:

GENERAL INFORMATION: SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS

Race:

Age:

Gender:

Highest level of education:

Place of residence:

Languages spoken:

GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS

Race**:**

Age:

Place of residence:

Languages spoken:

Marital Status:

APPENDIX 111

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

The schedule was used to ensure that certain aspects of parent involvement in multicultural schools were dealt with during the interviews. However, at no time did the schedule dictate what was to be discussed and participants were free to raise issues at will.

1. The nature of parent involvement in the school

- What are the basic obligations of parents regarding the education of their children?
- What are the basic obligations of the school in this regard?
- In what ways are parents involved in the school?
- Does the school have a written or verbal policy of involving parents?
- What are the opinions of staff at this school about working closely with parents?

2. Communication with parents

- In what way does the school communicate with the parent?
- Where and when are parent meetings held? How does this suit the needs of all parents?
- What measures are in place to ensure effective communication with parents during parent evenings?
- What language (s) are used in written communication with parents?
- Under what circumstances are individual meetings with parents held?
- What opportunities are provided for parents to communicate with the school?
- Generally, who makes use of these opportunities?

3. Parent support of learning at home

- What is the homework policy of the school?
- In what way have parents been informed of this?
- How have parents been assisted to support learners at home?

4. Parents as decision-makers

- **In what way does the SGB reflect the racial composition of the learners?**
- How are parents included in decision-making at this school?
- How do you ensure that the opinion of all racial groups is reflected in the decisions you take?

5. Parent volunteers

- In what way are parent volunteers used in this school?
- Which parents generally offer to work at the school? In what capacity?
- How are volunteers invited?

6. Barriers to parent involvement

- What factors act as barriers to effective parent involvement in the school?
- In what ways has the school attempted to rectify the problems?
- Do you feel that there are negative aspects to parent involvement?

7. Advantages and problems

- What would you consider to be the advantages of parent involvement?

8. Staff training

- Have teachers been trained to implement parent involvement in this school?
- Have teachers been trained to work with children and parents from different racial groups**?**

APPENDIX 1V

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

The schedule was used to ensure that certain aspects of parent involvement in multicultural schools were dealt with during the interviews. However, at no time did the schedule dictate what was to be discussed and participants were free to raise issues at will.

- What does parent involvement mean to you?
- As a parent representative, discuss some of your efforts to gain parent support.
- You are involved in school governance, making decisions on behalf of parents. How equipped are you in terms of knowledge, skills and values?
- Describe your experiences as a parent during school visits. What did you like? What did you not like? Why?
- Which aspects/areas of school matters do you control or manage? Assess the effectiveness of your involvement.
- Problems experienced by parents: how often are you consulted as a SGB member to help with issues? What are some of the issues brought to you by parents?
- Are racial issues ever discussed at SGB meetings? Give examples.
- How accessible are you to the general parent body? Do you particularly assist members of your own race group/ cultural group? Have you assisted parents other than your own race group?
- Reflect on your school situation. Discuss the school's attempts in meeting the needs of a multicultural community.

- What are your feelings regarding the establishing of a Parent Support Committee? What are some of the aspects that such a committee could assist in?

- What are some of the things you are happy/unhappy about with regard to parent involvement? How can it be improved?

APPENDIX V

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
PARENTS OF LEARNERS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

- What are your feelings regarding parent involvement as a parent of a secondary school learner?
- As a parent what basic obligations do you meet?
- What activities have you been involved in at your child's school?
- Describe the school climate on your visits to school.
- Assess the management of learner activities / programs involving parents.
- Discuss problems experienced with the school.
- Describe some efforts made by the school / SGB to get you involved.
- When have you been asked to visit? How successful was the visit? Who do you meet first? How long was the visit? Did you wait to be attended to? Where did you meet the person who asked to see you? Were you satisfied?
- What can the school do to facilitate parent involvement and make it more effective?
- What is the school presently doing to have parents involved?
- Which areas or aspects of school matters would you like to be involved in?
- Respect for parents by school staff members. Discuss.
- Teacher attitudes towards parent involvement. Discuss your experiences.
- School management of parent involvement. Discuss.
- When have you communicated with the school other than the school contacting you?

- Discuss your feelings with regard to a Parent Management Team.

- Communication strategies with parent. Is it acceptable? Have you had any problems? Is it effective?

- Frequency of newsletters? Assess content in terms of language used. Is it fully understood? What problems have you or other parents you know experienced regarding information sent to you?

- With regard to activities at school, who generally attends? How many parents attend?

- How are parent complaints handled?

- What literature is given to parents other than term newsletters or learner reports?

- Volunteers. Are parents volunteering in any position at school? Have you considered? Discuss.

- A school's visiting policy. Does one exist? Is it acceptable/unacceptable? Discuss.

- Your relationship with the school governing body. Do you know who the members are? How effective is the SGB? Have you had any problems that you have taken to them? Discuss.

- Describe your relationship with the school principal. Have you had personal contact with him/her? What are your feelings regarding his/her leadership style? Are parents' input respected by the school principal and management team?

- What are your recommendations to improve parent involvement?

APPENDIX VI

INTERVIEW BETWEEN S. MICHAEL (SM) AND THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM FROM SCHOOL B

SM I'd like to know what do you think are the basic obligations of parents?

VN I'd say, monitor academic progress.

KR Attending meetings, ja I'd say that's important. What about financial obligations.

RR I'd think also interacting with the school is important, getting involved in fundraising and so on.

SM What do you believe to be the basic obligations of a school?

KR I would think academic work will be primary, looking at the physical and mental development, that will cover it basically. But again we also get all kinds of disciplinary problems , ja I think from the management point we'll have to deal with that too.

SM And what do you think, VN, would you like to add anything?

VN I would stress communication, but I think what's most important is attending to problems.

SM In what ways are parents involved in this school, RR?

RR I'd say parents are involved only when there's a problem with their child. Attendance to meetings is pathetic. Very few attend. There are those who attend but this is more by the character of the meeting.

VN Let me come in here, I think we need not create the impression that parents are not involved at all. What I must say is that parents are generally interested. Where they don't pay interest is to meetings, like our Budget meeting , and meetings to elect SGB members. Attendance is generally poor at our general meetings but should we call a meeting to address academic progress only, then our parents go all out to attend. But

we don't get many of the black parents attending. You know, we are one of the best achieving schools and we have made a reputation when it comes to academic achievement, so for that, jaa, parents will give their time.

SM Are there no committees as such that parents can get involved in?

KR No, nothing else, besides for academic work and the Awards Day Function.

RR Ja, I'd say the only time they'll come to school is when we call them and tell them of a problem. But then too they'll come and take the part of their children.

SM Would you say that this happens across all the race groups or is specific to certain race groups?

KR I'd say this is more with the richer kids. I won't say that different race groups react differently, more that there's a difference in the reaction of poorer parents to richer parents.

SM In what way?

KR Well when we call parents to school to discuss a problem we've experienced with the child, the parent is quick to side with the child. They insult educators, telling us we are incompetent as educators. These parents spoil their children, buying them all brand name stuff and making them feel that they are above other children as well as educators.

SM Does the school have a written or verbal policy for parent involvement, VN?

VN The Rights of Parents, which are given to learners on admission to school is sufficient. The school does not need to draw up a policy on parent involvement.

SM RR, what are the opinions of staff at this school about working closely with parents?

RR I think they would see it as a great help. Ja, you see we're working in isolation from them and parents sometimes don't know what to expect

from us, or from their children. So, I'd say close working relationships are helpful.

VN I'd say opinions would vary with the type of learner as well as cases of the hard to reach parent. But we don't have teachers who refuse to work with parents.

SM KR, what has the management team done to improve parent involvement at this school?

KR Well look at the Budget meeting we're having. We sent out a notice and now we're sending them a second reminder. That's what we do, constantly remind them. Also, we talk to the GB, the parent component, for them to bring parents in, although we do our bit, it's also encumbent upon them to get the parent's support because they must do their bit as we're doing our bit.

RR We're not sure even if our kids are taking our messages and quoting it to their parents, even our notices, we're not sure if they even give it to their parents, but we ask them to sign the return slip and bring it back.

SM In what way does the school communicate with parents?

VN Well, there are the parent meetings. This is usually held on a Saturday afternoon after two in the school hall. Sometime we feel we need to spend more time with parents then we extend it by starting earlier.

SM Does this meet the needs of all parents?

VN Well, we have the parent who'll call to say they can't come. We try to call them during the week. We haven't had problems, as long as it's not on a working day.

KR We also communicate via the GB. Whenever they have GB meetings, we send messages to them of issues that need to be raised.

RR But when we have problem pupils then we talk directly to the parents. Also, as was mentioned earlier we communicate via letters that we send with pupils.

SM How do you communicate with parents from outlying areas?

KR Well, if the child is not at school, then we send letters with someone to

pass on but in many cases we don't communicate at all. Now, you can't ask us to go and visit the family that is unfair on us.

SM Which areas do learners come from?

VN Well anywhere around here, Umlazi, Umbumbulu, Adams Mission, Folweni. Some come from as far as Illovo.

SM Do you not have a problem with latecoming to school?

RR Well, the local ones come late, leave alone the on'es from Illovo.

SM KR, where are parent meetings held and at what time?

KR We use the school hall or the Platt Drive Hall. Generally if it's an evening meeting then we use the Platt Drive Hall, Jaa, otherwise if it's a Saturday, then we use the school.

SM Is this okay with all the parents?

RR That is why we have Saturday meetings, but as we said we do have poor attendance. We don't see the ones we want to see. You know, we get the parents of our bright learners more often coming to meetings. We don't want to see them, and we tell them this. We want to see the parents of the learners who give us a hard time at school, but their parents don't come.

KR You know, we tried all the different days and times, but you know, it's never good. We tell them afternoon, some say, no the morning is better, we tell them afternoon some say why not the morning. So you see, we don't know which way to go.

SM What do you do to ensure effective communication – that is making sure that everyone understands?

RR But in most cases, we don't get a lot of African parents coming. Mostly it's Indian, jaa, we get maybe a drop. Very few, we can count the number of black parents who come.

SM This is a multicultural school, do you not have any measures in place to ensure that everyone understands, VN.

VN We may have 35% black learner but this is an English medium school,

Therefore we use English.

KR We get one or two Blacks, but I don't think we get parents from farms or locations. The ones we've met speak good English.

SM Under what circumstances would you call individual parents to school?

RR Generally, regarding discipline, we have the Code of Conduct which we follow, so depending on the nature of the problem then we inform parents.

KR Sometimes we send a letter, like yesterday there was a fight, so we had to inform the parent.

SM So, you say that there are no other reasons for you meeting parents on a one-to one basis.

KR No, only when there's a problem. I think I know what you're getting at, maam. But you see if a child is doing so well, we don't phone parents We seem to be dealing so much with problem children that we don't have the time to sit and talk with learners and parents about the good work. But we do praise them at parent meetings.

VN Also, we have the Awards Day where we congratulate parents as well, but I don't think it's a norm to call parents individually for such.

SM What opportunities are provided for parents to communicate with the school?

KR We're not hard and fast about them making an appointment. Whenever parents come to school we try to accommodate them.

VN I think the school is quite accessible. We don't use the appointment system because it becomes intimidating . It also creates a bit of distance. You see we need to accommodate parents who are working.

SM Generally who makes use of these opportunities?

VN I'd say a fair number of Blacks and Indians. You see, they call the secretary and if the person they want to see has a full teaching day then we tell the parent the teacher is not available for that day.

KR But we have the parent who will just turn up. We have a secretary who receives our visitors in a very warm manner. There is a room, which is

very comfortable where parents await to meet whom they have come to see. Sometimes parents don't understand that we can't leave a class of 40 children to attend to one parent. Sometimes they get angry, that they took off from work and that we're making them wait. We didn't create the problem, their child did. After we speak to them, then they understand.

RR We don't allow them to come to the classroom. We have a boardroom w where we meet them.

SM I am now looking at parent support – do you have a homework policy at this school?

KR No, no we don't have a policy to do that. But we expect learners to do their homework and parents know that. Also we have strong Representative Council of Learners who motivates learners into doing their homework.

SM If you have a situation where the parent is not providing a supportive environment for the child, how do you go about helping the parent to support the child?

RR Well, this school will help any parent that needs the support. If parents come here and talk to us, we are prepared to help, like for example, a parent came here this morning to talk about not being able to pay school fees, this school will help raise funds to support the child or we may exempt them from paying fees. But if you are asking whether we directly inform parents that they can come to us, we don't do that.

VN I would say that guidance is given to the parent more especially when examinations are to be written. When we send out learner exam timetables, we always send a letter where we tell parents, please monitor your child's progress and we give them study tips and so on. Even during Awards functions and parent meetings parents are reminded of checking homework, monitoring latecoming and absenteeism and school uniform.

SM With the introduction of SGB's parents now are involved in decision-making. Does the SGB reflect the racial composition of the school?

VN It doesn't. We tried to do something in the last election meeting- there was very little interest. There was just 1 black parent present who wasn't interested.

SM How are parents included in decision-making at this school?

KR Obviously through the SGB and through the committees they've formed. But of course we have the purely academic decisions where they don't get involved.

SM How do you ensure that the opinion of all race groups is reflected in the decisions taken?

RR Well, this depends on the SGB. You see quite often parents complain that they knew nothing about certain issues. But they don't realise that they have to be present at Meetings.

KR For example when the school wanted to take off for Diwali. We didn't have requests from parents but from teachers. Then they (the parents) started questioning the leave that was granted to everyone for Diwali.

SM Do you have any parent volunteers?

RR You know at the beginning of the year we send out letters with categories like gardening, sport, fundraising, etc, asking parents to volunteer their services according to their abilities. Nobody responded. They take us for granted because they send their kids to school thinking it's the teacher's job to do everything because this school has a reputation of producing good results. But when we requested parents to help with relief, they did come in but it didn't work, as there were too many problems with classroom management.

VN But we do get some support you know. When it comes to transport, giving material to the school, like timber and metal.

SM Which parents in terms of race groups offer to help?

RR Both.

SM How are volunteers invited?

VN Generally what happens is we call or when we come into contact at meetings. Sometimes we have learners who come up to us and say, look my father works in a factory, so it's through learners and meetings that we get parent support.

SM What would you say are the barriers to effective parent involvement at this school, KR?

KR Parents are working. Also they take us for granted and send their children to school thinking that it's the teacher's job to do everything. You see parents see the school from an academic point of view. They forget the structure of the school is part of the school education. Nobody will come and check whether our furniture is in order or whether we have water. Another thing is it's the history of Indian education- non involvement where it's left to the school.

RR Well they think it's the teachers job, we're getting paid for it. Some may have so confidence in teachers doing a good job, you know from those days, they don't want to interfere, but that is the past you know.

SM What do you think, VN?

VN I think it might be parent attitudes as far as the school is concerned, either through experiences or the learners themselves or even the image of the school, or impressions of certain educators. You will get perceptions, perceptions could be very important – although they may not be real, they could be imagined.

SM Have you ever considered why parents from maybe Umlazi don't attend meetings?

KR I'd say transport might be the problem. But we try to have all our meetings at midday on a Saturday. Other than that we have not done anything about the transport problem.

SM What about non-English speaking and second language English speakers. Won't language be a barrier to them?

VN Well that is a problem, but when they do come to school and there is a problem with understanding then we call someone, we have teachers who can converse in Zulu.

SM Do you feel that there are any negative aspects to parent involvement?

VN When we look at the formation of the SGB, I think it has become a problem. I think to avoid it becoming a problem; the principal needs to be very clear about what the boundaries are. They need to be very strong as far as legislation is concerned, so that we operate not from a position of weakness but from a position of strength. Don't see yourself in the second camp as it were.

SM What would you consider to be the advantages of parent involvement?

RR I think the greatest thing would be if they were here, they would understand what we go through.

KR I think only when parents become overbearing and want to interfere with the running of the school, will it be a problem, otherwise I'd say there are more advantages to having parents involved.

VN Parents are from the community. We look at providing a wider service and have wider goals of nation building and community building. You can't do this in isolation. Look at the whole process of democracy as well; we can't discount parents from the process. They need to be intricately involved to build a stronger community and a stronger school. When parents buy into that, they feel part of the structure. We need to create the opportunity for strong relations. We may not be as successful as ex-model schools but we're getting there.

SM KR, have teachers been trained to implement parent involvement?

KR No, no formal training as such.

SM What about workshops or staff development programs?

KR Not in a formal sense, but what normally happens is before a parent meeting, we do discuss the manner in which a parent should be approached.

SM Have teachers been trained to work with children from different racial groups?

VN Very informally, but nothing much.

SM Thank you.