

**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGERS IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN  
EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

by

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

in the subject

**EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**31 JANUARY 1995**

To my wife, Sally, my daughters, Tasha and Tanya and my son,  
Nashlin - for their patience and understanding.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere and profuse appreciation to Dr. G.M.Steyn for her professional guidance and encouragement. Dr. Steyn has helped me discover the essence of research.

The empirical investigation, would not have been possible without the expert advice, guidance and recommendations from Professor G. Bester and Professor C.H. Swanepoel; they have helped from the initial stages of planning the questionnaires, analysis of data to the writing of the report.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Mr.P. Govender, Mr.K. Singh and Mr.K. Govender for their time and effort in editing.

Finally, my gratitude goes to Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Baba for his unobtrusive presence and guidance.

## ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in education is not a new concept; parents have always been involved in education in various ways and to various degrees. Perhaps now, parents are more sensitive to the important role it plays in ensuring the full potential of the child is realised. Departing from the premise, that it is important, useful and necessary, the researcher has embarked upon an in depth literature study of parental involvement in education in various communities and has undertaken an empirical investigation of the involvement of parents of pupils in secondary schools in the Phoenix North area. The main thrust of this research was to explore the obstacles to parents being involved fully in the education of their children and to make appropriate recommendations to the principals, as the school managers.

### KEY TERMS

Parental involvement; parental participation; governance; communication; teacher's role; school manager's role; community control; parent-teacher meetings; parent education; teacher education

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIENTATION AND EXPOSITION OF THE PROBLEM

#### 1.1 THE PARENT AS THE PRIMARY EDUCATOR

Man cannot and does not exist in a vacuum. He is a communal being who has to live with other individuals within a variety of community structures. Group norms, for example, are important criteria that must be obeyed by all members of the community in the interest of the community's welfare and maintenance. The community expects those members who are parents to raise their children on behalf of the community and to instruct them in a way of life, acceptable to the community. The parents, therefore, must of necessity have a hand in education so that they are able to influence the ethos and direction of the schools (Van Schalkwyk 1988:33).

Notwithstanding this very broad but vital need for the involvement of the parent in education, educators must realise that parents are involved in the education of their children from birth. The fact that educators in preschools receive pupils who have already acquired a host of acceptable behavioural patterns from parents is indicative of the major role parents have played in ensuring that children conform to social norms (Berger 1983:2; Gabela 1983:79).

Rene' de La Chalotais (1701-1786), in a statement made during the prerevolutionary France lends support to this idea when he

asserts that only minds that are already somewhat trained can profit from the kind of instruction given by a formal institute such as a school (Brucbacher 1966:345).

Children who are able to converse well, walk and behave normally and are adept at a host of other social skills have been accepted unquestioningly. The parents have, perhaps wittingly or unwittingly, educated their children to the level that educators are familiar with in the classroom.

Education, however, does not remain a simple task of imparting basic social skills. In the present climate, education (more specifically educative teaching) has become comprehensive, specialized and a scientific phenomenon (Van Schalkwyk 1988:2). It is not possible for the parents to carry out this task successfully for want of time and expertise and because of the highly specialized nature of the field. Hence the need for institutions such as the school. But parents, in their capacity as primary educators and tax payers, do need to be involved in the education process. Indeed, the educators are accountable to them for the education of their children. Plato (in as early as the fourth century B.C.), in questioning the theories of child rearing in his dialogues in 'The Republic', states:

Shall we, then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers..... By no manner of means will we allow it. We must begin, then, it seems by censorship over our storymakers and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject (Berger 1983:3).

Pestalozzi was the first modern theorist to stress the parents' vital roles in the education of their children. In *THE EDUCATION OF MAN*, his views are asserted strongly in 'As the mother is the first to nourish her child's body, so should she by God's order be the first to nourish his mind.'

(Berger 1983:10). He captures the significance of the parents in the following:

For children, the teachings of their parents will always be the core, and as for the school master, we can give thanks to God if he is able to put a decent shell around the core.

The idea of parental involvement is not an inspiration of the twenty first century. Pestalozzi contended that the home was the principal centre for the education of children. Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670) supported this idea with his reference to the 'school of the mother's knee' (Brubacher 1966:350).

It is of relevance and interest, to note also, that close to Comenius and Pestalozzi, Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel in his 'Mutter-und Kose-Lieder' espoused that the whole educational edifice rests on the foundation of home training. He called upon the state to establish institutions not only for the education of children but also for the education of parents so that they may take their rightful place in the education of their children (Brubacher 1966:350). The point of departure for parental education depends largely on the existing circumstances amongst which the present perspectives

of educators and parents should feature prominently.

## 1.2 THE PERSPECTIVES OF EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

Parents have particular expectations of schools and teachers; and teachers, on the other hand, have their own views on parental involvement. What a teacher may interpret as apathy and lack of interest in a parent, may in fact be a symptom of the parents' lack of ability or confidence to communicate with the teacher (or the teacher with the parent), the fear of a bureaucratic system they do not understand or a reluctance to intrude into the education process which they may interpret as the domain of professional educators. Also, minority groups, who in many cases may not be literate in the English language may find it difficult to decode the 'professional' messages schools utilise (Howard & Hollingsworth 1985:13).

The point of departure, therefore, for any form of solution to the problems that plague and hinder active parental involvement lies in the role of managers to ensure that both educators and parents are equipped to work together towards a common objective, namely, the education of the child. They are able to, in terms of their office, influence the degree of involvement of parents in education by

- (1) discerning and influencing the development of goals and policies
- (2) stimulating and directing the development of programmes designed to achieve the goals and purposes

(3) creating the right atmosphere

(4) procuring and managing resources effectively to sustain a high level of involvement of parents in education.

It is therefore necessary to investigate the fundamentals of parental involvement so that principals, as school managers, will be better equipped to encourage active parental involvement.

Notwithstanding that parental involvement in schools under the administration of the erstwhile House of Delegates has been increasing and is a good deal more than it was a decade ago, it is still a long way from the desired state where parents may be regarded as equal partners and their participation and involvement are at its optimum. The reluctance of the teachers in the classroom to accommodate the parents in a meaningful way and their inability to cope adequately with these relatively new players in the educational process, does little to improve the situation. Problems between educators and parents are not uncommon. With the prominence given to parental involvement at present, there is a need to educate all participants, that is, the educators, the managers and the parents, to function in concert with each other so that the ultimate goal of educating the child is realised together.

The following table (Chavkin & Williams 1988:87-9) from a survey carried out by the Southwest Educational Development

Laboratory in 1980 in USA is quite illuminating with regard to the perceived usefulness of teacher training in parent involvement:

**TABLE 1.1 PART OF THE TABLE FOR THE COMPARISON OF AGREEMENT WITH NEED FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT TRAINING FOR TEACHERS.**

	Parents N=3108	Teachers N=881	principals N=726
Teachers need to be trained for working with parents	72,7 %	86,8 %	92,1 %

**TABLE 1.2 COMPARISON OF AGREEMENT WITH TRAINING AS A REQUIRED UNDERGRADUATE COURSE.**

	Teachers N=881	Principals N=726	Teacher Educators N=575
A course in working with parents should be required for undergraduates in elementary education	73,4 %	83,1 %	82,8 %

**TABLE 1.3 COMPARISON OF AGREEMENT WITH PARENT INVOLVEMENT TRAINING AS AN ELECTIVE COURSE.**

	Teachers N=881	Principals N=726	Teacher Educators N=575
There needs to be an elective course about involving parents for undergraduates in teacher training	75,5 %	74,0 %	88,5 %

While some of the tertiary institutions, in South Africa, offer particular courses catering for training of teachers for parental involvement, the conspicuous absence of this aspect in other institutes, does not augur well for community participation in the future. Although the statistics quoted above reflect the feelings and the opinions of a community far removed from the South African shores, it does, nonetheless, come from a body of parents and educators and in keeping with the dictum that despite the cultural differences there is unity in diversity, it is believed that the situation among the communities of South Africa is no different.

The statistics reflect a strong penchant for the training of educators in the field of parental involvement. Epstein (1991:347) supports this view when she reports that the State of Washington requires that competence in parental involvement

be one of the 'generic standards' for state certification of teachers and administrators. Colleges and universities must prepare teachers and administrators to work more productively with parents as partners.

Educators and parents do concede that there is a need to maximise the involvement of parents in education but there is always the anxiety that parents will interfere with the internal sovereignty of the school. This is also echoed by the 1984 Green Paper on Parental Influence at School in Great Britain (Cullingford 1985:3). According to the Green Paper the school should have a life of its own. According to Cullingford (1985:3) this implies that the school, in serving the local community and in being responsive to the demands of the parents, should not be interfered with by too much professional expertise from the outside. There is a need therefore, to investigate this area of education so that information will be available to educators at large and school managers in particular. It is hoped that this will dispel the prejudices of the past which ensured that the school remained the domain of the teachers and perpetuated the notion that the parents had little or no role to play in the functioning of the school.

### 1.3 BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

There is an increasing awareness by the parent of the need to be involved in education. While trying to fulfil this task, some parents involve themselves to the extent where the

internal sovereignty of the school as an institute is threatened, while on the other hand, parents (for reasons that need to be investigated) contribute very little towards a positive involvement in education. This, however, is not strictly of an antipodal nature but forms a continuum between the two extremes. This sphere of education is fraught with problems and obstacles. The media abounds with reports of conflicts between educators and parents, between parents and the Departments of Education. As an educator and Head of Department in a secondary school under the Administration of Kwazulu Natal and situated in the heart of a sprawling township in the North Coast of Natal, the researcher very frequently encounters problems of a nature that point towards, (among others) either miscommunication, misunderstanding, prejudices between educators and parents and more importantly, the mutual insensitivity on the part of the parent and the educator towards the problems experienced by the parents at home and the educators in the classrooms. In some cases, even the limited amount of involvement of parents in the education of their children is accepted with some degree of reluctance by the educators. Parents' visits to the facility is often considered to be disruptive and any criticism of the curriculum and methodology is viewed as unqualified judgements of professionals by non-professionals. Consequently, deeply entrenched prejudices harboured by educators, together with the fear on the part of the parents of encroaching into the professional realms of the educators have perhaps, cumulatively contributed towards retarding the involvement of parents in education.

The abolition of corporal punishment in the historically 'Indian' schools under the erstwhile House of Delegates has lent yet another dimension to this field of education. Since the educator cannot resort to any form of corporal punishment to check deviant behaviour the educator is, therefore, compelled to communicate more frequently with the parents of deviant pupils and in so doing have made parents jointly responsible for the good conduct and academic performance of their children in schools. The researcher has often observed such meetings between educators and parents to take place in an atmosphere charged with hostility and antagonism. Allegations made against deviant pupils by school authorities are often viewed by parents as indictments against their persons as parents. Consequently, parents often assume a defensive stance thus creating an impasse between parent and educator.

There are a number of ambiguous grey areas of authority and responsibility between parents and teachers that has aggravated the distrust between them. While teachers, for example, argue that they are responsible for the quality of education and not educational outcomes, many of the parents do not even make a distinction between the two. Should the distinction be made, many of the parents declare openly that the teacher is responsible not only for the quality of the education but also for the educational outcome especially if the child is performing poorly. Under such circumstances the opportunities for teachers and parents to come together for meaningful substantive discussions are far and few. One may

argue that parents and teachers do meet at formal meetings to discuss their children's progress. However, Lightfoot (1978:28) makes the following observations in respect of the situation in the United States of America which strongly reflects the circumstances within the South African communities at present:

Schools organize public, ritualistic occasions that do not allow for real contact, negotiation, or criticism between parents and teachers. Rather, they are institutionalized ways of establishing boundaries between insiders (teachers) and interlopers (parents) under the guise of polite conversation and mature cooperation. Parent-Teacher Association meetings and open house rituals at the beginning of the school year are contrived occasions that symbolically reaffirm the idealized parent-school relationship but rarely provide the chance for authentic interaction. Parents and teachers who are frustrated and dissatisfied with their daily transactions do not dare risk public exposure in these large school meetings by raising their private problems. Teachers fear the scrutiny of their colleagues and principal, who expect them to conform to the collective image of smooth control and decorum that they want to project to parents.

McAfee (1987:185) asserts that inspite of evidence that parental involvement is not just a way of placating parents and taxpayers, many educators work with parents reluctantly and perhaps even grudgingly. The researcher has found that this is not uncommon among educators in schools in the Natal region. Teachers may hesitate to involve parents because of the time and effort required for productive parent involvement, the absence of external rewards and problems with low commitment or skills on the part of the parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al 1987:419).

From the parents' perspectives several factors may mitigate

against productive involvement in schools such as lack of time, minimum opportunities for involvement and indifferent or antagonistic attitudes on the part of the personnel. The problem therefore, is both diverse and complex and needs to be addressed from both perspectives, namely that of parents and that of educators. It is against this background that the researcher has recognized the very vital portfolio of the principal who, as the manager of the school, can play a significant role in ensuring the maximum involvement of parents in the education of their children in an atmosphere conducive to cooperation, consensus and enthusiasm with the common objective of educating the child.

#### 1.4 THE PROBLEM

It is widely accepted that parents must of necessity be involved in the education of their children. While most parents and educators concede to this fact, there seems to be, however, a serious lack of constructive, positive involvement of parents in education. While parents complain incessantly of their children's poor progress, educators do not fail to point out that parents are not fulfilling their obligations as parents and co-partners in education. What then can the principal, as school manager, do to ensure that parents and educators understand and communicate with each other in an atmosphere of mutual trust so that they can achieve the ultimate goal of educating the child with the view of exploring the full potential of the child?

It appears that school managers do not seem to be adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge to enable them to design procedures and strategies that will elicit maximum involvement of parents in education. The following questions, therefore seek to put the problem into greater perspective:

- (1) What are the factors that have either retarded or promoted the involvement of parents in the education of their children in secondary schools?
  
- (2) How can the principal, as the manager of a school, utilise the human resources available, namely, the educators and the parents towards getting these parents to take part in activities that would further the interests of the school in terms of the curriculum, and activities that are extraneous to the curriculum so that the school registers greater achievements both in the academic and non-academic fields?

## 1.5 A DEFINITION OF TERMS

### 1.5.1 School Managers

Before delving into the concept 'school managers', it is necessary to consider the concept of a manager in a general sense. Beach (1980:6) describes management as the process of utilising material and human resources to accomplish designated objectives. It involves the organisation, direction, coordination and evaluation of people to achieve

these goals. The central purpose of administration in any organisation is that of directing and co-ordinating the efforts of people towards the achievement of its goals. In education these goals have to do with teaching and learning (Gabela 1983:76). Van Schalkwyk (1990b:3) asserts that educational management is unique. Institutions, such as schools deal mainly with people and their task is the delivery of services to people through people. Van Schalkwyk (1990b:3-5) quotes the following unique features of educational management:

- (1) The very nature of the task of the school, among others to educate, to establish certain values and views and to prepare them for life requires a specific type of management.
- (2) The effectiveness of the functional task of the school can only be determined over a long period. It is, therefore, difficult for educational managers to bring about quick and effective changes in order to remedy deviations in the educational process.
- (3) The educational needs of the school's clients change dynamically according to its environment. Consequently high demands are made on educational management.
- (4) The dynamic nature of the parent, the child and the teacher make high demands on the educational manager.

- (5) Unlike other kinds of institutions, teachers, as professional educators, possess specialised knowledge and a certain autonomy with regard to the educational processes and can therefore make significant contributions to management and should therefore be accommodated.
- (6) It is almost only true of education that clients of an organisation are involved, to a very great extent, in its management. Parents, children and representatives of the community are increasingly involved in the management of schools. This poses specific challenges to the educational manager.
- (7) The school is only a part of the educational system. The educational system itself is a complex composition of social structures which makes decisions, lays down policies and sets parameters which limits the school. In this regard one can mention planning bodies, policy structures, auxiliary services, controlling bodies and examination boards. Demands are also made by interested bodies such as the state, church, commerce and trade, parent bodies, cultural institutions and welfare services. The school manager must work within the context of this environment.

Greene, Everett and Ronald in Van Schalkwyk (1990b:10) reduce the task of educational managers to eight different roles, namely:

- (1) As leaders, they must inter alia, give directions, accompany their followers and motivate them to do the job. For that purpose they must plan, structure and coordinate.
- (2) As resolvers of conflict they must mediate, convince, negotiate, pursue and realise cooperation in order to maintain efficiency.
- (3) In the role of politicians they must create working relationships with other managers, negotiate in the give and take of resources, control and create new ideas.
- (4) As problem solvers and decision makers they must investigate problems, identify and evaluate alternative solutions, weigh and consider different options, take risks, allocate sources, implement decisions and learn to live with the consequences of his decisions.
- (5) In the role of confidants, they must have an understanding of the personal problems of teachers and co-managers, and handle them with confidence.
- (6) In the role of staff trainers they must provide in-service training and they must develop professional growth of staff members by providing information and opportunities to learn.
- (7) In the role of information monitors, they must determine

what information to create and distribute and how it must be utilised.

- (8) In the role of the executor of rewards and sanctions, they must issue positive and negative outcomes such as salary increases, bonuses, commendations, reprimands and job terminations, amongst others.

In the case of schools, it is the principals, as heads of institutes, who have to fulfil these tasks. Their human resources will include (among others) the educators and the parents in the community and the designated objective would be the education of the child with the view of exploring the full potential of the child.

#### 1.5.2 Parental Involvement

The word 'parent', as used in this research, does not only refer to the father or mother of the child but also refers to any adult who has taken full responsibility for the child and its education on a full time basis.

The closest meaning of the term 'involvement' in the context of this research according to the Oxford English Dictionary is 'entanglement'. While it implies a deep and intricate association with education, this meaning may not be suitable in its entirety for the term implies a state of disorganisation. Parental involvement in education should by no means be disorganised. Parental involvement, though,

should be seen as a concerted effort on the part of the parent to participate in the day to day academic and other school related matters of the child with a definite view to improving the output of the child either in the short term or the long term. It is also conceded by educators that this is a complex issue given the differing perspectives held by parents and educators on the desired aims and the disparate nature of the work. In discussions with a large number of parents, practitioners and academic staff, the National Foundation for Research in England, has found a wide diversity of opinion on which activities should be developed and the basic principles underlying this work (Jowett et al 1991:4). While some activities between home and school is an end in itself, others saw it as a catalyst that may lead to other situations that may involve the participation of parents (Jowett et al 1991:4). The term 'participation' is commonly used in lieu of 'involvement'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term, 'participation' means 'share in by common action or position or by sympathy'. The significant aspects of this definition are 'common action' and 'sympathy'. Although no explicit distinction has been made in the usage of the terms 'involvement' and 'participation' in the numerous literature sources consulted, it was implicit in some cases, while in others it was used loosely and interchangeably. In the context of this research, therefore, these terms would imply the working together of parent and educator towards a common goal.

Parental involvement, however, appears to be a less

contentious and a less complex issue than parental participation. It may be added that parents who have the expertise and confidence may participate in the higher echelons of the education system where policies are formulated and decisions are taken. Indeed, it is not all parents who may involve themselves thus. However, it is imperative for all parents, irrespective of their expertise, to take an interest in the education of their own children. This may include such aspects as ensuring that the homework is done, monitoring the progress of their children and meeting with the respective teachers. Others may be interested in participating in administrative, curricular and instructional decisions as well as in decisions relating to the governance of the school. While both the former and the latter may be regarded as involvement, it is the latter that lends itself to the definition of participation. Gittell (1977:18) states the following in which the distinction between parental involvement and parental participation is implied:

If we were to move beyond minimal community involvement and achieve meaningful community participation, it would involve adoption of a wide range of new policies and procedures. It would require a review of the educational decision making process at the state, local and neighborhood levels. Since education is a state function, the politics of participation may be best served at that level.

Suffice it to state that while all forms of participation are involvement, all forms of involvement are not necessarily participation. These two terms, therefore, will be used in this research with circumspection, with due cognisance given

to the distinction made above.

### 1.5.3 Secondary Schools

The secondary schools usually accommodate the junior secondary phase and the senior secondary phase. The junior secondary phase includes standards five, six and seven while the senior secondary phase includes standards eight, nine and ten. Often, however, depending on local conditions and the availability of space, the standard five pupils are accommodated in the primary schools. Reference to secondary schools in this research, therefore, pertains to standards six to standard ten.

## 1.6 THE AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons for the limited involvement or the non-involvement of parents in education in secondary schools, and to make recommendations to school managers, based on research findings, so that maximum parental involvement in education takes place in an atmosphere conducive to the educational progress of their children. This research, therefore, aims to

- (1) provide a theoretical grounding of parental involvement in education
- (2) provide an insight into the role played by school managers in other communities and schools in involving

parents in education

- (3) conduct an empirical investigation amongst parents, teachers and principals with the objective of eliciting their views and opinions with regard to parental involvement in education
- (4) make appropriate conclusions and recommendations based on the literature study and the empirical investigation.

### 1.7. RESEARCH METHODS

A complete literature study is being made of parental involvement in general and the role of the school manager in particular with respect to parental involvement. An empirical study in the form of questionnaires to parents, educators and school managers was undertaken with a view to establishing the opinions of the educators, parents and principals with regard to the involvement of parents in education. This will be dealt with in chapter four. The focus, however, shall be on individual parental involvement and not formal parent structures.

The questionnaire seeks to establish the views and opinions of parents, educators and principals on parental involvement in education with regard to their individual participation in their personal capacity and not as part of any formal structures such as parent-teacher organisations. The findings of this survey together with the information acquired from the

in depth literature study shall be used to equip school managers with information that would enable them to maximise parental involvement in education.

### 1.8 DEFINING THE FIELD OF STUDY

There are three levels of educational administration. These are the macro (or central) level, the meso or (intermediate or regional) level, and the micro (or local) level. The main thrust of this study, however, is how management at the micro level can ensure parental involvement at the functional level. Formal structures such as PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) and PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association) while essential, does not bring parent-involvement to each and every parent. Given the multifarious characteristics of parents and that only a small fraction of the parent community can serve on such a body, only a limited number of parents and those of a certain calibre would choose to involve themselves in such formal organisations where governance, advocacy and decision-making are part of the functions. This study, therefore, deals primarily with individual parental involvement and not formal parent structures (see paragraph 1.7).

While one expects a certain degree of diversification amongst various cultural groups and communities, there are also universal aspects of parent, child and educator to be considered. It is, therefore, necessary to make a thorough literature study of parental involvement in other communities and cultures with emphasis on individual participation in

their personal capacity and not part of formal parent structures. Empirical study, however, shall be focussed on the normal co-education secondary schools under the administration of the erstwhile House of Delegates in the Natal Kwazulu Region, in the Phoenix North area. Five schools are focussed upon in respect of teachers and parents. With regard to questionnaires to school principals, it is imperative that the researcher increases the number of schools in order to obtain a greater number of respondents to the questionnaires.

#### 1.9 SEQUENCE OF THE STUDY

Chapter two of this study will include a thorough literature study with the objective of providing a theoretical background to parental involvement in education. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the history of parental involvement and the factors that have influenced it. Forming an indispensable part of the theoretical background is the necessity and value of parental involvement to educators, parents, children and the school. In keeping with the main thrust of this research, the researcher has focussed much attention on the ways of parental involvement and the obstacles that hinder active parent participation in education.

The school manager shall be focussed upon in chapter three with the view to exploring how the principal, in particular, functions in a school situation to bring about parental participation in the activities of the school and involving

them in the education of their children. Strategies employed by principals in other schools and communities are quoted.

Chapter four will include an analysis and feedback of responses to the questionnaires sent to parents, educators and principals. The questions are so designed as to elicit information from the respondents pertaining to problems associated with the participation of parents in education; prejudices of parents and educators and the views of the various participants with regard to parents as partners in education are focussed upon.

Based on the literature study of chapter two and three and the empirical study of chapter four, chapter five shall seek to make recommendations on how the school managers can involve parents in education so that the potential of their charges are explored fully.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A THEORETICAL GROUNDING OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

#### 2.1 HISTORY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In recent decades schools and government agencies have been stressing the importance of educators and parents working together as partners to further the educational aims of their children. But parental involvement in education is a very old and traditional concept. Today, however, this concept is emphasised, recognised and acknowledged for the vital role it plays in the education process thus creating the mistaken notion that it is a new concept of the twentieth century. In fact, since prehistoric times, family groups and parents have been involved with the rearing of their young (Berger 1987:24).

The harsh weather conditions, the constant threat from predators and the incessant struggle to obtain food and water necessitated the development of a culture, albeit a primitive one in order to ensure their survival. Children were recognised for their contribution to survival and for their implied continuance of society and this demanded that they be taught how to obtain food and water for sustenance and provide protection against the harsh weather conditions and predators. Through the concerted efforts of parents and their function as role models, children were able to learn and internalize important customs, rules, values and laws so

that they may participate as members of both the family group and of a larger society. Parental involvement was a matter of necessity in order to ensure their continued survival (Berger 1987:25). In later years, 5510 BC to 3787 BC, there emerged a need for formal education among the ancient civilizations of Sumeria, Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt. But this was still carried out at home. It was not until later (3787 BC to 1580 BC) that schools outside their homes developed (Berger 1987:25-6). The system, however, that had the greatest influence on western thought was the educational system of ancient Greece.

Here, as early as sixth century BC, there were regulations governing schools. It was the responsibility of the parents to teach their sons to read, write and swim. As is the case today, schools were to be in session for a specified period each day during which time free tuition was provided for sons of men skilled in battle. Schools were private and parents were free to choose the pedagogue or the school they desired for their children (Berger 1987:26; Butts 1953:35).

Rome, also, boasted a system where parents played a prominent role. The parents were regarded as the first educators and high priority was placed on the children's education. The mother played a vital role in the academic education and taught the children to read. The fathers encouraged business acumen and good citizenship in their sons. The mother taught her daughters the obligations, responsibilities and skills necessary to be a homemaker (Berger 1987:27).

Regrettably, however, parental involvement in education did not enjoy such prominence in all European communities throughout history. During the middle ages, for example, between 400 AD and 1400 AD children were very low among society's priorities. Children of the lower classes, that is the serfs and the peasants, learned what they could from their parents and peers. Owing to the economic conditions of that time, family life was at its minimal and there was no formal system of education. The children were forced to work with their parents in order to subsist on the feudal estates (Berger 1987:28).

This was not very much unlike the colonial system of America in which the land was new and living was a matter of survival. Houses were needed, the soil had to be tilled, crops had to be cultivated and harvested. This scenario left no place for the formal education of children in schools. Children helped their parents and were educated in such matters that pertained directly to their immediate needs (Butts 1953:36). The situation amongst the early white settlers in Southern Africa was not very much different.

In the early eighteenth century, Willem Adriaan van der Stel, lifted the restriction imposed on farmers by his father Simon van der Stel who prohibited them from 'trekking' with their cattle more than eight days distance from the farm (Muller 1990:59). Hence farmers were constantly in search of better grazing and many led a semi-nomadic existence moving ceaselessly to and fro between summer and winter pastures.

This resulted in the inevitable problem of keeping in touch with schools and the church. There were no schools for children who could not attend the school in Cape Town or in one of the smaller towns. Parents had to teach the children themselves or use itinerant schoolmasters (Muller 1990:60-1). Amongst the white population in the Cape Province a form of centralised control of education existed from the seventeenth century. As a result of the De Mist recommendation in 1805 that local taxation should pay for education, local school bodies comprising members of the community, emerged. Later, the School Board Act of 1905 ensured that one hundred school boards became an integral part of the education system. The idea that people were responsible for education was slowly growing (Behr & Macmillan 1971:45).

While Natal was not successful in setting up local school boards, the Transvaal and the Cape Province persevered with the idea following the Cape model (Behr & MacMillan 1971:46). Even after the Boer War when a highly centralized regime had developed, the need for local control of education was acknowledged so that parents may have a voice in the education of their children. In presenting the Education Ordinance of 1953, the then Administrator, Lord Selborne, said:

The parents of both racial groups demand a voice in the education of their children. This desire springs from their democratic and religious way of life and out of their deep-rooted conviction, on the one hand, that a child belongs rather to his parents than to the State and, on the other hand, that parental say and communal interest are factors that must contribute to the teaching and education of their children (Behr &

MacMillan 1971:47).

The Orange Free State originally boasted of sixty school boards but were reduced, mainly for financial reasons, to twenty five school districts each with a minimum of five schools (Behr & Macmillan 1971:50).

Board members were allowed to enter and inspect any provincial school building on condition that they do not interfere with the actual instruction in any way (Behr & Macmillan 1971:50). But, with time, the school boards, which were supposed to function between the school and the department of education, became progressively weaker. There was no fixed policy in the local control of education and the provinces failed to strengthen the position of the school board. The functions of the boards were 'too limited, too easy of execution and too unchallenging to attract the citizens most qualified to serve in an unpaid capacity for three years at a time' (Behr & Macmillan 1971:51).

In the Transvaal, the Volksraad passed the Burger's Education Act in 1874 (Muller 1990:264). This Act provided for the establishment of farm and town primary schools and a secondary school or gymnasium at Pretoria. The act also provided for parents to have a voice in educational matters through elected school commissions. Although it was a progressive piece of legislation, it was only implemented in 1876. Five years later, when Paul Kruger was in office as Vice-President, he focused his attention on education and

aimed at reorganising it on a Christian national basis. He had definite suggestions to offer and these were approved during the first meeting of the new Volksraad in September 1881 (Muller 1990:276). An education act (Act 1/1882) was passed which emphasised the responsibility of parents in the education of their children. Behr and Macmillan (1971:51-2) assert that the people of South Africa, especially the Afrikaans-speaking community, have always favoured the existence of some authority representing the parents in the control of each school. The words of the Provincial Education Commission (1939) lends support to their views in:

The education of the child is ultimately the responsibility of the parent. His authority over the child must never be ignored; his co-operation must be enlisted. The ideal parent would not be concerned by the minimum demanded by the state, but would seek to give his child a much deeper preparation for life through the home, a much more varied preparation through his social contacts and a much more practical preparation by means of timely specific training for a calling in life (Behr & Macmillan 1971:51-2).

Historically, when formal schools did make its appearance, schools have been granted a great deal of autonomy in the execution of their task of educating the child. Society did not challenge the schools as long as it seemed that the assigned tasks were being accomplished satisfactorily. Educators enjoyed immunity from public scrutiny and the community languished in complacency in the knowledge that the job was being done. But today, most researchers agree that families provide the primary shaping role in early socialization and there is an increasing awareness among

parents of the need to be involved in the education of their children. It is common knowledge, however, that the degree of involvement varies from family to family and from community to community. This may be attributed to numerous factors which may have the cumulative effect of either facilitating or inhibiting parental involvement in education.

## **2.2 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

### **2.2.1 Socio-Economic Factors**

In a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Youth Development at the Catholic University of America, Bauch (1988:82) reports that Black parents in the Catholic schools appeared to be more actively involved, despite the high number of working mothers and different religious affiliation. Black parents may be better disposed towards parental involvement because of the bitter experiences they have had in securing a well paying job and, therefore, wish their child to do well in school in order to compete in the labour market. Bond (1973:2) corroborates this when he cites an example from his own experience in which parents in the lower third of the community in socio-economic terms, cooperated immensely with the school and showed a great deal of interest.

Hoover-Dempsey et al (1987:419) report, however, that their investigation of the variable, socio-economic status, has led them to conclude that while socio-economic status plays a

role in parent-teacher relations, the general direction of its influence is difficult to discern. Notwithstanding this, they offer possible explanation for the correlation that was observed in some instances between high socio-economic status and increased parental involvement. Parents in the higher socio-economic status realize the importance of education for their children and feel confident of their right to be involved in the school and, therefore, take a more active role than those parents in the lower socio-economic status. Also, parents from the higher socio-economic status may view themselves as partners with the educators rather than inferiors or subordinates. These parents may also feel greater confidence in the value of their contributions to the schools (Hoover-Dempsey et al 1987:430; Herman & Yeh 1983:16). In South Africa parents of lower socio-economic status, who come to meetings, for example, do so reluctantly. This is especially true of the many Black illiterate and semi-literate parents who fear that their views will be regarded as naive, uninformed or unimportant (Gabela 1983:92). These parents are also frustrated by material deprivation and a struggle for survival. This may be as a result of or aggravated by the large families in some cases. The mother, for example, is less likely to give personal care to her children, as a result of which the children from the larger families in the lower social class groups were generally less well-developed physically than children in the higher social groups. These children appeared to get less encouragement from their parents (Goodacre 1970:93; Gabela 1983:93). Douglas in Goodacre (1970:93) states that even an

✓ Gabela

educably ambitious mother may fail to visit the school, if she is tied by the needs of her younger children'.

### **2.2.2 Level of Teacher Efficacy**

Hoover-Dempsey et al (1987:421) define teacher efficacy as teachers' beliefs that they are effective in teaching, that the children they teach can learn, and there is a body of professional knowledge available to them when they need assistance. The authors maintain that a high level of efficacy implies a sense of professionalism and security in the teaching role. Such confidence would logically enhance teachers' efforts to discuss their teaching programme and goals with parents. Such efficacy may also lead to an increased sense of role differentiation and complementarity thus minimizing perceptions of threat to role or expertise which is frequently experienced in parent-teacher relations.

### **2.2.3 Level of Literacy among Parents**

In a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Youth Development at the Catholic University of America, Bauch (1988:82) reports that parents who had attended college were more likely to be active participants and high communicators. However, he maintains that this factor in itself does not account for the differences found among black schools. Instead, a combination of parent and school factors seem to influence parent involvement.

#### **2.2.4 Cultural and Linguistic Differences**

The way in which parents and school personnel communicate will depend on the linguistic factor. Language is essential in a forum where information is to be exchanged, considered, and acted upon. Linguistic differences, therefore, poses a practical problem which understandably deters parents from involving themselves in education (Lynch & Stein 1987:106).

#### **2.3 NECESSITY AND VALUE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

It is generally accepted that when educators and parents work together in a partnership in the education of their children the productivity increases. But it is not enough to merely concede to this fact. It is essential that schools recognize this fact and utilize this resource effectively. The community, in general, is answerable for the education and teaching of the non-adult members of the community.

While the parents may see themselves as the 'owners' of the child on grounds that they are the natural parents and are biologically responsible for their appearance, they do not have exclusive rights over their child. It must be borne in mind that the child is a member of a larger group, besides the family, that is, the community. Long after the demise of the parents, the child will continue to live in society and be of service to society. In this complex and diversified world, it is not practical to undertake to educate the child in all aspects of education. It is therefore necessary to have an institute, such as the school, to cater for the

formal aspects of education (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:5).

Schools have been assigned numerous tasks amongst which the development of students' academic achievement and the equipping of individuals to make meaningful contributions to society feature prominently. These tasks, however, cannot be achieved alone, considering that only 12,5 percent of the child's twelve years of schooling is spent in school (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:24). It follows, therefore, that a major part of educating the child becomes the responsibility of the parents and the school has undertaken to fulfil only a facet of the parents' task. Therefore, schools and educators are basically serving the community and the parents. As such, the parents become the clients of the educators. In this regard, Van Schalkwyk (1990a:4) says:

Die insig dat dit die ouer is wat die onderwyser se kliënt is en nie die kind nie, beklemtoon die beginsel dat die ouer 'n basiese rol in die skoolopleiding van sy kind vervul. Die ouer bring as kliënt sy kind na die beroepsopvoeder om hom met sy opvoeding en onderwys behulpsaam te wees.

While the educator-client relationship is acceptable from the perspective of accountability of educators to parents, Wolfendale (1986:33) makes a distinction between the characteristics of parents viewed as 'clients' and those of parents perceived as 'partners'. Parents as partners are seen as being active and central in decision-making and having equal strengths and equivalent expertise; they are seen as persons who contribute to, as well as receive, services and share responsibility so that both the educator

and the parent are mutually accountable.

### **2.3.1 The Necessity of Parental Involvement**

#### **2.3.1.1 Parental Involvement as a Principle**

Parental involvement is not only a matter of necessity in terms of what can be attained in education but also a matter of principle. The parent, as primary educator, is responsible for their children's well being, their future and their education. It must be borne in mind that the children have been educated by the parents from birth. By the time they are received at school on the first day, they have already acquired a host of social skills which makes them acceptable to society at large and the school community in particular. It is at this point that the third individual, namely, the teacher, is introduced. The teacher is entrusted with continuing with the education process by exposing the children to the formal aspects of education. It would, indeed, be naive to imagine that the home life and the school life are rigid compartments and that the parents' interest in their children is completely severed for the period that the children are in school. The parent-child relation is not substituted by the educator. Instead, the educator should be seen as a professional who contributes towards the education of the child in areas where the parent cannot meet the requirements in terms of time, expertise and resources. It is, therefore, not logical to exclude or limit the parent, who is the primary educator, from the formal education of the

child (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:19-20).

### 2.3.1.2 Parental Involvement as a Legal Requirement

In the Republic of South Africa the Law makes provision for parental involvement in education. According to the recommendations made by the Human Sciences Research Council in 1981 (Report of the Main Committee of the HSRC Investigation into Education 1981:15) and 'Nasionale Beleid vir Algemene Onderwysake, 76 van 1984' the policy stipulates that:

- (1) There should be a positive relationship between formal, informal and non-formal education in the school, society and family.
- (2) The State is responsible for the provision of formal education but that the individuals, parents and the community have a voice and are jointly responsible (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:20).

Further, it is important to note that the child has to be in school until the age of sixteen years and it is the parents' responsibility to ensure this. Since it is, by law, the parents' responsibility, the parents' involvement in education becomes necessary by law. In fact, a father's duty to support his children was established in Roman and Roman-Dutch law, and has been affirmed in many decisions of the South African courts. This responsibility has been said to arise from a sense of natural justice and filial and parental dutifulness (Boberg 1977:254; Reader's Digest 1982:305). A parent who ignores an attendance order and persists in

refusing to send a child to school can be prosecuted unless the parent is able to prove that the child is receiving a suitable full time education outside the school for reasons such as ill health or other unavoidable circumstances (Reader's Digest 1982:309-10).

#### **2.3.1.3 Parents as Contributors of Tax**

The maintenance and support of education is sustained by the contributions made by the tax payers of the country of which the parents form a major part. It is therefore, their fundamental right to ensure that this commodity (education) for which they have been paying, albeit indirectly, is of the required standard and acceptable to them (Kelly 1974:8-9; Van Schalkwyk 1990a:21).

#### **2.3.1.4 Intellectual Development**

A child's intellectual capacity does not remain static. It has the capacity to change depending on his interaction with the environment. Fifty percent of the child's intellectual development is determined from birth to four years and thirty percent from four to eight years old. The first eight years, therefore, are of utmost importance for the child's intellectual development. The other twenty percent is developed from eight to seventeen years old. It is therefore, essential that the parent plays a vital role in education so that together with the educator, the child can be given the best possible exposure in order to maximize his

intellectual development (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:21).

#### **2.3.1.5 Parents as Caregivers and their Rights and Requirements**

A nurturing environment is essential in order to rear a child. All children must be fed, touched and involved in communication, either verbal or nonverbal in order to continue to grow and develop. This is the task of the caregiver. Thus the essential bond between the child and the caregiver emphasises the significance of the parents' role. The parent, therefore, as a caregiver has a natural right to be involved in education (Berger 1987:1-2; Van Schalkwyk 1990a:23).

#### **2.3.1.6 Formal Education as a Facet of the Education Process**

Educators cannot do justice to all aspects of the education process in the limited time available. In fact a child spends only 12,6 percent of the twelve years, under the charge of the educator in a formal institute. Relative to a life span of sixty years he spends only 3,6 percent of his life in a school (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:24).

There is too great a differentiation among the individuals to do complete justice to every child in terms of their unique nature. The parent, as one who knows his child more intimately, is in a better position to develop the child's potential.

## 2.3.2 The Value of Parental Involvement

### 2.3.2.1 Value to the Educator

#### (a) The Family as Basis For a Successful Education

If children do not have the necessary security, love and feeling of acceptance by the family, then the children will not allow themselves to be led by the educator and to be exposed to new experiences.

The family provides the child with his daily physical requirements such as clothes and food without which the full potential of the child cannot be explored by the educator. The family provides a good psychological background without which the child may experience anxiety and aggression. Omission of these essential needs are obstacles to the education process (Jowett & Baginsky 1988:42; Van Schalkwyk 1990a:25).

If the child does not have a positive attitude towards his education, learning and the school, it is going to be detrimental to his academic success. The problem is aggravated when the family has a negative attitude towards the school and education. Under these circumstances the educator will find it almost impossible to effect a change in the pupil. Van Schalkwyk (1990a:25-6) is succinct in his appraisal of the value of the family when he states:

Die gesin vorm die sleutelfaktor in die skepping van 'n gunstige fisieke en psigiese basis vir geslaagde onderwys en dit vorm die kind se houding, bereidheid en gereedheid om van sy formele onderwys 'n sukses te maak. Die psigiese verbondenheid met die gesin is so sterk dat al sou die gesinsituasie negatief vir die onderwys wees, die kind hom moeilik daarvan kan losmaak.

(b) Improving Relationship between Parents and Teachers

When parents and the school work together meaningfully, there is a greater likelihood of improvement in the attitudes of the parents towards the school and the educators. They are more willing to follow the school's programme positively in the interest of the child and the teacher and to contribute towards the corporate life of the school (Jowett & Baginsky 1988:42; Van Schalkwyk 1990a:26). Berger (1987:3) asserts that teachers and principals who know parents by virtue of their participation in school activities treat those parents with greater respect.

(c) Working Together Generates Trust

The objective of educating the child cannot be achieved by the school alone, especially if one considers that only 12,6 percent of the child's twelve years is spent in school. The task is too big and complex to do justice to the formal aspect of education in this limited time. In order to achieve the desired goals in education, it is necessary for both the teacher and the parent to work as partners. Thus, the inevitable by-product of the recognition of each other and the co-ordination of their efforts is the

generation of trust (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:27).

(d) Positive Criticisms Improve Teaching

One of the advantages of a positive teacher-parent relationship is that, it can be mutually supportive with constructive criticism. The teacher, as a person who is able and experienced as an educator, is in a position to offer advice to the parents. The parents, on the other hand, can also offer advice to the educators with regard to the child's individual problems and identify a problem situation early so that it may be rectified timeously (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:27).

(e) Provide Background Information to the Educator

Every child is a unique and dynamic individual who hails from an environment that is strongly characterised by particular socio-economic factors. It is imperative that every effort is made to understand the child against the backdrop of his environment. The parent is in a position to provide information of this nature to the educator (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:27).

(f) Improvement in Children's Discipline

Children of those parents who enjoy a good relationship with the school and its educators, give little or no discipline problems (Hoover-Dempsey et al 1987:418; see also 2.3.2.2.b.).

(g) Parental Involvement Eases the Task of the Educator

Competent and willing parents are of great value to the teacher in the classroom situation. Parents can often assist in certain subjects depending on their level of competency. An educator who is alert to the skills and capabilities of the parents in the community can, with a bit of planning and initiative, make maximum use of this resource and in so doing make the task in the classroom lighter (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:28) and as Jowett and Baginsky (1988:42) express it, it 'provides practical help for hard-pressed teaching staff'.

2.3.2.2 Value to the Parents and their Children

(a) Improvement in Academic Achievement

Van Schalkwyk (1990a:30) asserts that in cases where parents are actively involved in the education of their children, there is considerable improvement in academic achievement. This is corroborated by Hoover-Dempsey et al (1987:418) when they state that empirical work supporting the wisdom of teacher-parent interaction gained recognition in the 1960s as being beneficial to children. Among the benefits suggested were improved student achievement. Children who know that their parents take an active interest in their education, enjoy a feeling of emotional stability and security.

(b) Learning and Behavioural Problems are More Easily Resolved

In Australia, for example, teachers and other interested groups and a handful of students responded to the Ministerial Policy Development Paper No. 2, 'The School Setting: management of student behaviour in schools' (Management of student behaviour: high level of agreement between parents and teachers. 1985. *Pivot*, 12(3):4.). There was a great deal of consensus amongst the respondents on a number of issues among which the need for cooperation between parents and the school in developing policy and in dealing with problems was stated. A number of respondents also stated that it was the task of the parents to do the basic behaviour training before the child reached school. It was then the responsibility of the parents to work with the school in continuing the management of the child's behaviour. There was common agreement that the formulation of the school rules should be a task undertaken by all members of the school community, that is, parents, staff, school council and students.

Administrators at Wilson Junior High School in Hamilton in Ohio have embarked upon a very effective way of curbing deviant behaviour (Georgiady & Lazares 1987:133-4). They discovered that by getting parents to spend a day in school with repeatedly misbehaving pupils, helped to deter and minimize discipline problems at their school. Discipline problems at this school have decreased dramatically and parents have expressed a new confidence and satisfaction with

the school and teachers feel less stress and are reassured by strong support from the principal's office (Georgiady & Lazares 1987:133-4).

### 2.3.2.3 Value to the School

#### (a) Improvement of Co-ordination

The educator is regarded as the secondary educator and is responsible for the formal part of the child's education. The parent, on the other hand, who is regarded as the primary educator, is responsible for the informal part of the child's education. While these two partners may be working with the same child, they have differing immediate aims, differing starting points and differing principles and norms. Consequently, it is necessary for co-ordination so that the universal principle of educating the child is realised (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:31).

#### (b) Financial Support

Parents contribute towards the financing of the school directly and indirectly: directly in the form of school fund and indirectly in the form of taxes (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:31).

## 2.4 NATURE AND SCOPE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

It appears that there is no consensus among educators as to the precise delineation of the nature and scope of parental

involvement. While some view it as a sincere interest in the teaching of the child at home, others view it as a service to the school in the form of collection of funds, help rendered during school functions, the development of school grounds, maintenance of school structures and helping in certain administrative tasks. A very popular view is that parental involvement is the meeting of parents with the respective educators in order to discuss scholastic progress of the pupils and to get to know the educators of their children. Yet another view is that parental involvement is being a member of a body such as the parent-teacher associations. Educators differ over the possibilities and the boundaries of parental involvement. Amongst the very orthodox, the view is held that parents have a very limited role to play in the formal education of their children. The parents, it is felt, should only ensure that the children are clothed, fed and that they attend school.

Many educators perceive parents as persons who may undermine the professional status of the educators if they are allowed to be involved in education and as such are very reluctant to encourage it (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:34). Perhaps out of necessity and not out of choice, this view is fast changing. It is now conceded that formal education cannot be undertaken by the professional personnel alone. It is imperative that parents, as primary educators, involve themselves as partners in the education process.

The pupils have to mature to adulthood. They have innate

abilities which they cannot realise if their need for adult support is not met. It is the task of the parent as the primary and natural educator to fulfil this task of educating and leading the child to adulthood (Vrey 1979:205). In this regard Van Schalkwyk (1990a:35) says:

In sy op-weg-wees na volwassenheid het 'n kind 'n volwasse wegwyser of begeleier nodig. So 'n wegwyser staan bekend as 'n opvoeder. Die kind se ouer is sy primêre en natuurlike opvoeder.

The task of doing justice to educating the child fully without assistance from a third source is difficult, impractical and expensive. It is therefore necessary to send the child to school. The task of educating children, therefore, is the responsibility of the parents. They seek assistance from the school because they lack the expertise, knowledge, time and resources. As such it is conceded that parents are equal partners in the education process. No longer should there be a major player (educator) and a minor player (parent). Both the partners are viewed with equal importance. Van Schalkwyk (1990a:35) aptly compares the situation to a swinging pendulum in:

Wat dus gebeur het, is dat die onderwyspendulum vanaf die gesin/ouer weggeswaai het na die skool/onderwyser. In dié proses het die opvoeding van die kind baie gebaat maar ook verloor. Wie ken byvoorbeeld die kind beter as sy ouer, wie kan aan hom beter emosionele ondersteuning gee as sy ouer en aan wie is hy meer blootgestel as sy ouer? Die ideaal is dat die onderwyspendulum in 'n ewewigsposisie moet verkeer waar al die bates en voordele van die ouers aan die een kant en die onderwysers aan die ander kant behou kan word.

## 2.5 WAYS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The basic obligation of parents, that is, their responsibility for the children's health, safety, supervision, discipline and guidance is undeniably parental involvement. However, this aspect which is essential to enable the secondary educator to carry out his task of formal education is a natural responsibility that is fulfilled by all normal parents. Failure to do so constitutes a criminal offence and falls within the boundaries of the welfare organisations and the law. The concern, therefore, of the administrators of education, educationists and educators is the involvement of parents in the formal education of the children. The next few paragraphs will focus attention on some salient aspects of parental involvement in education.

### 2.5.1 Communication

In order for schools to involve parents meaningfully there has to be a healthy system of communication. D'Angelo and Adler (1991:350) assert that extra care in fashioning and maintaining channels of communication between schools and families in a number of school systems around the country in the United States is paying off. They depart from the premise that it is not possible to design a single method of communication to suit all parents because of the numerous variables that interfere. These include parents' level of literacy; language preferred; daily commitments and responsibilities that may affect the time and energy available

to devote to school; and parents' level of comfort in becoming involved in their children's education. It is therefore incumbent upon the administrator to get a profile of the community with regard to understanding how and when parents may be hard to reach and then to 'fine-tune' their communication to respond to the qualities, characteristics, and needs of the parents. In the more successful cases, as reported by D'Angelo and Adler (1991:350), this has meant creating, selecting, pilot testing, evaluating, revising, and fine-tuning practices many times until acceptable levels of communication are achieved.

The parent-school contact may take the form of notes to parents, conferences, home visits and joint participation in workshops and classes. Other forms of communication include telephoning parents and the school newsletter. Parents value these contacts because they often are the only alternative to the child's account of what transpires at school (Dulaney 1987:49).

Berger (1987:107-11) makes a distinction between a one way communication and a two way communication. A one way communication is simply information, generally from the school to the parent. This may take the form of a newsletter-the design of which may range from a simple notice to an elaborate and professional letter.

Two way communication is possible, for example, when school personnel meet the children and their parents thus creating a

two way interaction between the parent and the educator. Parents as well as the educators recognise the meeting as an excellent opportunity for clarifying issues, searching for answers, deciding on goals, determining mutual strategies and forming a team in the education of the student.

Educators making home visits to make contact with the parents, do not enjoy consensus by all in the teaching profession. There are those who see this as a perfectly natural part of parent-teacher relationship and are of the opinion this is indispensable in order to develop a healthy relationship and professional understanding (Bastiani 1986:21-2). Some believe that contact with children's homes is legitimate and desirable but impractical. There are also those who see home visiting as falling beyond the boundaries of an educator's duty. It must be borne in mind that educators in this category are not necessarily averse to parent teacher contact (Bastiani 1986:21-2).

#### **2.5.2 Parental Involvement in School Decision-Making, Governance and Advocacy**

This would include specifically parental participation as opposed to involvement in the lower echelons of education such as ensuring that the child does his homework. Mitchell (1985:2-3) points out that blanket demands for greater participation or for more effective consultation or simply to have a greater say in what is decided mask a variety of possible formal and informal administrative practices not all of which may be consistent with each other. It appears that

the pivotal point in school administration around which parents' concern lie is decision-making. This very crucial area embodies 'greater participation', 'effective consultation' and a 'say in what is decided' (Mitchell 1985:2-3).

The Open University publication for a Third Level Educational Studies Course 'Education and the Urban Environment' (1978) in Mitchell (1985:3) suggests that participation comes in both 'strong' and 'weak' forms. A distinction is made between participative discussion taking (strong form) and participative discussion and consultation prior to final decision taking (weak form).

Gittell (1977:8) justifies parental participation in decision-making when she states that democracy requires that citizens be engaged in the policy process directly, not through representatives and not only as voters. She points out that attitudinal studies of political effectiveness suggest that when people feel they can control what goes on, they are more likely to participate. An interesting observation by Gittell (1977:8) is the distinction between administrative decentralization and political decentralization. Under administrative decentralization, internal reorganization takes place which results in the sharing of power among professionals at different levels. It does not provide for increased community participation. In fact, it is asserted that this is merely a ploy to create an illusion that changes are being made in the decision-making process. Gittell

(1977:8) maintains that it is 'a professional response to pressures for increased citizen power'. Political decentralization involves a redistribution of power between professionals and the community and necessarily poses a threat to those who currently hold power. The form of participation prescribed by political decentralization may vary from the election of parent bodies to direct parent participation in decision-making in individual schools. Ornstein (1980:82) concurs, albeit the terminology used is slightly different. He makes a distinction between **administrative decentralization, community participation and community control**. It would appear that both the researchers are referring to similar strategies in their references to political decentralization, community participation and community control. Community participation according to Ornstein (1980:82) connotes the formation of advisory committees or groups that may operate at various levels within the system. The main functions of these groups is to make recommendations (not policy) and to serve as a liaison between the schools and community. Community control, on the other hand, implies a legal provision for decision-making authority and power to be shared between the community and the professionals. Political decentralization, therefore, embraces both community participation and community control.

Unlike Gittell, Ornstein (1980:83) sees administrative decentralization as a necessary step towards community control. It is maintained that the professional educators see a need for it in terms of reducing school bureaucracy and

accept it because it allows them to retain power and the critics accept it because it is the first step towards community control.

Despite the endeavours in most communities to involve parents in the decision-making process, it is not uncommon to find thinking to the contrary in some instances. In a study of Hispanic parents, the authors (Lynch & Stein 1987:110) found that the attitude of 'the teachers know best' prevailed generally and the feeling amongst most parents was that the decision-making was the school's job and they therefore entrusted this role to the school system and its personnel. The authors felt that if the parent-teacher partnership did make a difference in the student outcomes, then it was incumbent on the system to find ways of encouraging parents to participate.

## 2.6 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AS A RIGHT-ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability according to Kogan ( Mitchell 1985:3) is 'a duty to a body that has authority to modify performance by use of sanction and reward'. This body can refer to the parents or the educational authorities in the form of school managers, inspectorate, fellow professionals and pupils. There could arise contrary expectations as to what constitutes professional performance by educators (Mitchell 1985:3). In this regard Becher et al (1981:20-1) make a distinction between Moral, Professional and Contractual Accountability.

Contractual accountability refers to one's accountability to one's employer in terms of the legislation. This embraces the hierarchy that may be found in the education system.

Moral accountability pervades the teacher-pupil relationship. A teacher is answerable to pupils and parents in moral terms. Similarly, a principal is morally accountable to the schools under his care.

Professional accountability appears to be a grey area that embraces both contractual accountability and moral accountability and accountability in terms of a code of ethics as demanded by the professional body. Parents have a right, in their capacity as co-partners in education, to demand accountability from the school. Over and above the exercise of this natural right, the school, as an institute that sees to the educative needs of the child, is answerable and accountable to parents in their capacity as payers of tax. Jowett and Baginsky (1988:41) report from a research finding that one form that parental involvement should take relates to the notion of parents as consumers who will require information about the school and its policy and will expect a feedback about their child's progress.

Rust (1985:5) asserts that in Great Britain accountability has reached significant proportions as a result of two major central government actions. The Education Act 1980 provided that regulations could be made to ensure that parents were provided with factual information about their Local Education

Authority and about individual schools. The regulations also require parents to be informed about such topics as sex education, careers education, streaming, setting homework, school discipline, examination results, the curriculum and arrangements for pastoral care. The second regulation ensures closer scrutiny of the finance and accountability to the parent community.

However, a chronic problem that has plagued the presumably shared task of educating the child is the standpoint from which both the parent and the educator have approached the task. Hence, questions with regard to the extent of accountability, to whom accountable, when accountable and conditions of accountability do not find easy consensus. In the present climate it can be argued that accountability is the very essence of the educational system and it is therefore, natural that publicly funded utilities and services are open to scrutiny (Mitchell 1985:1). Becher et al (1981:1) concur that schools must of necessity be accountable to parents and submit the following possible reasons for accountability to parents:

- (1) Children benefitted educationally when parents were involved and interested.
- (2) Consumer rights were recognised.
- (3) Public financed education-as a taxpayer-public became conscious of its rights to know how the money was being

spent.

- (4) Public was less trustful of institutions and of those in positions of authority.

The net effect of this can lead to a closer relationship between school professionals and the community and has the potential of convincing teachers that they must be responsible to the parents as clients as well as to their professional peers (Gittell 1977:21). At a time of parental disenchantment with education and schools, accountability may be used to defuse parental criticism and mollify public concern. It can provide effective ammunition for possible battles against other bureaucracies (Herman & Yeh 1983:11; Mueller 1987:761).

Jowett et al (1991:1) note that the emphasis is not only on increasing the involvement of parents in schools but also of increasing the accountability of schools to parents.

Accountability, however, should not dominate the educational institutions. Organisation of action for the purposes of accountability should extend rather than distort the general organisation of the institution concerned (Becher et al 1981:19).

Closely allied to accountability is participation. The parent has a right as primary educator to influence the milieu of the school climate. The nature of participation will be dependent upon the assessment of the nature of the quality of the information provided by the schools in respect of

accountability. Prime Minister Callaghan of Britain was justified in pointing out that lay people have a right to help determine the nature of this particular form of public service which was, after all, created for their benefit (Mitchell 1985:3).

The media has been instrumental in promoting the view that more accountability and participation are essential to rectify educational ills. Greater participation means a reduction of influence for others. This implies a shift in the balance of power and responsibility as between professionals (teachers) and lay people. It will be conceded by many, that professional people by virtue of their experience and training, contribute significantly to their specialised fields. It is here that the teachers' role becomes controversial. Their claim to be the sole arbiters of the professional practice is less solid than that of other professions because their work is often in the realms of values than in the interpretation of technical data as in the case of lawyers and doctors. Clearly, there is a lack of consensus between the parent community and the teacher fraternity with regard to the question of accountability and the professional status of the teacher. Winkley in Cullingford (1985:92) maintains that if teachers see themselves as professionals in the same sense as doctors or lawyers then they must attend more closely to the implications of professional-client accountability. Accountability creates the inevitable situation of the parents playing a greater role in the governing body; it reflects the reality of the job of

teaching, namely that teachers are engaged in a service where they are accountable to parents and children in a community.

## **2.7 PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

### **2.7.1 The Educator's Professional Status**

Becher (1981), Elliot (1981) and Munn (1982) assert in Munn (1985:106) that parental trust in the expertise and competence of teachers to be a pervasive feature of their research conducted in England and Scotland in the late 1970s. There was a great deal of respect for the teachers' professional role and judgement. Teachers readily defended their right to autonomy on the basis of their expert knowledge and parents were ready to accede to their claims. This belief in teachers' competence was reflected in what parents had to say about their children's attainments. Both Elliot and Munn (Munn 1985:107) draw attention to parents' reluctance to ascribe responsibility to teachers for their children's poor attainments. Elliot in Munn (1985:107) stresses the view that parents see the the school as being responsible for the quality of the educational processes it offers pupils and not educational outcomes.

The status of the teacher as a professional has long been the subject of much controversy. While teachers would like to see themselves as professional as the doctors and the lawyers there is no consensus on the matter. Cullingford (1985:10) asserts that a teacher is only just superior to the tradesman.

Teachers do experience anxiety with regard to the threat to their professional status. This, together with the increasing demands made on them has resulted in teachers taking refuge in their professional status. The curious mixture of hope and disappointment have tempted them to retreat to a position where they have rejected the claim that they are in loco parentis (Cullingford 1985:11). But the belief in the skills of teachers had diminished although the expectation of their social role had not. Teachers are even more acutely conscious of their position as 'professionals' and are more aware of the relationship between their studies and their performance as experts. Many guard their expertise closely and are suspicious of outside control (Cullingford 1985:132) as Wolfendale (1986:34) succinctly states 'a straw man' is often erected by teachers and others who are cautious, even nervous, of foraying into the realms of working with parents'.

### 2.7.2 Views of Parents towards School and Educators

Parents' views of the teacher are very much influenced by their own experiences in school and by the way teachers are presented in films and the mass media. Teachers are seen as persons who are representative of conventional morals of their time and as conformists even in the area of dress and speech. Teachers are seen as ones who act as bridges between the children and the adult world (Goodacre 1970:48).

While many parents feel that schools serve the important function of enabling the latent abilities of children manifest

themselves though examinations and the skills necessary to acquire a respectable job (Cullinford 1985:138), this was not commensurate with what they thought of the teacher as a professional possessing expertise. An investigation team sponsored by the National Union of Teachers in England (Goodacre 1970:49) asked a cross section of the public (which included education committee members, industrialists, business men, academics, career advisers, local newspaper men, trade union officials) what they thought of teachers. It was reported that teaching was seen less as a highly skilled job requiring intensive training and experience. Instead, it was viewed as a job anybody can do, given certain inborn or hereditary characteristics such as tolerance, patience and friendliness. However, the writers of the survey also reported that many of the interviews carried out revealed a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding about the training responsibilities and make-up of the teaching profession.

Parents generally develop particularistic expectations of their children and the teachers develop a universalistic attitude towards their charges. When parents request the educator to be fair to the child or give the child a chance, they generally mean that the teacher must give special attention to their child, that is, the individualistic characteristics of the child must be considered. When the teachers refer to the concept of 'fair', they mean giving equal amounts of attention and judging everybody by the same objective standards. In effect the parents develop

particularistic expectations of their children and the teachers develop a universalistic attitude towards their charges (Lightfoot (1978:22).

In the Sussex Research, as reported by Becher et al (1981:50), it was found that parents preferred talking about their own children as opposed to talking about other children. This (talking about other children) may be interpreted as interference-although there may be varying views as to what interference really is. This research also found that some parents perceived other parents as a dominant interest group who interfered. A parent-teacher association was not essential for such a group but when it did exist it was frequently seen as providing opportunities for parent-teacher contacts from which a particular clique was alleged to profit.

The Task Force on Parental Involvement and Choice believes that too many American parents are not too deeply involved in their children's education (Lamm 1986:211). They, the parents, are of the opinion that the person's ability is the most important factor. Parents in Japan and Taiwan, on the other hand, think that a student's hard work is most important in determining achievement. Lamm (1986:211) asserts that far higher percentages of Japanese and Chinese parents take the initiative to provide desks for their school going children than the Americans do.

In a research funded by the Department of Education and Science in England and Wales, Jowett and Baginsky (1988:37)

report that most parents are extremely interested and wish to assist in their own child's progress but that they are not concerned with broader school issues. This perspective has been criticized by those who would prefer to broaden the base of parents' contact. This is corroborated by Becher (1981) and Munn (1982) in Munn (1985:106), both of whom stress that it is information from which their children stood to benefit and which seems to be most pertinent to their individual children's education that parents want. They wanted information directly related to what and how their children were doing at school. Consistent with parents' view of teachers as experts, parents wanted to know how their children were responding to the expert instruction they were receiving and the particular curriculum they were following.

A study of home-school links in secondary schools in Great Britain (Woods 1984) found that one quarter of parents would have liked to be more involved in schools (Jowett, et al 1991:3). It is interesting to note that this varied little by social class. More than two fifths of parents would have liked an explanation of the teaching methods used, and more than one third would have welcomed details of what was being taught (Jowett, et al 1991:3).

Many parents and educators, and a host of theorists and researchers, have asserted the value of positive, communicative home-school relationships if children are to receive maximum benefit from their education. Polls of public opinion reported by Gallup (1986), for example, have shown

that parents want more contact with schools. Cutright (1984), Moles (1982) and National Education Association (1981) in Hoover-Dempsey et al (1987:418) assert that studies of teacher opinion have consistently reflected positive views of active parent involvement in children's education. However, despite the value placed on improved parent-teacher relations, there is still the very real problem of achieving this goal. One of the problems is the consensus between the parents and the educators as to what forms this parental involvement should take. Educators do not always welcome the parents' involvement in the affairs of the school. Hammond (1986:135), for example, argues that there is a great deal of worry in the profession about the parent in the classroom. The parent, on the other hand, does not always welcome his involvement in the education of his child.

Notwithstanding the many attempts to encourage a greater responsiveness to the demands and interests of parents, many schools remain exclusive places because of traditional habits of thought. Many parents persist in thinking of schools as separate places with their own rules, structure and their own mystique (Cullingford 1985:10).

## 2.8 OBSTACLES TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The problems encountered in parental involvement in education are both diverse and complex, some of which are in keeping with the milieu of the community. Cullingford (1985:7)

espouses similar views when he refers to the fragility of the relationship between the parent and the teacher in the ambiguous position of the welfare officers. These officers who play an active role in the cases of truancy have been repudiated and despised by both the teachers and the parents. Their position as ancillary connections between the parent and the teacher is constantly under strain, reflecting the very poor relationship between the parent and the teacher.

Although there has been a significant rise in parental involvement since the Flowden Report of 1967, Cullingford (1985:7) asserts that the mutual suspicion between parents and teachers continues. Beneath the surface of well intended meetings lies misunderstanding and indifference.

Work, time conflicts, transportation and child care needs appear to be problems that are not peculiar to any one cultural group or community. Not only is it a universal problem but a perennial one as well. However, no one problem may be seen in isolation. The problems must be seen in perspective, with due consideration being given to the family life and the respective systems within which the family has to function.

## 2.8.1 The Family and the School

### 2.8.1.1 Differences in Relationship between Parent and Child and Teacher and Pupil

There are distinct contrasts in structure and purpose between

the family and the school. These differences are endemic to the very nature of families and schools as institutions. The interactions between the participants in the family are **functionally diffuse**, that is, they are intimately and deeply connected and their rights and duties are all encompassing and taken for granted. In schools, on the other hand, the interactions are **functionally specific** because the relationships are delineated by the technical competence and individual status of the participants (Lightfoot 1981:98). The relationship between the participants of the family and the school are differentiated in terms of scope, affectivity, quality and depth. There are contrasts between the primary relationships of parents and children and the secondary relationships of teachers and children. While the parents' relationship with their children are based on emotion and often devoid of interpersonal status and functional considerations the pupils in the school are treated as members of categories (Lightfoot 1981:98).

Closely allied to this is the question of authority. While the authority of the parent and that of the educator are justifiable, (the former in terms of being a primary educator and the latter on grounds of professionalism and expertise) conflict is inevitable (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:46). These inherent differences which are fundamental to these institutions do little to foster a climate conducive to healthy parent-teacher relationships. The perceptions of both the parent and the teacher are inevitably influenced by these inherent differences (Lightfoot 1981:101).

### **2.8.1.2 Expectations of Parents and Schools Differ**

In some communities the parents expect the schools to equip their children in preparation for career opportunities while the schools strive for a more idealistic and balanced education. In other communities the schools are preoccupied with academic achievement while the parents strive for a more balanced education (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:45). Cullingford (1985:140), however, reports that all teachers were unanimous in their views about education, which were different from that of the parents. The teachers interviewed never mentioned jobs as an aim of education. They all mentioned that education should be aimed at preparing the pupils to 'cope' with life, to be sociable and to express themselves according to their ability.

Cullingford (1985:3) maintains that parents can be very orthodox in their expectations and demands. He quotes a case in point, of strong opposition by all parents and other interested parties to the appointment of a woman as the head teacher; the community felt that such a role was best served by the traditional authority held only by a man.

### **2.8.1.3 Differences in Views with regard to the Relevancy of the Education**

Owing to the complex nature of the education system, the school is not very sensitive to the demands and the changes in the environment. The family, on the other hand, as part of the dynamic world outside the school, is more adaptable and

progressive. Herein lies the problem. While the school is less likely to adapt to changing circumstances the family reacts more readily. Consequently there is a conflict between the school and the community with regard to the relevancy of the education offered by the school (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:45).

### 2.8.2 The Education System

Teachers, generally, prefer to be free from the niggling authority of the parent. Teachers are accustomed to a system where the parent is not a role player in the education process and they (the teachers) possess all rights and are exclusively in charge (Van Schalkwyk 1983:16). This being the case, any attempts to involve parents in the education process will meet with opposition from some quarters, at least. The problem is further aggravated by the infrastructure which does not make provision for the involvement of parents. Gittell (1977:16) emphasises that school professionals largely control educational decision-making in state departments and local school systems. They have become increasingly protective of the power and the prerogatives they have gained over the years and this has been used to serve professional loyalties and interests at the expense of educational policies. In the light of this, it is claimed, parent bodies, for example, can only exist so long as they do not make demands for direct participation.

In the State of New York, for example, parent participation in teacher training and selection was opposed by teacher

organizations (Gittell 1977:16). Yet, this area was the most fertile ground for parent participation. In fact, parent participation would have ensured that teacher training went beyond a simple graduation from a four-year college programme and the meaningless trial period before granting of tenure. Instead **competency based teacher education** would have been employed. One of the many elements of this approach was the emphasis on teacher **performance and accountability**. This never materialized, however, as a result of opposition from teacher bodies on grounds that the issue of accountability was 'educational fascism' (Gittell 1977:16). Gittell (1977:16-17) encapsulates this problem appropriately in the following:

The pervasiveness of professional power in education which is exercised within education bureaucracies at all levels (in teacher training institutions, by teachers in the schools and through strong teachers' unions and supervisory associations) makes it virtually impossible to achieve any fundamental change in the distribution of power at any level.

It is claimed that community control in particular (as opposed to community participation) is not eagerly accepted by school officials. This is not unexpected if one considers that community control connotes a shift in power from the professionals to the parents, whereas participation suggests a status quo in the present power structure (Ornstein 1980:88-9).

In 1976 a survey of superintendents was conducted throughout the United States (Ornstein 1980:89). There was evidence of significant differences in attitudes towards **community**

participation and community control. Community participation was defined as input related to advising on school policy and community control was defined as input related to determining school policy. The table below reflects the attitudes of the superintendents in the school systems in the United States.

**TABLE 2.1 SUPERINTENDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CONTROL IN FOUR AREAS OF SCHOOL POLICY**

VARIABLE	$\bar{X}$	2-TAIL PROBABILITY
CURRICULUM		
Participation	11,651	,001
Control	14,604	
STUDENT POLICY		
Participation	13,521	,001
Control	16,062	
FINANCES		
Participation	10,746	,001
Control	13,057	
PERSONNEL		
Participation	15,540	,001
Control	17,303	
TOTAL		
Participation	51,325	,001
Control	60,818	

NOTE: The higher the mean score, the less positive the attitude towards involvement (Ornstein 1980:89).

The statistics indicate that the superintendents were more favourable in their attitudes towards community participation rather than community control. Further, their attitudes about community involvement differed in the four areas of school management mentioned. They were more favourably disposed towards community involvement in the finances and least

favourably disposed towards the community advice in personnel matters.

Note that these statistics corroborates Gittell's statement with regard to personnel matters in which it is asserted that school administrators are protective of their rights to recruit new faculty and to determine fitness (evaluation), promotion and tenure. Educators and school administrators see community participation and control as a threat; hence the large scale opposition from teacher bodies. Ornstein (1980:90) claims that the crux of community control of education lies in political power and economic self interest. In the light of such circumstances, any effort to change the system to accommodate greater parental participation is bound to meet with opposition.

In the United States of America the Task Force on Parental Involvement and Choice believes that public education, as it is currently structured, cannot deal effectively with the nation's diversity and its demand for compulsory education (Lamm 1986:211). It is the system that tells students what they will learn and at what speed and quality. The parents have very little scope to make any contributions in this regard (Lamm 1986:211). Very often, the education system is so centralised that a parent who wants a point of view not merely heard but acted upon is up against the formidable challenge of a bureaucratised and highly politicised institutional structure.

Lightfoot (1981:99) makes a significant observation when she points out that anthropologists, sociologists and the revisionists claim that schools serve as a place to inculcate the lower classes with the motivational schemes of factory work, that is, discipline, passivity and submissiveness, while at the same time maintaining the benevolent illusion that schools provide universal opportunities for mobility and equality. She claims that it is this **asymmetrical power** between the family and school that gives rise to **conflicts**. Although these conflicts are felt at all levels, it is more profoundly felt in the everyday rituals and routine of school life. They are, perhaps unwittingly, communicated through value transactions, rewards and punishments, low expectations and patronizing of school personnel.

However, the Task Force on Parental Involvement and Choice believes that they can remain dedicated to a system of public schools and still increase the sovereignty of the consumers by allowing parents to select from a number of public schools. Schools that compete for students and teachers will be willing to make changes more readily in order to succeed. It is suggested, however, to have state intervention in order to prevent unrestrained choice which may result in unintended consequences (Lamm 1986:211). Notwithstanding the suitability of the system, successful implementation of the parental involvement programme will depend largely on the human factor. Considering the diverse backgrounds of both the educators and the parents, getting them to work together in the common interests of the child will not be without problems.

### 2.8.3 Problems Experienced by the Parents

#### 2.8.3.1 Lack of Time

In a research inquiring about developments in work with parents funded by the Department of Education and Science in England and Wales, Jowett and Baginsky (1988:42-3) report strong indications that lack of time and apprehensiveness of parents and teachers posed a major obstacle to involving parents in education. Moles (1982:45) reports similar findings in the United States of America when he asserts that many parents face competing demands of work and family life, come from different cultural backgrounds and feel mistrust and anxiety when dealing with school staff.

In describing the dilemmas of parental involvement, Epstein and Becker (1982:111) in a research of 3700 teachers in about 600 schools in Maryland in United States, report the views of a number of teachers, one of which, is quoted below:

Parents are so involved with staying alive and being able to keep up economically, there is little or no energy left to devote to children-much less spend time teaching, disciplining, etc. The time they have is spent being loving, lenient or feeling guilty for not having time or energy to help their children. The children have no motivation to study. Many of the children I teach are too busy raising the little children in the family, cleaning house and doing adult work at home because their parents are out trying to make ends meet. It amazes me that children can run houses, raise siblings, and still find time to learn.

Van Schalkwyk (1990a:54) asserts that the financial circumstances of most households is such that it necessitates

the mother working to supplement the income. They do not have the time to involve themselves in the affairs of the school.

#### **2.8.3.2 Stressful Conditions at Home**

There are numerous reasons that may be responsible for the high level of stress that is experienced these days. It may emanate from problems that range from lack of money, illness of a loved one or unemployment. Under such circumstances parents may find it difficult to be actively involved in education (Berger 1987:219).

#### **2.8.3.3 Teachers' Professional Status**

A chronic problem reported by researchers, school administrators and parents is that teachers, often seek refuge in their professional expertise as a means of safe-guarding their autonomy thus inhibiting communication with the parents (Munn 1985:107; Hammond 1986:134). The teachers' perception of themselves as professionals possessing expert skills and knowledge does not alleviate the situation. Van Schalkwyk (1990a:49) asserts that the members of the teaching profession generally portray an image of unassailability, arrogance and as experts who know best in the field of education. Any effort on the part of the parents to obtain information relating to these skills is often interpreted as a challenge to teachers' expertise or as being illegitimate. Thus parents may feel inhibited about asking for descriptive information about their children's progress at school and the kind of work

they are doing, lest it be interpreted as comments on the inadequacy of the school and teacher (Munn 1985:107). Winkley in Cullingford (1985:75) is quite succinct in his appraisal of the problem when he adds that 'The more intense and technical the training, the more developed the mystique of expertise, the more separating it can appear to the lay sensibility'.

#### **2.8.3.4 The Negative Attitudes of the Educators**

Notwithstanding the very complex and rigid structure of the education system, the human factor will always play a vital role in determining the spirit, ethos and direction of the school. One of the areas where this is the case, is in the attitudes of the educators towards parents of different economic groups. The reality of the situation is such that educators unwittingly differentiate on the basis of income. McLaughlin and Shields (1987:157) make a distinction between advantaged parents and low income parents. They assert that efforts to stimulate parent participation were uneven. Parent-school partnerships defined the content, structure and scheduling of parent involvement activities on the school's terms and very often they tended to engage the participation of advantaged parents and not of low income parents (McLaughlin & Shields 1987:157). Lightfoot (1981:100) supports this view when she states that despite the passionate and often unrealistic dreams of black parents (in the United States of America), teachers continue to view them as uncaring, unsympathetic and ignorant of the value of education for their children. Their lack of involvement in ritualistic

school events is seen as apathy and disinterest although it is highly likely that it is their inability to negotiate the bureaucratic maze of schools or it is their response to a long history of exclusion and rejection at the school door.

Bastiani (1986:23) supports this view with his assertion that there are (according to the teachers) two parent stereotypes in particular, which are used to buttress their beliefs about parents. These are the 'interfering parent' and the 'disinterested parent' - 'You Never See The Parents You Really Want To See'. But, says Bastiani (1986:23) while the former can be traced to a misrepresentation of the efforts parents make to find out more about the children's schooling so they can help them more effectively, the latter, which the teachers attribute to parental inadequacies may, in fact, be as result of important and legitimate circumstances which need airing.

These negative attitudes by teachers and managers do little to alleviate the situation; it makes the parent more unwilling to take part in the education process (Van Schalkwyk 1983:18).

Should the more resilient of parents persist in involving themselves, Hammond (1986:134) reports widespread suspicion of the motives behind such moves by parents to involve themselves more actively in the life of the school.

Parents from a poor background are more likely to evoke negative reactions from educators. Educators feel that they display a disproportionate interest in their own child at the expense of the general school population (Cullingford 1985:74).

#### **2.8.3.5 Lack of Privacy and Autonomy**

Christopher Lasch in Lightfoot (1981:98) rightfully argues that families are besieged not only by major structural and economic changes in society, but also by the intrusions of social care givers, teachers, psychiatrists, welfare workers and priests all of whom rob the family of its privacy and autonomy and make it overly dependent on expert wisdom.

In a research carried out in England and Wales, Gibson (1981), reporting in Munn (1985:107), states that it was the inadequacy of the mechanisms by which specific information about pupils' progress was conveyed that concerned parents. Parents complained about the lack of privacy in their conversation with teachers and the limited amount of time available for such consultation.

#### **2.8.3.6 Parents' Personal Background**

Parents experience inhibitions although the atmosphere of the school may be relaxed and welcoming. They do not always find it easy to ask for advice or talk openly to teachers. This may be attributed to fears from their own school days, confusion as to how to address the teacher or conflicts they had in the past or a dread of learning that their child is performing poorly and of being blamed for the problems (Beck 1989:12; Rutherford & Edgar 1979:19-20; Van Schalkwyk 1983:18; Van Schalkwyk 1990a:55). Beck (1989:12) asserts that the majority of the parents view the teacher with awe and respect,

regarding their expertise as special, resulting from their training and qualifications. The situation is aggravated by the fact that some parents lack the necessary knowledge and view schools as hostile and forbidding institutions (Gabela 1983:93). Under such circumstances, it suits the parents' convenience to leave education to the school (Van Schalkwyk 1983:18).

#### **2.8.3.7 The Perceived Negative Consequences of Parental Involvement**

Parents are often afraid of the consequences of their involvement. They are not ready to make sacrifices in terms of time, effort and commitment. On the other hand, the parents who are not averse to the demands of parental involvement, suffer the anxiety that the educators will victimise their child if they are too critical of the school (Van Schalkwyk 1983:18).

#### **2.8.3.8 The Parents' Inadequacy with regard to Assistance to their Child**

The child becomes progressively more independent and the work becomes increasingly more complex. Parents become acutely sensitive to the fact that they are not adequately qualified. Their efforts to enhance the school's teaching may be seen as a behaviour modelled on a teaching style very much different from that of the subject teacher's and is rejected by the child. Furthermore, the work in the secondary schools is of a specialised nature and the parents very often cannot cope.

Some parents lack the knowledge and the expertise that is required of them in order to become involved in the affairs of the school which is aggravated further by the bewildering number of complex teaching methods (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:56). Kelly (1974:10) asserts that education now requires an expertise which is beyond the comprehension of the average parent.

#### **2.8.3.9 Lack of Knowledge and Experience in Working Together with Parents**

Van Schalkwyk (1990a:52) emphatically asserts that one of the singular most important factors in the failure of parental involvement in the Republic of South Africa is the lack of knowledge and experience in working with parents. In a research carried out in the United States of America among 950 teacher educators, 2000 teachers, 1500 principals, 4800 parents, 2500 school superintendents, 2500 school board presidents and 36 state department of education officials, Berger (1987:100) reports that the popular consensus was that teachers require training to work with parents.

Teachers very often blame parents for the child's shortcomings and openly declare that parents ought to be doing more in some way or another. But, says Winkley, in Cullingford (1985:76) such views "are based on a hypothetical neatness....."all children ought to".....a sense of norm which is a useful clarification for assessment but dangerous as a weapon of advice in circumstances where actual knowledge in depth is

limited'. What the teacher knows of the child is largely gained from within the school and the teacher has very little opportunities of actually observing the child in his relationship with his family. This, together with the fact that the teacher has received no formal training in the handling of parents, lures the teacher to fall prey to his personal norms which are a curious mixture of cultural, emotional and rational components (Cullingford 1985:77). The teacher develops attitudes and makes judgements from the standpoint of his personal norm which is frequently prejudicial.

#### **2.8.3.10 Poor Communication**

Communication from schools is often lacking in purpose or intentions. It appears to be designed in a vacuum and is too prescriptive or too negative or sometimes too verbose. There is a particular style of talking and writing, says Bastiani (1986:15), which is characteristic of schools. While such forms of language may have been learned in the struggle for classroom survival, they are not suitable for addressing parents, 'transforming them into the role of big boys and girls' (Bastiani 1986:15).

#### **2.8.3.11 The Paradox of Parent Teacher Interviews**

The parent-teacher interview is supposed to be a potentially useful contact. Unfortunately, this has been taken too much for granted and is merely tolerated by many educators to

satisfy bureaucracy. Very often parents have been left feeling very disappointed and even frustrated after the meeting with the educators (Bastiani 1986:16).

#### **2.8.4 Problems Experienced by Teachers**

##### **2.8.4.1 Teacher Competency in the Handling of Parents**

Teachers face competing demands at school and at home, lack training for dealing with parents, and may have difficulty relating to culturally different families (Moles 1982:45).

X Van Schalkwyk (1983:16) supports this view when he asserts that teachers do not know how to handle parents; they do not know how to conduct a successful meeting with the parents or where the place of the parent and the educator is in the parent-teacher partnership. But involving parents in education is a two way process that calls for commitment from parents as well.

##### **2.8.4.2 Prejudices of Parents**

Parental attitude plays a significant role in determining the type of relationship between the parent and the teacher.

Often parents bring to the school their own experience of the school, which may involve not liking a teacher, or being victimized by a particular teacher, and the fear that the child will be treated the same. Such a parent may well begin to communicate with the school from a defensive position (Clifford 1983:281) thus making the teacher's task of

involving the parent in the education process difficult if not impossible.

In some cases parents who come from high income groups may have a low opinion of teachers whose earning and social status may be considered lower than the parents in question. Under such circumstances procuring co-operation from them will be difficult.

#### **2.8.4.3 Unreasonable Expectations of Parents**

Ever so often parents' expectations of a child's performance at school are based on their own performances. It may be a father's desire to see a reflection of himself in his son and therefore, being good at cricket, for example, may be important to him because he was good at cricket. Another father may also nurture a fervent desire to have his son play in the school cricket team but for a different reason. He was not good at cricket and has suffered the consequences of it. The child who does poorly under such expectations may well have the parents blaming the teachers. This, perhaps, is fertile ground for the fomentation of bad relationship between the teacher and the parent. Under such circumstances it is difficult to effectively involve such parents in the education of their children (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:48).

Furthermore, the society at large, expects the school to remedy all the ills of the society and the teacher to solve the problems. As a result of this, many educators are

assuming the stance where they see themselves as professionals who have a duty to perform with regard to imparting a body of knowledge and nothing more. This attitude of indifference does little to involve parents in the education process (Van Schalkwyk 1990a:48).

#### **2.8.4.4 Preferential Treatment Expected of Teachers by Parents**

An interesting and significant point raised by Beck (1989:12) is that some parents who help in school on a regular basis expect preferential treatment when their children are involved in serious misdemeanours. Normal procedures for informing parents and disciplining the child are expected to be set aside on the basis that the parents always help and support the school. Bastiani (1986:19) claims that some parents who help in the school have developed a strategy for exploiting the educative potential of such help.

#### **2.8.4.5 The Dynamic Nature of Parental Involvement**

Initially many parents may be willing to carry out the routine and mundane tasks of parent involvement. They may be quite content in mixing with the other parents and in a setting where there is always something going on. But with the deepening of interest and the building up of confidence they are likely to seek more demanding forms of involvement and different satisfactions which may encroach onto the territory that the teacher deems to be his professional domain (Bastiani 1986:20).

## 2.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the history of parental involvement is discussed briefly with reference being made to the ancient civilisation of Sumeria, Babylonia, Assyria and Egypt. It is maintained that there is a mistaken notion that parent involvement is a new concept when, in fact, it is only emphasised and acknowledged now for the vital role it plays in the education of the children. Brief reference is made to parental involvement in education in Europe and Colonial America. Parental involvement in South Africa, however, is discussed in greater detail.

The chapter makes reference to four factors that influence parental involvement in education. These are:

- socio-economic factors
- level of teacher efficacy
- level of literacy among parents
- cultural and linguistic differences.

The thrust of the discussion, pertaining to the necessity and value of parental involvement in education, is that the task of educating the child is the responsibility of the parent. Since expertise, resources and time will not allow them to fulfil this function adequately, the school as an institution has been evolved for this purpose. However, since only a very limited period of the child's life is spent in the school and the rest in the charge of the parents, it is incumbent upon the parents to play a major role in the education of the

child.

The necessity of parental involvement is seen from the perspective of:

- a principle;
- a legal requirement;
- consumers;
- intellectual development of the child;
- a right;
- a facet of the formal education process.

The value of parental involvement is discussed in some detail with reference being made to the value to the educator, parents and the children, and the school.

The views of educators as to what extent parents should be involved in education varies considerably. Much influence is exerted by the ingrained prejudices of the educators and fears that parental involvement will erode their authority and the sovereignty of the school. Notwithstanding this, many schools encourage and promote active parental involvement of which the communication process and decision-making, governance and advocacy play pivotal roles.

In keeping with the current climate and democratic principles, parental involvement as a right and the question of accountability is given some prominence as forming the very essence of the educational system.

Departing from the premise that one has to first understand the problems associated with parental involvement in order to develop ways to maximise parental involvement, the researcher has discussed in some detail the obstacles to parental involvement from the perspective of the family and the school, the education system, the parents and finally the educator.

The following chapter shall focus attention on strategies employed by school principals in other communities in trying to bring about active involvement and participation of parents in education.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE ROLE PLAYED BY SCHOOL MANAGERS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS IN INVOLVING PARENTS IN EDUCATION

##### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of parent-teacher interactions has been accepted as an incontrovertible fact by most, if not all communities. In Great Britain, Government reports show a substantial correlation between parental aspiration, language style of the home as well as the background of the parents, academic ability and achievement. The conclusion reached by the Plowden Report has been that the influence of the background factors, such as living conditions and parental attitudes in the education of children, was crucial to their educational attainment but it was believed that such attitudes were susceptible to alteration by persuasion, and that schools should seek the active cooperation of parents in the education of their children (Craft et al 1980:71).

Unfortunately, however, not all communities can boast of intense participation of parents in the education of their children. Often such platitudes as 'The parent is the primary educator and therefore must be involved in education' is glibly bandied around in teaching circles. But serious involvement of parents in the education of their children is a component that is frequently missing. The absence of this aspect of education is conspicuous in the curriculum of teacher training colleges and universities. Experience in

dealing with parents is acquired only after educators start teaching. They have had no formal training in this regard. School principals, in their role as managers, therefore, are faced with the daunting task of ensuring that teachers are educated into believing that parents have a role in the educational process and secondly, to ensure that parents and teachers trust each other before they embark upon a partnership involving parent-teacher cooperation.

School principals, as the school managers, have all the resources and the advantages to initiate the move towards involving parents in education. They have the means through their status and authority to ensure that teachers and parents cooperate and work together with the common objective of educating the child. Berger (1991:122) is explicit in her assertion that the school climate and the atmosphere in the school reflect the principal's leadership style which has a direct influence on a host of issues associated with the involvement of the parents in the education of their children. Kruger (1989:61) concurs when he states:

Deur die positiewe beleving van 'n skool met 'n oop en gesonde skoolklimaat deur die leerling, word sodanige leerling 'n bron van effektiewe en positiewe kommunikasie vanaf die skool na die ouerhuis. Groter ouerbetrokkenheid by skole is deur talle outeurs geïdentifiseer as 'n kenmerk van 'n skool met 'n oop en gesonde skoolklimaat.

The importance of the school principal in the parent-teacher relationship is aptly described by Dekker (1986:965) when she states:

Die kwaliteit van die skoolouerverteenwoordiging hang in 'n groot mate van die kaliber skoolhoof af. Die

sukses van samewerking is afhanklik van sy houding en optrede. Dit is sy taak om leiers onder ouers raak te sien en hulle tot leierskap in ouergeledere te help vorm. Die skool behoort eintlik die blaam te dra as die ouers nie hulle verantwoordelikhede na behore nakom nie. Wanneer ouers opgeroep word om meer direkte en verpligte bydraes vir die onderwys van hulle kinders te maak, sal hulle waarskynlik ook meer aandag daaraan bestee.

There can be no doubt that the principal, as the manager and leader of the school, is in command and therefore is responsible for using his personnel and other resources as effectively as possible so that definite needs are anticipated and the best possible efforts are made to achieve educational aims and objectives (Kruger 1989:55). Epstein (1987:120) reports, however, that while the principals in some schools lead in promoting parental involvement, principals in other schools leave the selection and use of parental involvement practices to their teaching and support staff. Hence, there is a great deal of inconsistency in the extent to which principals are active as administrators in maximising parental involvement in education. Yet, it is the principals' role to orchestrate activities that will help the staff study and understand parental involvement, and to select or design, evaluate, and revise programmes for parent involvement. The principal, as a manager and leader, therefore, is crucial to the successful implementation of the programme of parental involvement in education.

Steyn (1992:49) views the parent-school relationship from a different perspective although the ultimate message is the same. She asserts that certain literature sources attempt to

liken the school as an educational institute to a business organisation in which a service is provided to clients. Viewed against this backdrop, the effectivity of the management is considered central and all persons with which the management comes into contact in the course of executing their duty are considered to be clients. This implies that all interested parties in the school situation are clients: the parent is therefore a client. Steyn (1992:49) states:

Die persoon wat die diens verskaf word as die verskaffer in hierdie verband beskou terwyl die persoon wat die diens ontvang as die klant beskou word.

The school principal, therefore, plays a major role in ensuring that his clients receive quality education. In this regard Steyn (1992:53) asserts '...die belangrike rol van bestuur en in besonder die rol van die skoolhoof in die bereiking van gehalte-onderwys' is considered crucial.

In the ensuing paragraphs reference will be made to agents, besides the principal, because they perform many functions that are typically the responsibility of the school principal, as the school manager.

### **3.2 THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN ESTABLISHING A HEALTHY SPIRIT IN THE SCHOOL**

#### **3.2.1 Developing Trust and Cooperation between Teacher and Parent**

Teacher-parent cooperation may be defined as a process

whereby teachers and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the child (Rutherford & Edgar 1979:19).

Cooperation, however, is not possible without mutual trust between the parent and the teacher. This is a fundamental prerequisite for establishing any kind of relationship. But the problem is that in order to trust someone, one has to have some opportunities of working with that person. Another fundamental aspect that cannot be compromised is that teachers must believe that parents have a role in the education process. Cooperation, therefore, cannot just occur. The principal, as the school manager, has the arduous task of planning, organising, directing and controlling.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm shown by many teachers, getting teachers to cooperate in winning the confidence and support of the parents is not without its problems in the form of resistance from teachers.

### **3.2.1.1 Commonly Encountered Rationale from Teachers for Non-Cooperation**

#### **(a) Conflicting Views with regard to the Degree of Involvement**

Bastiani (1986:25) claims that many educators claim that they are already engaged in getting parents involved in education. While this may be the case in some instances, it is not usually so. The teachers who claim that they are already doing it, often justify this claim by making reference to a few superficial similarities between what is being proposed

and what is already being done. The occasional home visit can hardly be classified as a commitment to involving parents in the education process.

Resistance to encouraging greater involvement of parents may also emanate from a fear that their professional status may be undermined (Craft et al 1980:131).

(b) Afraid of Administration's Response

In some instances the teachers were unsure of the administration's response and, therefore, avoided provoking an inquiry into their own judgement by involving parents (Ostrander & Ostrom 1990:14). Bastiani (1986:25) makes a similar assertion when he states that some teachers state that the principal will not allow them to involve parents. Mays in Craft et al (1980:65) corroborates this when he reports that only four out of ten heads, when asked whether they felt that there should be a closer link and more cooperation with parents of their pupils replied in the affirmative. He reports further that the attitude towards parent-teacher associations seemed to be extremely confusing and illogical. One head said he wanted to form one, (that is a parent-teacher association) but simply could not rely on obtaining the necessary support from his colleagues.

Notwithstanding such reports, Bastiani (1986:25), however, believes that this is more like scapegoating as a way of deflecting responsibility. In British schools teachers have

shown their willingness to change especially when they have seen the benefits of parental involvement in education.

(c) Uncertainty of Parental Response

Ostrander and Ostrom (1990:14) claim that when teachers perceived the student's parents to be the source of the students' problems, they were concerned about bringing parental retribution down upon the student by contacting the parent. Notwithstanding the parent being the source of the problem, if the teacher suspected that a student's parents would respond aggressively, the teacher shunned contact to avoid being embarrassed by the parent. Roberts in Craft et al (1980:42) reports that it is commonplace for teachers to acknowledge a need to work continuously at home-school relations, if they are to have any hope of engaging parental support. Some argue that parental attitudes have been identified as a persistent source of working-class underachievement that teachers stand powerless to overcome. But, says Bastiani (1986:25), the views of parents are numerous and varied and to categorise all parents into a single category is unjustified and is probably the result of ignorance on the part of the teachers as to what parents really do want for their children. Teachers often tend to stereotype parents into socio-economic categories and have preconceived notions of what to expect. Roberts in Craft et al (1980:43) says teachers underestimate working class parents' ambitions to see their children succeed; they present too harmonious a picture of middle-class home-school

relations and ignore the difficulties that they often face when dealing with middle-class parents; they underplay the anxieties that working class parents feel for their children's progress.

(d) Teachers are Disillusioned

This may be as a result of past experiences and teachers feel that further involvement will be a futile exercise. However, a patient and honest evaluation of the previous experience may reveal legitimate reasons for the lack of response and the ingratitude of parents (Bastiani 1986:25).

(e) Lack of Time

Ostrander and Ostrom (1990:14) claim that when teachers believed there was little hope of students overcoming their problems, teachers were reluctant to contact parents because they perceived such situations taking up a great deal of their time which they cannot afford to spare let alone it being a futile exercise.

While time could be a very real problem, there are instances where this may be exaggerated. The best corrective to this type of resistance is to impress upon the teachers that the parents have much to offer through their practical help and support in return for the new demands that increased involvement brings.

### 3.2.1.2 Schools in Practice

#### (a) Getting the Commitment of the Teaching Staff

In Lincoln Acres in the United States of America, the principal maintains that getting teachers to accept parental involvement and getting them to create strategies to maximise parental involvement should be a joint effort of both the administrator and the staff (Gold & Miles 1981:120-1). From the beginning he asked his educators to do much of the planning on their own. It is felt that this increases teachers' investment in the school and created an extra social pressure in that consensual group decisions are more likely to be actually carried out. The strategy was that persons involved in the decision-making and the planning would find it difficult not to honour commitments they had shaped together.

At Chatsmead Junior School, Davies (1985:49) reports that the establishment of a favourable climate was fostered over a fairly lengthy period of time by individual counselling of teachers by the school principal and by a succession of meetings of the staff where pertinent issues were discussed. The various fears and trepidations of the staff were brought out into the open and rationalised in the hope that it would be allayed. It is essential, therefore, that the initial stage is thought out in considerable detail.

(b) Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with the Parent Community

The Wilson Junior High School in the United States of America (Georgiady & Lazares 1987:134) has an interesting practice of inviting the parents of delinquent pupils to spend time in school with their child. This serves as a deterrent not only to the child who has erred, but also to the others in the class. The more positive aspect, however, is the practice of the principal calling the parents of pupils who have been in trouble in the past but are presently behaving well. The principal informs the parents that their son or daughter is doing fine at school. The parents are generally delighted to hear news of this nature. This positive approach is carried a step further. The teachers at this school send names of students doing excellent work or performing outstandingly in a particular field to the principal's office on a weekly basis. The principal telephones the parents congratulating them on their son or daughter's fine work or achievement. Georgiady and Lazares (1987:134) report that the results at this school are outstanding. Parents are generally flattered to be called and relieved to know that their children are doing well. Parents who may have had reservations about visiting the school now feel more relaxed and comfortable about meeting with the principal and the staff.

At Chatsmead Junior School the parents are kept informed of what is going on by means of regular news letters and by sending out invitations to parents to attend school events.

Children's progress are discussed by parents and teachers informally and formally at regular parent-teacher and open evenings (Davies 1985:50). Parents are encouraged to 'pop in' and have a quick chat with the teacher about the child's progress. Parents and teachers also meet socially in a relaxed atmosphere to get to know each other and to work together for the good of the school (Davies 1985:50). For this to materialize, the school principal, as the administrator, must coordinate, manage, support and recognise parent involvement and it is through the very nature of his leadership style that a healthy relationship with the parent community is ensured (Kruger 1989:54-61).

### **3.3 THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE AS A MANAGER AND LEADER IN INVOLVING PARENTS IN EDUCATION**

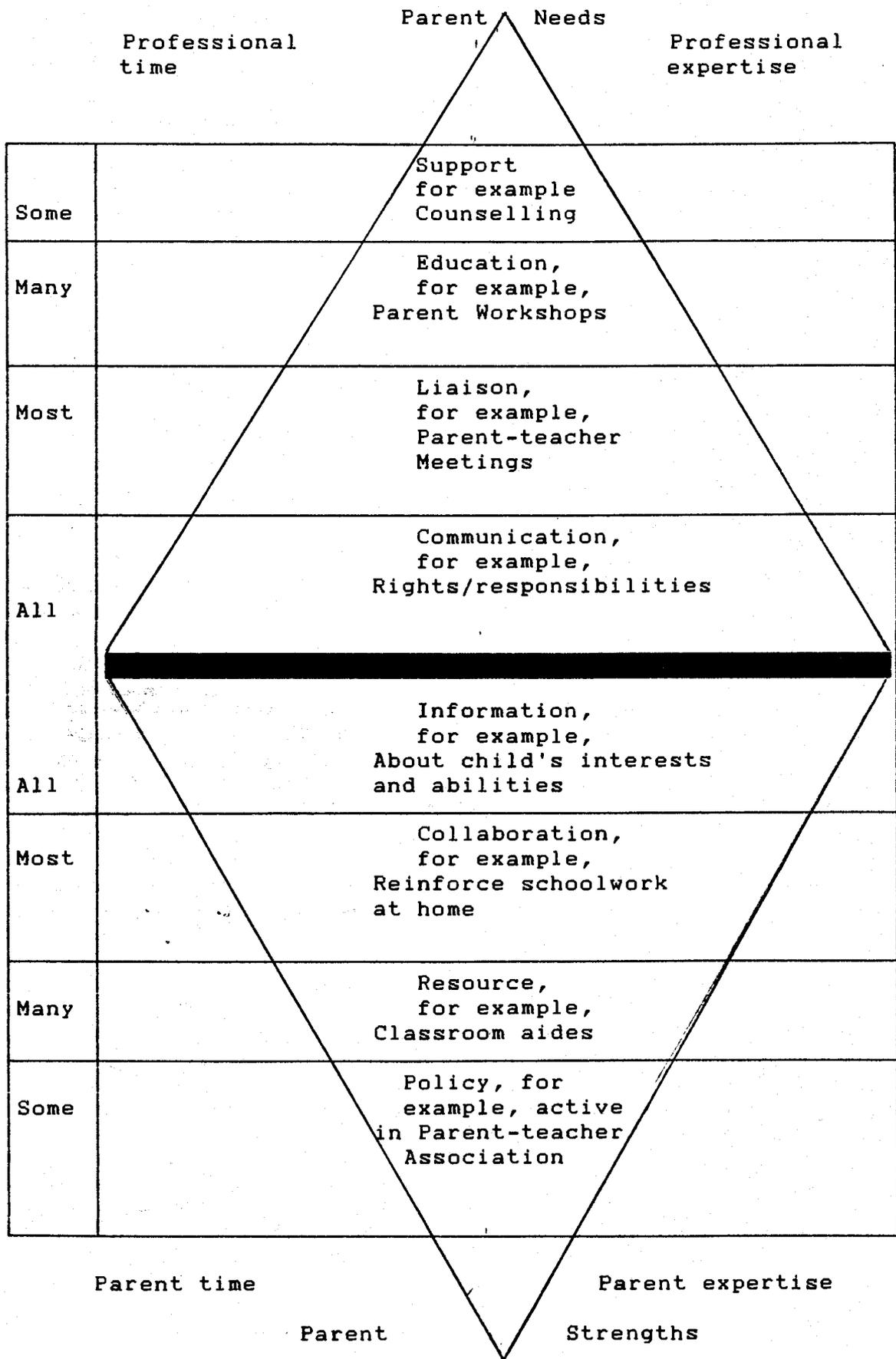
The thinking among many educationists is that the parents' place in the school must go beyond just volunteerism. While we depart from the premise that involvement is necessary, it is indeed the principal who will play a vital role in determining whether the parents will be involved as volunteers or participate as partners (Sandfort 1987:99-103). Sandfort (1987:100) maintains that while volunteer ventures are especially satisfying for principals in that the distance between the home and school has narrowed, much more remains to be done.

Sandfort (1987:101) asserts that when parents are more than volunteers there is a direct and extended contact between parent and professional, a focus on the individual child, and

a fundamental concern with instruction as opposed to the general welfare programmes.

The following theoretical model seeks to provide a framework for the functioning of the principal with regard to the formulation of overall policy and plans for the involvement of parent in education (Hornby 1990:247-8). The model consists of two pyramids; one representing a hierarchy of parents' needs, the other a hierarchy of parents' strengths. Both pyramids demonstrate visually the different levels of needs and strengths of parents. Thus, while all parents have some needs and some strengths which can be utilised, a smaller number has an intense need for guidance. The model also shows that, for parents' needs at a higher level, more time and expertise is required by educators in order to meet these needs.

TABLE 3.2 A MODEL FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT



(Hornby 1990:249)

Hence, it will be noted that numerous activities will take place in order to involve the parent in the education process. The function of the school principals must be envisaged in much wider terms than what is generally considered to be the functions of teachers. This is to be a managerial function. They are not to lead the various clubs, groups and activities, but to assess potential needs and to ensure that leadership will be carried out effectively by others (Craft et al 1980:148). Mahlase (1989:54) mentions directing as one of the functions of the principal according to which the principal initiates and sustains parent involvement. In tandem with this, is controlling, an activity by which the principal together with his management team can determine whether the planned aims and objectives are attainable or are being attained (Mahlase 1989:54).

Central to the idea of parental involvement in education is communication. The importance of this component of parental involvement in education cannot be over emphasised. It influences all spheres of parental involvement.

### 3.3.1 School-Home Communication

Harris, in Craft et al 1980:165-6), asserts that amongst others, one of the main objectives of good communication between parents and the school is the improvement of parents' understanding. All too often, the communicants view the school from different perspectives. Parents examine the activities, attitudes, and aspirations of the school in the

light of the effect upon their own child. The school evaluates them in terms of the overall effect on the whole population of children in the school. A parent finds it difficult to accept the validity of an organisational procedure adopted by the school which acts against the interests of his child, even though it might be favourable to the school as a whole. The solution to this is found in effective communication (Craft et al 1980:166).

It is, therefore, imperative that the principals ensure that the parents receive information that is unambiguous, relevant and the right medium is used. In this regard, Dekker (1986:956) appropriately states:

Beplanning van kommunikasie beteken dat die persoon of party wat die kommunikasie inisieer die ontvanger van die boodskap goed moet ken, sy boodskap dienooreenkomstig moet formuleer, besluit wat nodig is om oor te dra, die regte kommunikasiemedium (skriftelik of mondeling) vir die oordra daarvan kies, verseker dat terugvoering sal geskied en gereed wees om 'n opeenvolgende boodskap te stuur indien nodig.

Epstein (1987:123) asserts that school administrators can influence the form, frequency, and likely result of information sent from the school to the home. They can influence whether the information can be read and understood by all parents, whether the parents are alerted to check frequently with their child for messages and notes from school; whether parents can work with the school staff to revise or improve school programmes and policies and whether parents can work with the school administration and teachers

if their children's attendance, grades, conduct and school performance are not satisfactory.

### 3.3.1.1 Schools in Practice

#### (a) Written Communication

Historically, the written word has been the main medium of communication between the school and home with regard to school policies, programmes and curriculum. Depending on the ingenuity of the school and the needs of the community, the format can vary greatly.

Initiative and ingenuity play a vital role in determining the nature of the written communication and what the principal intends to achieve from it. All too often written communication takes the form of regular report cards and official looking documents that does little more than intimidate the parent and alienate him further. McGeeney, in Craft et al (1980:134), quotes the following letter sent to parents by a principal:

The procedure to be adopted when visiting the school is first to see my secretary. She will deal with enquiries of a purely routine nature, and will arrange for you to see me if necessary. On no account should this procedure be by-passed and a teacher approached directly in or out of the classroom.

Justifiably, those on the receiving end of this frosty communication from the principal must be left in doubt as to whether they are forbidden to bring their queries to the head

teacher or whether they are completely forbidden to do so. In sharp contrast to this is the following conclusion to a letter of welcome and advice sent to all parents by Miss Margaret Wright, head of the Hunters Bar Infant School, in Sheffield in England (Craft et al 1980:134):

I also want to emphasise that I am here at any time to answer your queries. It helps the school and the child to know of any changes at home which may have disturbed them. Never feel that any problem is too small for you to consult us about. It is only by working together and knowing each other well that we can make sure that every child is a happy, confident, secure little individual, growing up to be a valued member of the community.

An example of initiative and ingenuity is that of a principal in the United States of America who sent a letter to all parents in the community enquiring about their special talents and whether they will be willing to share them with their school (Amundson 1983:26-7). The school discovered a wealth of talent waiting to be tapped.

(b) 'Face to Face' Communication

Notwithstanding the zeal and enthusiasm that a principal may display, it is, indeed, impractical for a principal to carry out house calls personally. What role, then, can the principal as the administrator play in this type of communication process? Firstly, it is imperative that teachers are educated into believing there is a need to make house calls. Secondly, it is necessary to motivate teachers to undertake the visit to the home. School principals ensure

that such visits are well planned, teachers have a strategy and they exercise the utmost diplomacy.

In the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Wes-Duitse Bondsrepubliek) [BRD] home calls forms an important aspect of the communication process between home and school (Dekker 1986:812). It is maintained that this is the best way to obtain first hand information with regard to the child's home background and environment. Dekker (1986:812) lends further support to the benefits of home visits when she says 'baie onderwysers het al hul houding en eise teenoor die kind na so 'n besoek drasties verander. Die voordeel van hierdie vorm van kontak is dat ouers in hulle eie omgewing meer op hulle gemak voel en openliker gesels.'

At Lincoln Acres in the United States of America, the 'house to house survey' of the community was considered by the principal as early as 1975 (Gold & Miles 1981:119). It was his view that this type of survey would serve as a more effective communication device than would public mass meetings. But this did not meet with approval in all quarters of the educational sector. In this regard Gold and Miles (1981:119) state that 'a good deal of faculty ambivalence toward the community was present during the creation of these environmental linkages...'

The Chapter 1 programme in Lima, Ohio (D'Angelo & Adler 1991:351) has, as a main goal, the establishment of a personal relationship with every parent. This face to face

meeting helps to personalise the relationship and in so doing applies subtle pressure on the parent to get involved in the education of their children.

A junior high school principal who believes that the best strategy for dealing with parents is to meet them face to face, gives teachers two planning periods a day during which time they may confer with parents or set up appointments for meetings at other times (D'Angelo & Adler 1991:353).

In other schools in the district, the administrators teach classes while teachers conduct home visits during the day. The principal of one of the schools conducts the home visits himself.

#### (c) Group Meetings

Administrators, claims Epstein (1987:124), can assure the success of these group meetings by discussing with the teachers the purpose of the meetings and by organising the meeting to make the best educational use of the teachers' and parents' time; by requiring the attendance of all teachers; and by requiring and reviewing materials prepared by teachers to provide information to parents on course objectives, special programmes, or school policies, including parental involvement.

The head teacher at Campsbourne Infants School in London (Kanji 1984:126) practises a school policy which gives an hour to prospective parents to discuss the ethos of the

school, to discuss the curriculum and the expectations of the school and to answer questions. All parents are shown around the school and given information booklets. Later in the year a general meeting of the new parents is held at which meeting parents are invited into the classrooms to look around and ask questions about any area of concern with which they are preoccupied.

Similarly, in the United States of America, a particular principal established a Parent Education Committee to advise him on curriculum and school programmes (Amundson 1983:27). The group meets monthly to discuss long-range objectives and deal with problems that require more immediate solutions.

Clifton Hill (Spensley Street) Primary School (Jackson 1985:19) in Australia bears mentioning. This school has been actively involved in a school policy review; together parents and teachers have discovered that there is a healthy degree of debate about many aspects of the school programmes and organisation. In order for parents to make meaningful contributions to the educational debate, they had to learn about the school's current curriculum and current organisational practices. As a result an information evening for parents was held. Assuming parents tended to judge modern education on the basis of their own primary education, the evening's activity centred upon the theme, 'They don't teach 'em like they used to'. A film contrasting teaching styles of the past with those of the present was shown, and parents were encouraged to comment on the change from

teacher-directed to child-centred learning.

Diverting attention to the European shore, in France, during the 1977-1978 school year, a new structure was modelled in keeping with the principle of participation of parents in education (Beattie 1985:44). The secondary schools were to be governed by a *conseil d' e'tablissement* consisting of five members of the administration (head teacher included), five ill defined co-opted personalities representing the locality, five elected teacher representatives and five elected parent representatives. There were also elected pupil representatives. Councils were also provided at class level. This was made up of teachers, parents and pupils. The class council, whose main function was to discuss progress and promotions, was to be chaired by the head teacher (Beattie 1985:45).

These structures, however, did not appear to give parents full participatory rights in terms of decision-making and policy. Beattie (1985:46) states 'central authority still saw participation as a device for supporting rather than questioning, for harmonizing ideologies rather than confrontation'. Consequently, the function of the school council remained uncertain and limited to more or less peripheral activities such as mutual information between families and teachers, nature study visits, school transport, supervision of pupils outside school hours, canteens, and extra-curricular activities. The head teacher was to carry out his executive responsibilities between meetings which he

chairs. There was very little flexibility afforded to the head teacher to use his initiative to maximise parental involvement.

### 3.3.2 Parent Education

Parental involvement in education has to be handled on a totally different plane with due cognisance given to the very important role it plays not only in ensuring education of a superior quality but also that the education received is in keeping with the milieu and the ground-motive of the community. But is the parent enlightened enough to make meaningful contribution to the education of their children without interfering with the internal sovereignty of the school? In this regard Kendall and Louw (1989:6) state:

I know no safer depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.

#### 3.3.2.1 Schools in Practice

Many schools around the country in the United States of America establish parent centres that serve a variety of purposes (D'Angelo & Adler 1991:351). These centres allow parents to practise new skills, borrow material and meet other parents. One such centre is the Buffalo's Chapter 1 Parent Resource Centre. Here, parents are invited to review resource materials or to take part in workshops.

Also in Buffalo, there is a computer lending programme which allows parents to receive training in the use of the computer as a prelude to borrowing the computer for as long as eight weeks (D'Angelo & Adler 1991:351). Parents learn how to select and use software that meets the needs of individual students.

The Natchez/Adams (Mississippi) Chapter 1 programme has a parent centre which works continually to make education a part of parents' lives and to enable the parents to work more effectively with their children (D'Angelo & Adler 1991:351). Parents receive forms from their children's teachers that outline the skills that their children need to practise. Parents bring these forms to the parent centre and are trained in the use of instructional materials to help their children.

At Chatsmead in the United Kingdom, attempts are made to involve as many parents as possible (Davies 1985:50). Due cognisance is taken of the fact that some parents lack confidence and concerted efforts are made to encourage these parents to take an active role in the education of their children. These parents are initially encouraged to come to school by providing a series of events to which they can bring their children. Curriculum meetings are held in which parents are free to ask questions. At these meetings pupils work are displayed to be viewed by parents.

### 3.3.3 Teacher Education

Bond (1973:4) asserts that the teacher as the educator has all the natural advantages in the situation and it is therefore, incumbent upon the teacher to be the prime mover to initiate the involvement of parents in the education of their children. In this regard Van Schalkwyk (1990a:122) says:

Die skoling van onderwysers vir ouerbetrokkenheid is 'n saak wat deurlopende aandag moet ontvang. Die professionele ontwikkeling van onderwysers is een van die bestuurstake van die skool bestuursplan. Dit is 'n saak wat met die grootste gemak in die skool op vasgestelde tye hanteer kan word.

Without teachers participating actively and willingly in the partnership process, parent involvement will not ensure the desired benefits in the achievements of the pupils.

#### 3.3.3.1 Schools in Practice

Administrators at Ellis High School in Boston depart from the premise that change and improvement in schools are most likely to occur when there are opportunities for teachers to work together affording them time for reflection (Davies 1991:380). At this school there were action research teams of teachers who worked together in small problem solving groups. The group comprising of four teachers met at least once a month. After doing some background reading in parent involvement and undergoing other training activities, the action research team interviewed the rest of the faculty to

determine how teachers felt about parents and parental involvement, what past activities had been successful (or unsuccessful) in involving parents and what concerns teachers had about increasing parental involvement.

San Diego in the United States of America recognises that building the capacities of teachers, administrators, and other staff members to work effectively with families is a prerequisite for improved family-school partnerships (Chrispeels 1991:369). Bearing this in mind, a quarterly staff newsletter, *The Vital Connection*, which contains articles on parental involvement research, suggestions for school-based activities, and information on forthcoming workshops, is published. Included with the newsletter are 'black-line masters' of articles that principals can duplicate and include in their own school newsletters for parents (Chrispeels 1991:370).

In Lincoln Acres in the United States of America the principal maintains that getting teachers to accept parental involvement and getting them to create strategies to maximise parental involvement should be a joint effort of both the administrator and the staff (Gold & Miles 1981:120-1). From the beginning he asked his educators to do much of the planning on their own. It is felt that this increases teachers' investment in the school and created an extra social pressure in that consensual group decisions are more likely to be actually carried out. The strategy was that persons involved in the decision-making and the planning

would find it difficult not to honour commitments they had shaped together.

### 3.3.4 Involving Parents in Decision-Making

Decision-making may be described as a neutral activity which serves as a tool to carry out the administrative, functional and auxiliary work process (Dekker 1986:318). Decision-making, which pervades the whole organisation is an aid in the education process and may be regarded as being essential in order to reach ones goal. It involves deliberation and the choice of the most suitable option from a range of alternatives that may be presented as a possible solution to a problem at hand. Marx in Dekker (1986:318) describes decision-making as '... die keuse van die mees geskikte manier van optrede om 'n spesifieke probleem/situasie op te los/te hanteer nadat verskillende alternatiewe moontlikhede bewustelik oorweeg is'.

Decision-making, therefore, is an indispensable part of the education process. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the principal, as the school manager and designer to make provision for the parents to take their rightful place in the decision-making process. This however, must take place in an atmosphere of love, honesty, fairness and acceptability to the parent. Dekker(1986:320) comments:

Dit is van groot belang dat alle besluitneming sal voldoen aan die beginsels van liefde en respek vir die medemens, dat dit regverdig, billik en eerlik moet wees, dat dit op die grootste mate van doeltreffendheid

en nuttigheid gerig moet wees, dat tyd en energie ekonomies verbruik moet word en dat dit vanselfsprekend die demokratiese beginsel, die welsyn van elke belanghebbende, moet respekteer.

#### 3.3.4.1 Schools in Practice

Saint Anne's County First School in Staines in Great Britain (Davies 1983:146) was acutely sensitive to the need for allowing parents in decision-making. Opportunities were seized as far back as 1976 to involve parents in educational decisions affecting her school. Initially matters discussed covered practical concerns such as the desirability of school uniform for their pupils. It was not long before it was discovered that there was a wealth of decision-making expertise amongst the parents. Such revelations of decision-making talent prompted the head teacher to discuss with the staff the possibility of inviting parents to the staff meeting, initially for observation but eventually leading to involvement with the intention of building a joint policy making group from an existing decision-making body which was already experienced in discussing school policy matters. This, however, was not viewed favourably by the staff.

#### 3.4. CONCLUSION

Numerous literature sources have been quoted in this chapter, supporting parental involvement in education. The problem, however, that appears to be a common thread running through most communities, is translating the rhetoric into action. There may be a number of reasons for this. The following

were identified in this chapter:

- lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers and administrative staff
- a fundamental problem with the system in not recognising parental involvement in the curriculum of colleges and universities
- prejudices of educators and principals prompting them to offer resistance to intense parental involvement.

Notwithstanding this, a number of literature sources was unanimous in the assertion that the principal plays a very influential role in determining the extent and nature of parental involvement in schools. He is the initial and prime mover towards maximising parental involvement in education. Emphasis is placed on getting teachers to believe in parental involvement and secondly to ensure that there is trust between the parent and the teacher.

A distinction is made between parents as volunteers and parents as partners. It is maintained that when parents are more than volunteers there is a direct and extended contact between the parent and the educator and the parents' concern is fundamentally with educative teaching as opposed to general welfare programmes such as fund raising and organisation of transport.

A theoretical model which seeks to provide a framework for the functioning of the principal with regard to his efforts to maximise parental involvement is quoted. In this model, communication, parent-teacher meetings, counselling and support are quoted in order of importance.

Administrators' efforts in different types of communication, teacher education and parent education are quoted in United States of America, Australia, Great Britain, Germany and France.

While strategies employed in a number of schools have been quoted, it must be borne in mind that those strategies which may have been successful there, are not necessarily workable in local situations. Technological differences, socio-economic differences, prejudices, levels of education, cultural differences all play an enormous role in determining what methods and approaches are appropriate in a particular environment. It is only with knowledge that the principal as the school manager can be in a position to design, co-ordinate and facilitate strategies and make use of resources available for maximum parental involvement in education. It is with this in mind that the researcher has undertaken to survey the views and opinions held by the community of Phoenix in the North Coast of Natal and the problems they may be experiencing relating to the school. Notwithstanding the obstacles within and the peculiarities in a given community, the principal as the manager must set the highest of standards in order to provide his clients with quality

education. Burns (in Van Ryneveld Grove' 1992:43)

appropriately states:

Those who are most deeply devoted to a democratic society must be precisely the ones who insist upon excellence, who insist that free men are capable of the highest standards of performance...[we] will not survive if the highest goal free men set themselves is an amiable mediocrity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The fundamental objective of this research was to plumb the views and opinions of parents, teachers and principals, concerning their perceptions on the issue of parental involvement in education. In this regard the relationship between the following variables will be investigated:

Literacy level and income of parents and their interest in education;

Qualifications and experiences of teachers and the teachers' efforts to involve parents positively in the education of their children;

Qualifications of teachers and level of confidence displayed in dealing with parents;

Experiences of teachers and teachers' perception of parental involvement being useful;

Qualifications of teachers and the perception of parental involvement being a specialised field.

Hypotheses with reference to these variables and parental involvement will be formulated where applicable. A brief description of procedure used to test these hypotheses will be discussed. This discussion will include the selection of the sample, a description of the measuring instruments used, the procedure used in formulating and administering the questionnaire and finally the methods used in analysing the data.

## 4.2 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

### 4.2.1 Selection of Sample

Although the research was confined to the secondary schools under the erstwhile Administration of the House of Delegates in the North Coast of Natal in the Phoenix North region, the parent population being in excess of ten thousand and the teacher population being in the region of six hundred, were too large to attempt a census study with regard to the views and opinions of parents and educators. Of the 15 schools in the area 5 were chosen at random. The schools were numbered from one to fifteen and five schools were randomly selected.

The following schools were thus selected:

Havenpark Secondary School

Eastbury Secondary School

Stanmore Secondary School

Foresthaven Secondary School

Grove End Secondary School

Having established the schools, a sub sample of twenty pupils and twenty teachers was drawn from each of the five schools using random sampling. In total there were 100 pupils and 100 teachers. The parents of the hundred pupils selected were used in the research. Of the eighty eight parents that had responded, 35 % were mothers while 65 % were fathers. Of the mothers, 42 % were housewives and the other significant group

was made up of 37 % who worked for others. Of the fathers, 71 % worked for others while the rest were either self-employed, owned a business or were unemployed.

Since the number of principals was limited, a census study was attempted in the area defined. Of the twenty respondents to the questionnaire to principals, fifteen were currently holding the posts of principals in the fifteen schools and five were senior deputy principals who had acted as principals in the absence of principals for periods not less than six months.

#### **4.2.2 Measuring Instruments used in the Investigation**

The measuring instruments used in this investigation consist of three questionnaires; the first intended specifically for the parent community; the second intended for the teachers and the third for the school principals. The contents of the questionnaires were based on the problem defined in chapter one and the in depth literature study of chapters two and three. The main thrust of these questionnaires was to elicit why parents were reluctant to participate in the educational process of their children and to ascertain the problems experienced by the teachers and the principals in getting the maximum participation of the parent community.

##### **4.2.2.1 The Structure of the Measuring Instrument**

The parent community spans a very diverse group of people who

vary in literacy from the very educated to the illiterate. The questionnaire, therefore, had to be simple enough to be understood by persons with very little schooling, while at the same time enabling the researcher to obtain the desired information. Most of the questions, therefore, were designed in the form that merely required the placing of a cross in the relevant block.

In order to quantify, 'parental involvement' it was necessary to have suitable indicants. Questions such as 'How often do you enquire about school from your child?' and 'Do you ensure that your child does his/her homework regularly?' were used as indicants.

With regard to the questionnaires to the teachers and principals, it was the researcher's intention to ensure that the questionnaire is as brief and easy to respond to as possible, considering the fact that the principals and the teachers were not obliged to respond to the questionnaire.

The contents of the questionnaires were based on in depth literature study. Controversial and problematic areas in parental involvement in education that appeared to be common to most if not all communities were focussed upon. These included, amongst others, issues such as parents not having enough time, socio-economic problems and the controversy over the extent of involvement of parents in education. In order to further establish the content validity, the questionnaires were subjected to the close scrutiny of

experts in the field of parent involvement. The guidance and the advice given by these experts were adhered to strictly.

#### 4.2.3 Procedure Used

The questionnaires were personally hand delivered to the sample schools. With the permission of the principal of the school and with the assistance of fellow colleagues in the respective schools, the researcher was able to supervise the random selection of pupils (whose parents were the respondents) and the random selection of the teachers.

The colleagues assisting with the research were instructed to choose the pupils at random. The pupils were instructed to deliver the questionnaires to their parents and have it returned duly completed within five days from the date of issue. Envelopes were provided for the return of the questionnaires to ensure confidentiality. Teachers were also given five days from the date of issue to have the questionnaires completed.

The principal's questionnaire was hand delivered to the respective principals. A date on which to collect the completed questionnaire was agreed upon between the researcher and the principals concerned.

All questionnaires were collected personally by the researcher; this ensured a greater response rate.

Ninety percent of the parents, eighty seven percent of the teachers and hundred percent of the principals responded. Having collected the questionnaires, the responses had to be analysed using a computer. The responses were coded and thereafter analysed using the SAS statistical package.

#### **4.3 RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

##### **4.3.1 The Socio-Economic Level of Parents**

Investigations carried out by some researchers have led them to conclude that while socio-economic status plays a role in parent participation, the general direction of its influence is difficult to discern (Hoover-Dempsey et al 1987:419). Notwithstanding this, some literature sources assert that parents from the lower socio-economic group are frustrated by material deprivation and a struggle for survival and are less likely to give personal care to their children (Goodacre 1970:93; Gabela 1983:93). In a research carried out by the Department of Psychology in West Virginia University, Morgantown (Cone et al 1985:419), it was found that the mothers' and fathers' score for their involvement in education was positively correlated with family income level ( $r = 0,48, p < 0,0001$  and  $r = 0,31, p < 0.001$  respectively). In order to establish whether a relationship exists between the income level of parents and the interest they show in terms of enquiring about school from their children, the following null hypothesis was tested.

## Hypothesis 1

There is no significant positive correlation between the level of income of parents and interest they show in terms of enquiring about school from their children.

To verify the null hypothesis a Pearson Product-Moment correlation was calculated. The responses to the question 'How often do you enquire about school from your child?' was analysed (refer to section B, question 1 of appendix 1). The results are indicated in table 4.1.

**TABLE 4.1 PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION CO-EFFICIENT BETWEEN LEVEL OF INCOME AND INTEREST OF PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDRENS' SCHOOLDAY**

	INTEREST IN SCHOOL	N	P
LEVEL OF INCOME OF PARENTS	r		
	0,17	86	P > 0,05

From table 4,1 it is evident there is no significant correlation between level of income of parents and the interest they show in terms of enquiring about school from their children. Since  $r = 0,17$ ,  $P > 0,5$ , the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. No grounds have been found to conclude that there is a significant positive correlation between the level of income of parents and the interest they show in terms of enquiring about school from their children.

#### 4.3.2 Level of Education of the Parents

The researcher wished to determine whether there was any relationship between the mothers' and fathers' level of education respectively and the interest shown by them in terms of enquiring about school from their children.

The following null hypotheses were propounded.

##### Hypothesis 2

There is no relationship between the mothers' level of education and the interest shown by them in terms of enquiring about school from their children.

##### Hypothesis 3

There is no relationship between the fathers' level of education and the interest shown by them in terms of enquiring about school from their children.

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficients are indicated below:

**TABLE 4.2 PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION CO-EFFICIENT BETWEEN LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND INTEREST OF PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLDAY**

	INTEREST IN SCHOOL	N	P
MOTHER'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION	0,29	86	P < 0,01
FATHER'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION	0,21	86	P > 0,05

The relationship between the mothers' level of education and the interest in school shows a significant positive correlation. The null hypothesis, therefore, may be rejected

at the 1 % level of confidence. This implies that there is a low positive, but significant correlation between the mothers' level of education and the interest they display. Although one might be inclined to conclude that there is a positive correlation between the variables, no conclusive statements can be made with regard to the mothers' level of education and the interest they show in the education of their children due to the low value of the Pearson Product-Moment correlation. Similar findings were reported by Cone et al (1985:421). They reported a correlation of 0,37;  $p < 0.0001$  between the mothers' level of education and their involvement in education.

In the case of the fathers the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This implies that one cannot make any inferences with regard to the father's level of education and their interest in the child's school day (see paragraph 2.2.3).

Findings reported by Cone et al (1985:421), however, indicate a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0,47$ ;  $p < 0,0001$ ) between fathers' level of involvement and the level of education.

#### 4.3.3 Parents' Reasons for not Communicating with the School

Parents were asked how often they communicate with the teachers of their children (refer to section B, question 3 of appendix 1). Numerous options in terms of frequency of communication were given. These included, more than once a

term', 'at least once a term', 'at least once a year', 'very rarely' and 'never'. Those who responded 'never', that is, they do not communicate with the teachers of their children at all, were required to rate the reasons (refer to table 4.3) for not communicating with the school, in terms of applicability to their circumstances (refer to section B, question 4 of appendix 1). Four options were given for each reason according to the following key:

- 1 Not applicable
- 2 Slightly applicable
- 3 Applicable
- 4 Very applicable

The reasons together with the mean response scores are indicated in table 4.3.

**TABLE 4.3 A QUANTIFICATION OF PARENTS' REASONS FOR NOT COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL IN TERMS OF APPLICABILITY TO THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES**

REASONS FOR NOT COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL	N	MEAN RESPONSE SCORE	STD. DEVIATION
Time does not permit them to do so.	10	2,30	1,25
They are afraid of being accused of interference.	9	1,33	1,00
They do not see the need to do so.	9	1,89	1,05
They are afraid of what might be revealed to them.	9	1,00	0,00
It never occurred to them to do so.	9	1,44	0,73
Personal circumstances do not permit them to do so.	9	1,67	1,12
They do not enjoy a good relationship with the school.	10	1,30	0,95

N.B. Although 88 parents were used in the sample, not all parents were required to respond to this aspect concerning the reasons for not communicating with the school. Those who responded that they do communicate with the school, were required not to respond.

Since 'Not applicable' is denoted by number '1' and 'Very applicable' by number '4', the largest average value refers to the variable most applicable to the parents' circumstances. Time, therefore, appears to be, by far, the biggest problem preventing parents from communicating with the school. Literature sources (Jowett & Baginsky 1988:42; Moles 1982:45) support this when they assert that the financial circumstances of most households are such that it

necessitates the mother working to supplement the income. They do not have the time to involve themselves in the affairs of the school (see paragraph 2.8.3.1).

'They do not see the need to do so' is ranked second with reference to the mean response score (see table 4.3). While there could be numerous reasons for this response, such as, confidence in the school and the teachers, apathy, confidence in their children, this investigation cannot establish any conclusive reasons.

#### **4.3.4 The Parent-Teacher Evenings**

Fellow colleagues and parents have not always expressed satisfaction with regard to parent-teacher meetings. Many have expressed feelings that these meetings have failed to do justice to the very purpose of the meetings. It is for this reason that the views and opinions of parents have been probed so that appropriate recommendations can be made to rectify shortcomings in the future.

Of a total of 88 parents who responded to the questionnaire, 93 % indicated that they generally attend parent-teacher evenings.

Parents who generally attend parent-teacher evenings were required to respond either 'yes' or 'no' to the following question (refer to section B, question 5(c) of appendix 1):

If you have attended parent-teacher evenings in the past, did it satisfy you in terms of your expectations?

Of those who generally attend these meetings, 8 % declared that they were not satisfied with the manner in which it was conducted. In order to elicit the reasons for their dissatisfaction parents were required to rate the possible reasons (indicated in table 4.4) in terms of the following key (refer to section B, question 5(d) of appendix 1):

- 1 Very applicable
- 2 Applicable
- 3 Slightly applicable
- 4 Not applicable

**TABLE 4.4 REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING PARENT-TEACHER EVENINGS**

VARIABLE	N	MEAN RESPONSE SCORE	STD. DEVIATION
THEY RECEIVED NO NEW INFORMATION REGARDING THEIR CHILDREN	7	1,57	1,13
THEY WERE NOT AFFORDED PRIVACY WHILE DISCUSSING THEIR CHILD	6	2,50	1,64
THEY WERE NOT AFFORDED ENOUGH TIME TO DISCUSS THEIR CHILD	6	2,50	1,34

N.B. In this case the smallest mean value refers to the 'most applicable'.

While many parents have indicated all three reasons for

their dissatisfaction, most parents indicated that they were not given any new information regarding their children (see table 4.4). Gibson (1981), reporting in Munn (1985:107) supports the view that parents are not being afforded enough privacy to discuss their child (see paragraph 2.8.3.5).

#### 4.3.5 The Parents' Perception of the Teachers and the School

There is a general perception that teaching does not require much skill. All too often such views influence parents' attitudes towards teachers. The status of the teacher, as a professional, has long been the subject of much controversy. While teachers would like to see themselves as professionals, as do doctors and lawyers, there is no consensus on the matter (see paragraph 2.7.1).

While some literature sources (Munn 1985:106) claim that parental trust in the expertise and respect for the teachers' professional role to be a pervasive feature, others assert that a teacher is only just superior to the tradesman (Cullingford 1985:10). This has resulted in teachers taking refuge in their professional status and are suspicious of outside control (see paragraph 2.7.1). An analysis of the responses to the question, 'Where in terms of status would you place the teacher as an educator?' (refer to section B, question 8 of appendix 1) revealed the following (see table 4.5):

TABLE 4.5 PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE STATUS OF THE TEACHER

N = 89

	STATUS OF TEACHER	PERCENT.
1	VERY PROFESSIONAL	51,7 %
2	PROFESSIONAL	34,8 %
3	CLOSER TO TRADE	11,2 %
4	DEFINITELY A TRADE	2,25%

Contrary to research reports (see paragraph 2.7.1), this investigation has shown that a large majority of parents (86,5 %) view teaching as an occupation which is closer to those which are traditionally regarded as a profession than those that are regarded as a trade.

Closely allied to this, is the question of expertise, competence and level of difficulty of teaching. Parents were required to respond to the questions, 'Do you find the teachers adequately competent to assist you to help your child in problem situations?' and 'How do you perceive the task of the teacher in the secondary school, in terms of difficulty?' (refer to section B, question 6 and question 7 respectively, of appendix 1). The responses are reflected in the table 4.6 and table 4.7 respectively:

TABLE 4.6 PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER COMPETENCY

COMPETENT	88 %
NOT ADEQUATELY COMPETENT	12 %

N = 86

**TABLE 4.7 PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK OF THE TEACHER**

N = 89

TASK DIFFICULTY	PERCENT.
Very difficult	13,5 %
Reasonably difficult	67,5 %
Reasonably easy	14,5 %
Very easy	4,5 %

These findings, are contrary to the reports of a survey sponsored by the National Union of Teachers in England (Goodacre 1970:49) that maintains that teaching is viewed as a job anybody can do, given certain inborn or hereditary characteristics such as tolerance, patience and friendliness (see paragraph 2.7.2). However, the writers of the survey also reported that many of the interviews carried out revealed a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding about the training responsibilities and make-up of the teaching profession (see paragraph 2.7.2).

Contrary to the claims of some literature sources (Goodacre 1970:49; Cullingford 1985:138) that parents perceived teaching as less of a highly skilled job requiring intensive training and expertise, 81 % of parents in this sample indicated that a teacher's job is reasonably difficult, if not difficult (see table 4.7).

This investigation has also found that a large majority of parents view teachers as being competent; of the 86 parents

who responded 88 % stated that they had confidence in the ability of the teacher to assist them to help and guide their children (see table 4.6).

#### 4.3.6 The School Atmosphere

This investigation has shown that while many parents attend parent-teacher evenings and make efforts to get involved in the activities of the school, it is not without some serious misgivings concerning the general milieu of the school and the personnel. Secretaries, in particular, have come under some scathing criticism regarding their approach and attitudes. Parents were asked to rate the attitudes of the secretaries along a continuum from 'friendly and hospitable' to 'cold, unfriendly and businesslike' (refer to section B, question 10 of appendix 1). A slight majority (52 %) has indicated that they perceive secretaries as being warm and friendly. However, the 48 % who indicated that they perceive secretaries as cold and inhospitable cannot be ignored. Table 4.8 indicates the results.

**TABLE 4.8 PARENTS' OPINION OF SECRETARIES' ATTITUDES**

	FRIENDLY AND WARM		COLD AND INHOSPITABLE	
	1	2	3	4
N = 89				
PERCENTAGE OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	30,34	21,35	22,47	25,84

In order to establish parents' perception of teacher attitudes towards them, parents were asked to respond either

'yes' or 'no' to the following question (refer to section B, question 5(e) of appendix 1):

Do you find most if not all the teachers hospitable and friendly during these evenings?

**TABLE 4.9    RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION 'DO YOU FIND MOST IF NOT ALL THE TEACHERS HOSPITABLE AND FRIENDLY DURING THESE EVENINGS?'**

N = 78	YES	NO
PERCENTAGE OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	93,59	6,41

Of the 78 parents who responded to this question (see table 4.9), 93,59 % indicated that teachers were warm and friendly. The 6,41 %, however, that had indicated otherwise, were vehement in their criticism indicating that teachers were too bureaucratic in their approach, portrayed an image of unassailability and seldom found time for a friendly greeting when encountering parents.

Some schools with big brown buildings and nondescript doorways can appear intimidating and this can be aggravated if the attitudes of the school personnel are wanting. The researcher has found that not all parents felt comfortable visiting schools. Parents were, therefore, asked to rate the atmosphere of the school along a continuum from 'warm and welcoming' to 'cold, intimidating and official' (refer to section B, question 9 of appendix 1). While 78 % of the 88

parents indicated that the atmosphere in the schools was welcoming and warm, 22 % indicated that the school atmosphere was cold, intimidating and official (see table 4.10).

**TABLE 4.10 PARENTS' OPINION OF THE SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE**

	WARM AND WELCOMING		COLD, INTIMIDATING AND OFFICIAL	
	1	2	3	4
N = 90				
PERCENTAGE OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	45,56	32,22	10,00	12,22

**4.3.7 Parents' Views on Areas of Possible Involvement in Education**

Parental involvement in education spans areas of intense participation in such issues as decision-making, curriculum development, appointment of staff to direct involvement in the education of their own children in such mundane matters as ensuring that the children do their homework and resolving behavioural problems. In order to establish parents' views on areas of possible involvement in education, they were asked to rate the possible areas of involvement (see table 4.11) in terms of the following key:

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Not so important
- 3 Important
- 4 Very important

(Refer to section B, question 12 of appendix 1)

**TABLE 4.11 MEAN VALUES INDICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS**

**N = 90**

ASPECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	MEAN RESPONSE SCORE	STD. DEVIATION
Ensuring that the homework is done	3,86	0,41
Decision making and governance	3,08	0,89
Raising funds for the school	2,74	0,84
Appointment of staff	2,48	1,02
Assisting in extra-curricular activities	2,80	0,80
Development of the curriculum	2,87	0,94
Providing background information on the pupil to the educator	3,19	0,92
Resolving behavioural problems	3,64	0,59

The higher the mean score, the more favourably disposed are the parents towards the respective areas of involvement. Parents have indicated 'involvement in ensuring that the homework is done' as the most important task of the parents,

followed by 'resolving behavioural problems' and 'providing background information on the pupil to the educator'.

'Appointment of staff' and their 'involvement in curriculum' was considered as the least important.

#### 4.4 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM TEACHERS

##### 4.4.1 Educators' Perception of Parental Involvement in Education

Implicit in some literature sources (Becher et al 1981:1; Jowett & Baginsky 1988:41; Mitchell 1985:1; Rust 1985:5) is a perception that the greater the expertise and the knowledge of teachers the greater their willingness to cooperate with parents and to accept the principle of parental participation in education.

In the present climate accountability is the very essence of the educational system. This implies that publicly funded utilities, such as schools, are open to scrutiny (Mitchell 1985:1) and the parent, as a primary educator, has a right, to influence the milieu of the school climate. Also, the media has been instrumental in promoting the view that accountability and participation are essential to rectify educational ills. Accountability, therefore, brings the educator under the public eyes of the parents who can only exercise their rights as consumers if they are active participants (see paragraph 2.6). As consumers, parents have a right to ensure that the quality of service is of an acceptable standard. The quality of service includes,

amongst others, the quality of instruction by educators. No longer should there be a mystique surrounding the teacher and teaching (see paragraph 2.7.2). Under these circumstances, teachers with expertise will be more willing to accept parental involvement in education. This expertise may be quantified in terms of qualifications and experience (see paragraph 2.6).

The responses to the following question (refer to section B, question 1 of appendix 2) concerning the perceptions of teachers towards parental involvement in education in terms of its usefulness to education was correlated with the qualifications of teachers (refer to section A, question 1 of appendix 2):

How do you perceive parental involvement in terms of its usefulness to education?

The following options were provided:

Very useful; Useful; Not very useful; Disruptive, Serves no useful purpose

The following null hypothesis was propounded:

Hypothesis 4

There is no significant positive correlation between the qualifications of teachers and their perception of parental involvement as being useful.

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation between qualifications

of the teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful was  $r = -0,17$ ,  $p > 0,05$  (see table 4.12). The null hypothesis, therefore, cannot be rejected. There are no grounds for maintaining that there is a significant correlation between qualifications of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful. The correlation obtained was low, negative and insignificant.

In order to elicit from teachers, whether they view parental involvement as a field that requires specialised attention by experts at tertiary institutes such as teacher training colleges and universities, so that teachers will be better equipped to involve parents in education, teachers were required to respond either 'yes' or 'no' to the following question ((refer to section B, question 2 of appendix 2):

Do you agree with the following statement?:  
'Parental involvement in education is a field that entails so much specialised knowledge, that it warrants a slot in the curriculum of colleges of education and universities'

The following null hypothesis was propounded:

#### Hypothesis 5

**There is no significant positive correlation between qualifications of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field.**

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation between qualifications of the teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field was  $r = 0,10$ ,  $p > 0,05$  (see table

4.12). The null hypothesis, therefore, cannot be rejected. There are no grounds for maintaining that there is a significant correlation between qualifications of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field. The correlation obtained was low and insignificant.

Not all teachers feel confident when discussing pupils with their parents. The researcher, therefore, required teachers to respond to the following question (refer to section B, question 4(d) of appendix 2):

Do you feel confident when discussing pupils with their parents?

The responses to the above question was correlated with the qualifications of the teachers. The following null hypothesis was propounded:

#### Hypothesis 6

**There is no significant positive correlation between the qualifications of teachers and the level of confidence they display in dealing with parents.**

The Pearson product-moment correlation was found to be  $-0,09$  and  $p > 0,05$  (see table 4.12). The null hypothesis, therefore, cannot be rejected. This implies that there is no significant correlation between the qualifications of teachers and the level of confidence they display when dealing with parents.

Not all educators have acquired skill and expertise through qualifications alone. Many attribute their insight in the respective disciplines to experience. Of the 87 respondents 43 % were not graduates; they possessed either a diploma or ancillaries in the subject. In terms of experience, however, 54 % of the respondents were teaching for more than fifteen years.

In order to determine whether a relationship exists between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful (refer to section B, question 1 of appendix 2) the following hypothesis was propounded:

#### Hypothesis 7

**There is no significant positive correlation between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful.**

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful was  $r = 0,01$ ,  $p > 0,05$  (see table 4.12). The null hypothesis, therefore, cannot be rejected. The results suggest that no correlation exists between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful.

In order to establish whether a relationship exists between experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field (refer to discussion pertaining to hypothesis 5), the following hypothesis was

propounded:

#### Hypothesis 8

**There is no significant positive correlation between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field.**

No significant correlation could be established since the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient is  $-0,17$ ;  $p > 0,05$  (see table 4.12). The null hypothesis, therefore, cannot be rejected. This implies that there are no grounds for maintaining that there is a significant correlation between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being a specialised field.

The following hypothesis seeks to establish whether a correlation exists between the experience of teachers and the level of confidence (discussed under hypothesis 6; refer to section B, question 19 of appendix 2) displayed by teachers when discussing pupils with their parents:

#### Hypothesis 9

**There is no significant positive correlation between the experience of teachers and the level of confidence they display in dealing with parents.**

Although the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient is low ( $r = 0,25$ ) the null hypothesis can be rejected at the 5 % level of confidence (see table 4.12). It can be concluded, therefore, that there is a slight positive correlation between the experience of teachers and the level

**TABLE 4.12 PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION CO-EFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE VARIABLES INDICATED (BASED ON RESPONSES FROM SECTION B OF TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE; APPENDIX 2)**

QUESTION NUMBER	1	2	4(c)
N = 87	PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT BEING USEFUL	SPECIALISED FIELD	LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE
QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHERS	r = -0,17 p > 0,05	r = 0.10 p > 0,05	r = -0.09 p > 0,05
EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS	r = 0.01 p > 0,05	r = -0,17 p > 0,05	r = 0,25 p < 0,05

#### 4.4.2 The Parent-Teacher Meeting

While an overwhelming 98 % of the teachers agreed that parent-teacher meetings are essential, a significant number- 66 % indicated that they were not satisfied in the manner in which the meetings were conducted. Of the 87 respondents, 71 % indicated that they only get to meet the parents of the bright pupils.

In calling a parent-teacher meeting varying strategies are used to invite parents to the meeting. While some schools invite the parents of pupils from the whole school, others choose to invite parents of pupils from a specific standard. The opinions of teachers concerning the strategies that should be used for inviting parents to parent-teacher evenings were elicited (refer to section B, question 4 (f) of appendix 2). The results are indicated in the table 4.13 below:

**TABLE 4.13 PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO CHOSE THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES FOR INVITING PARENTS TO PARENT-EVENING.**

STRATEGIES FOR INVITING PARENTS TO PARENT-EVENING	N = 87 PERCENTAGE
PARENTS OF PUPILS OF WHOLE SCHOOL	13,79 %
PARENTS OF PUPILS OF A SPECIFIC STANDARD	21,84 %
PARENTS OF SELECTED GROUPS OF PUPILS eg. UNDERACHIEVERS ETC.	60,92 %
OTHER STRATEGIES	3,45 %

The majority of the teachers, almost 61 % preferred to meet parents of selected groups of pupils, such as underachievers and gifted pupils. Inviting parents of pupils of the whole school was the least popular.

#### **4.4.3 Views of Teachers with Regard to Possible Areas of Involvement of Parents in Education**

The extent of involvement of parents in education and the areas of involvement does not find easy consensus amongst teachers. Fears, such as, the erosion of the internal sovereignty of the school and parents undermining the authority of the teachers, are not uncommon (see paragraph 1.2). Therefore, the views of teachers, in possible areas of involvement, were investigated. Teachers were asked to rate these areas of involvement (see table 4.13) according to the following scale (refer to section B, question 3 of appendix 2):

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Not so important
- 3 Important
- 4 Very important

**TABLE 4.14 MEAN VALUES INDICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT EDUCATION AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS**

N = 87

ASPECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	MEAN RESPONSE SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION
Ensuring that the homework is done	3,90	0,48
Decision-making and governance	2,85	0,88
Raising funds for the school	3,40	0,77
Appointment of staff	2,07	0,93
Assisting in extra-curricular activities	3,54	0,71
Development of the curriculum	2,74	0,87
Providing background information on the pupil to the educator	3,73	0,62
Resolving behavioural problems	3,76	0,53

The higher the mean response score, the more favourably disposed are the teachers towards the aspect concerned. According to the data (see table 4.14) teachers prefer parents to keep away from areas of governance and academic aspects and would rather have them involved in areas that concern their own children; they were also favourably

disposed towards parents providing assistance, such as assisting in extra-curricular activities and raising of funds. They view parental responsibility in ensuring that homework is being done as being the most important. Teachers are the least favourably disposed towards parental involvement in the appointment of staff.

#### 4.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM PRINCIPALS

Since the primary aim of this research is to make recommendations to school principals on how to maximise parental involvement in their schools, it was necessary to probe the views and opinions of principals. Departing from the premise that in order to implement parental involvement one has to believe that it is necessary and useful, principals were required to respond to the following question (refer to question 1 of appendix 3):

How do you perceive parental involvement in terms of its usefulness to education?

The table 4.15 reflects the percentages of the respondents who chose the various options along the continuum on the scale from parental involvement being 'very useful' to parental involvement being 'disruptive, serves no useful purpose'. Eighteen of the respondents (90 %) indicated that parental involvement was very useful.

**TABLE 4.15 PRINCIPALS' OPINIONS ON THE USEFULNESS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

	VERY USEFUL		DISRUPTIVE, SERVES NO USEFUL PURPOSE	
	1	2	3	4
N = 20				
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS	55 %	35 %	5 %	5 %

#### 4.5.1 Principals' Views on the Parent-Teacher Evenings

The parent-teacher evening has become almost a tradition in most schools. At these meetings parents are afforded the opportunity to meet the teachers of their children to discuss their progress. The researcher wished to elicit from principals whether they had complete confidence in all their teachers to communicate effectively with the parents and to cope adequately with the meeting in terms of satisfying parents' requirements (refer to question 2 of appendix 3). Only 30 % of the respondents indicated that they had complete confidence in all their teachers.

The researcher wished to establish to what extent the parent-teacher evening is justified in terms of parents receiving information that they could not otherwise have received. To this end, the following question was posed (refer to 4(a) of appendix 3):

Are you of the opinion that parents are given information that they could not otherwise have received?

Of the 20 respondents (principals), 70 % indicated that the information imparted to parents by teachers is of such a nature that this could only be effected through a personal visit by the parents. In other words, 30 % of the principals are suggesting that the kind of information that their teachers are imparting to the parents is of such a nature that it does not necessitate parents visiting schools. Under such circumstances, parents grievances and reluctance to respond positively to parent evenings may be well founded.

Not all parents attend parent-teacher evenings. Table 4.16 reflects the responses of the principals to the question, 'Which lot of parents do you normally get to meet?' (refer to question 4(c) of appendix 3.)

**TABLE 4.16      RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS TO THE QUESTION, 'WHICH LOT OF PARENTS DO YOU NORMALLY GET TO MEET?'**

N = 20

CATEGORY OF PARENTS	PERCENTAGE
Parents of bright pupils	50 %
Parents of weak pupils	NIL
Mixed lot of parents	50 %

Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they normally get to meet parents of bright pupils only. One tends to question whether the pupil is weak because of the apathy and disinterest of the parents or do parents avoid contact with the school because their children are weak.

#### 4.5.2 A Focus on Some of the Principals' Concerns with Regard to Involving Parents in Education

School principals are acutely sensitive to and are aware of the fact that parental involvement in education is not as healthy as it ought to be. In responding either 'yes' or 'no' to the question, 'Are you of the opinion that there is a healthy involvement of parents in the education of the children in your school?', (refer to question 6 of appendix 3), only 15 % of the 20 respondents responded affirmatively (see table 4.17); 17 respondents expressed concern.

Addressing some of the principals' concerns, the researcher made reference to the following questions, all of which required either a 'yes' or a 'no' response:

- Are you of the opinion that there is a need to have workshops to orientate the teachers with regard to their role in maximising parental involvement in education? (refer to question 7 of appendix 3)
- Do you agree with the following statement? 'Parental involvement in education is a field that entails so much specialised knowledge, that it warrants a slot in the curriculum of colleges of education and universities.' (refer to question 8 of appendix 3)
- Are you of the opinion that parental involvement, if not controlled, can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school? (refer to question 9 of appendix 3)

**TABLE 4.17 PRINCIPALS' RESPONSES TO CERTAIN AREAS OF CONCERN IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

CONCERNS OF PRINCIPALS N = 20	PERCENTAGE OF PRINCIPALS THAT AGREE
The involvement of parents in schools is not as high as it ought to be.	85 %
There is a need to have workshops to orientate teachers with regard to parental involvement	90 %
Parental involvement in education should be included in the curriculum of colleges and universities	75 %
If not controlled it can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school	95 %

In expressing their concern for certain areas of involvement of parents in education, 90 % of the sample agree that there should be workshops to orientate teachers and 75 % suggest that parental involvement in education should be included in the curriculum of teacher training colleges and universities (see table 4.17).

In a survey carried out by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in 1980 in the United States of America (Chavkin & Williams 1988:87-9) it was found that 92 % of principals, 87 % of the teachers and 73 % of the parents agreed that teachers need to be trained for working with parents (see paragraph 1.2).

School principals are amenable to parents involving themselves in education but it is not without its accompanying anxiety. Ninety five percent of the respondents was of the opinion that if it is not controlled, parents, through their involvement, can erode the internal sovereignty of the school (see table 4.17).

#### 4.5.3 Principals' Views on Possible Areas of Involvement of Parents in Education

Closely allied to the view that parental involvement if not controlled, can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school, are the principals' views on the areas of involvement. The researcher wished to determine what was favoured by the principals in terms of areas of involvement of parents in education. Principals were therefore, required to rate possible areas of involvement in terms of the following key (refer to question 3 of appendix 3):

- 1 Not at all important
- 2 Not so important
- 3 Important
- 4 Very important

Mean values were calculated in accordance with this key and included in table 4.18; the larger the mean score, the more favourably disposed were the respondents (principals) towards the area of involvement.

The researcher has found that principals are most favourably

disposed towards parents involving themselves in such aspects as ensuring that homework is done, resolving behavioural problems, raising funds for the school, assisting in extra-curricular activities and providing background information on the pupil to the educator (refer to table 4.18). They appear to be less favourably disposed towards areas that encroach upon governance. Parents being involved in the appointment of staff, taking part in decision-making and the development of the curriculum do not seem to find easy acceptance among principals. This is corroborated by a survey of superintendents conducted throughout the United States of America (Ornstein 1980:89). They were more favourably disposed towards **advising** on school policy rather than **determining** school policy (see paragraph 2.8.2).

Parental involvement in the finances appeared to be the most popular and parental involvement in personnel matters appeared to be the least favourable (see table 4.18). Gittell (1977:16) also supports this when it is claimed that school administrators are protective of their rights to recruit new faculty and to determine fitness (evaluation), promotion and tenure. They see community participation and control as a threat (see paragraph 2.8.2)

**TABLE 4.18 MEAN VALUES INDICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AS PERCEIVED BY PRINCIPALS**

**N = 20**

ASPECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	MEAN RESPONSE SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION
Ensuring that the homework is done	3,90	0,31
Decision-making and governance	2,75	0,72
Raising funds for the school	3,45	0,51
Appointment of staff	2,20	0,83
Assisting in extra-curricular activities	3,50	0,51
Development of the curriculum	2,75	0,79
Providing background information on the pupil to the educator	3,40	0,68
Resolving behavioural problems	3,65	0,49

#### **4.6 A COMPARISON OF DATA GATHERED FROM PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS**

##### **4.6.1 Parental Involvement in Education as a Specialised Field in the Teaching Process**

The question eliciting responses as to whether parental involvement is of such a specialised nature that it should be involved in the curriculum of tertiary institutes such as universities and teacher training colleges, was put to both teachers and principals. Approximately seventy five percent

of the principals (see table 4.17) and seventy four percent of the teachers (see table 4.19) respectively, indicated that parental involvement in education should be included in the curriculum of universities and teacher training colleges.

**TABLE 4.19 VIEWS OF TEACHERS ON INCLUDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTES FOR TEACHER TRAINING**

N	87
RESPONDENTS	TEACHERS
PERCENTAGE THAT AGREES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT BEING PART OF CURRICULUM OF UNIVERSITIES AND TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES	74 %

**4.6.2 The Relationship between Pupils' Academic Performance and Parents' Willingness to Visit Schools**

The principals' responses to the question, 'Which lot of parents do you normally get to meet?' corroborates and reinforces the teachers' responses; 50 % of the principals and approximately 71 % of the teachers claimed that they normally get to meet parents of bright pupils (see tables 4.16 and 4.20 respectively). There appears to be a reluctance on the part of the parents of weak pupils to visit teachers.

**TABLE 4.20 TEACHER RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, 'WHICH LOT OF PARENTS DO YOU NORMALLY GET TO MEET?'**

N = 87	PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS
PARENTS OF BRIGHT PUPILS	71,26 %
PARENTS OF WEAK PUPILS	1,15 %
MIXED LOT OF PARENTS	27,59 %

#### 4.6.3 Criteria for the Selection of Parents for Parent-Evening

A common grievance among teachers is that often there are too many parents to attend to in a single meeting. Parents complain, that teachers, on the other hand, are often intimidated by the long queues of parents and they seldom do justice to the interviews. Tables 4.13 and 4.21 reflect the percentage of teachers and principals respectively who support the respective strategies for inviting parents to parent-evening.

**TABLE 4.21 RESPONSES IN RESPECT OF PRINCIPALS WHO CHOSE THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES FOR INVITING PARENTS TO PARENT-EVENING**

N	20
RESPONDENTS	PRINCIPALS
PARENTS OF PUPILS OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL	10 %
PARENTS OF PUPILS OF A SPECIFIC STANDARD	50 %
PARENTS OF SELECTED GROUPS OF PUPILS (SUCH AS PARENTS OF WEAK PUPILS, UNDERACHIEVERS, ETC.)	40 %
OTHERS	

#### **4.6.4 Views Regarding Teachers Undertaking Home Visits**

Fifty four percent of the teachers was of the opinion that undertaking home visits was outside the ambit of their duty. Amongst the principals, however, 65 % was of the opinion that undertaking home visits is the duty of every educator. A small percentage of teachers, however, was of the opinion that undertaking home visits was outside the ambit of an educator's call of duty (see table 4.22).

**TABLE 4.22 RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION, 'WHAT IS YOUR OPINION WITH REGARD TO TEACHERS UNDERTAKING HOME VISITS?'**

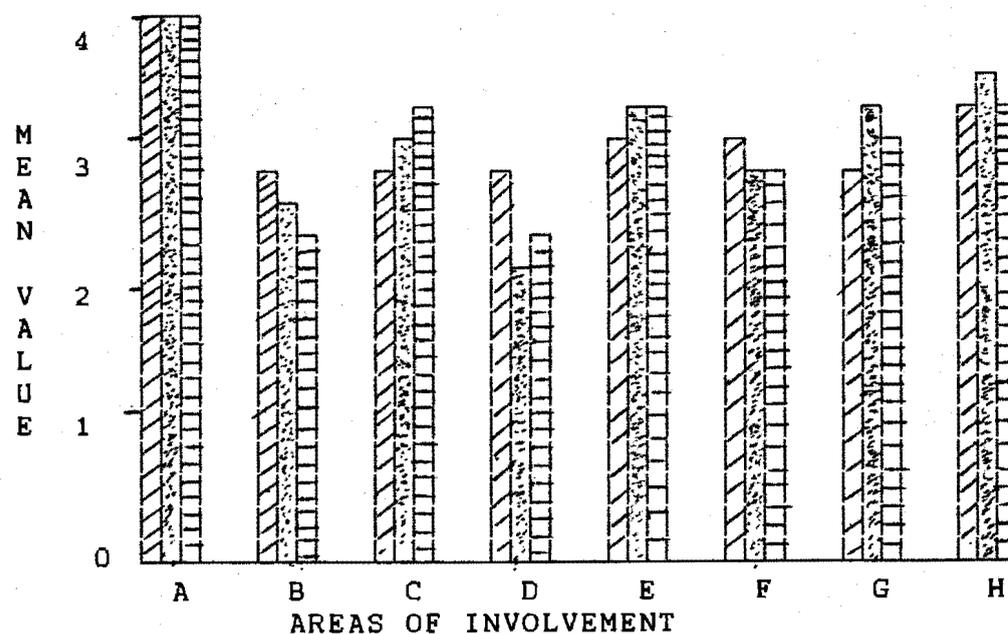
N	87	20
RESPONDENTS	TEACHERS IN AGREEMENT	PRINCIPALS IN AGREEMENT
IT FALLS OUTSIDE THE AMBIT OF AN EDUCATOR'S CALL OF DUTY	16,28 %	} 35 %
THIS IS THE JOB OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR	37,21 %	
IT IS THE DUTY OF EVERY EDUCATOR	46,41 %	65 %

#### 4.6.5 Possible Areas of Involvement of Parents in Education

There appears to be a degree of consensus on the areas of involvement between parents, teachers and principals in terms of the rank order of the various areas of involvement (refer to tables 4.11; 4.14 & 4.18). Parents, teachers and principals have scored the highest mean with regard to the parents ensuring that their children do their homework. Parents, teachers and principals accorded the least importance to parents being associated with the appointment of staff.

However, while there appears to be a good deal of consensus on the rank order of the categories in terms of importance, a pattern emerges if one has to compare the mean values scored by parents, teachers and principals in each category (refer to figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1** GRAPH REFLECTING THE VIEWS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO IMPORTANCE ACCORDED TO THE VARIOUS AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT



PARENTS



TEACHERS



PRINCIPALS

A - Ensuring that the homework is done

B - Decision making and governance

C - Raising funds for the school

D - Appointment of staff

E - Assisting in extra-curricula activities

F - Development of the curriculum

G - Providing background information on the pupil to the educator

H - Resolving behavioural problems

Parents have scored higher than teachers and principals in

such categories as taking part in decision-making and the governance of the school, appointment of staff and having a say in the development of the curriculum. Principals scored the lowest in the category of governance; a fear of interference and a reluctance to share that which was traditionally the principal's domain, with the parents, is a possible explanation. Literature sources (Gittell 1977:16; Ornstein 1980:88) support this view in its assertion that school administrators are protective of their rights to recruit new faculty and to determine fitness, promotion and tenure. Community participation and control are perceived as a threat, hence the large scale opposition from teacher bodies (see paragraph 2.8.2). There is a notion among educators that parental involvement can interfere with the internal sovereignty of the school.

The category that enjoys the greatest support among educators is the raising of funds and assistance in extra-curricular activities. This appears to be a comfort zone of non-interference in education.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to establish, verify or reject certain hypotheses between pertinent variables with the explicit intention of establishing a basis for making recommendations to school managers on how to improve or maximize parental involvement in education. Besides the correlation studies, a number of statistics concerning the views of parents, teachers and principals is provided.

The correlation studies have revealed the following:

- \* There was no grounds to conclude that there was any correlation between the income of the family and parents' interest in the education.
- \* There is a low, positive but significant correlation between the mothers' level of education and the interest they display in the education of their children. No correlation was found in the case of the fathers.
- \* No correlation was found between qualifications of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful or parental involvement being a specialised field.
- \* No correlation was found between the qualifications of teachers and their level of confidence in dealing with parents.
- \* No correlation exists between the experience of teachers and their perception of parental involvement being useful or it being a specialised field.
- \* There is a slight but significant positive correlation between the experience of teachers and the level of confidence in dealing with parents.

In respect of the views and opinions of parents, teachers and principals, the results have revealed the following:

- \* Lack of time appears to be the strongest reason advanced by parents for not communicating with the school with regard to enquiring about the progress of their children in school.
- \* Parents indicated that they did not always respond to invitations to parent-teacher evenings because they received no new information regarding their children.
- \* Contrary to some literature sources, this investigation has shown that the majority of the parents view teaching as an occupation that is closer to those which are traditionally regarded as a profession than those that are regarded as a trade.
- \* Most parents regard teaching as being either very difficult or reasonably difficult.
- \* Most teachers and principals did not prefer parents to be involved in areas of governance and advocacy.
- \* In considering the strategies for inviting parents to parent-evenings, most teachers and principals preferred to invite parents of selected groups of

pupils, such as, parents of underachievers.

\* Principals feared that parental involvement can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school if it is not controlled.

\* Many principals and teachers are of the opinion that parental involvement in education should be part of the curriculum of teacher training colleges and universities.

Based on the literature study of the preceding chapters and the empirical study of this chapter, recommendations and suggestions on how school principals can increase parental involvement in education shall be made in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The principal, as the head of the institute, determines to a large degree the nature and extent of the involvement and participation of parents in the education of their children. It is, indeed, through the planning, organisation, initiative and effort of the principal, as the school manager, that parents and teachers can work successfully and in concert with each other to ensure that the mutual goal of educating the child is realized. Principals must lead the crusade to bring parents into the high school, not just as passive participants or volunteers, but as full partners (see paragraph 3.1). The lack of active administrative leadership and attention is due, in part, to the dearth of useful, organised information on parental involvement in schools (see paragraph 1.4). Yet, it is the administrator's role to orchestrate activities that will help the staff study and understand parent involvement, and to select or design, evaluate, and revise programmes for parental involvement.

The researcher wishes to point out that certain information that refers specifically to the expected actions and responses of teachers are intended primarily for the consumption of the principals. The inclusion is based on the premise that principals, as school managers, require to know what makes for

a successful parent-teacher relationship, parental involvement and participation at the functional level before the administrative function is realized. If administrators understand the importance of and are familiar with the logistics of parent-teacher interactions, then they will be better equipped to influence teachers to maintain and sustain parental involvement at a high level.

## 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The main thrust of this study is how management at the micro level can ensure parental involvement at the functional level. The **emphasis**, therefore, is on individual parental participation in the education of their children (see paragraph 1.8).

Departing from the premise that parents are major players and stakeholders in the education process and their involvement is necessary (see paragraph 1.1), this study has sought to investigate what the principal, as the school manager, can do to increase and encourage parental involvement in the education process (see paragraph 1.4). The researcher is of the opinion that the reluctance of educators to accept and encourage parental involvement and the minimal participation of parents in education may be attributed to ingrained prejudices and misinformation. What a teacher may interpret as apathy and lack of interest in a parent, may in fact be a symptom of the parents' lack of ability or confidence to communicate with the teacher (or the teacher with the parent),

the fear of a bureaucratic system they do not understand or a reluctance to intrude into the education process which they may interpret as the domain of professional educators (see paragraph 1.2).

Establishing what factors have either retarded or promoted the involvement of parents in the education of their children in secondary schools and how the principal, as the manager of the school, uses the human resources available, that is, the educators and the parents, towards getting parents to take part in the education process of their children, are pivotal to this research (see paragraph 1.4).

The literature study in chapter two explores the history of parental involvement, both abroad and locally, with some emphasis on the South African situation (see paragraph 2.1).

Among the factors that influence parental involvement, socio-economic factors, level of teacher efficacy, level of literacy among parents and cultural and linguistic differences feature prominently (see paragraph 2.2).

Section 2.3 espouses the necessity and value of parent involvement in education. The parent, being the primary educator, is responsible for their children's well being and their involvement in education is necessary as a matter of principle. Based on the recommendations made by the Human Sciences Research Council in 1981 (see paragraph 2.3.1.2), legislation has made parental involvement in South Africa,

necessary, as a legal requirement.

The value of parental involvement is seen from the perspective of the educator, from the perspective of parents and their children and that of the school (see paragraph 2.3.2).

An area subject to some degree of controversy, is the nature and scope of parental involvement (see paragraph 2.4). It appears that there is no consensus among educators as to the precise delineation of the nature and scope of parental involvement. It varies from the view that parents should confine themselves to feeding and clothing their children to the view that they should be involved in the governance and advocacy of the school. Many educators fear, however, that parental involvement, if not controlled, can undermine their professional status and erode the internal sovereignty of the school (see paragraph 2.4).

Paragraph 2.5 focuses attention on ways of parental involvement. Amongst them, communication features prominently. Numerous forms of communication are described. With regard to governance, advocacy and decision making, a distinction is made between political decentralisation, community participation and community control. Community participation connotes the formation of advisory committees that may operate at various levels within the system. They make recommendations and serve as liaisons between school and community. Community control implies a voice in the decision making. Power is shared between professionals and the

community. Political decentralisation embraces both community participation and community control (see paragraph 2.5.2).

A pervasive feature of present day education is the accountability of the school to the parents. A distinction is made between moral accountability, professional accountability and contractual accountability (see paragraph 2.6). This area is also a subject of controversy.

Closely allied to this is the professional status of the teacher. It is maintained that if teachers see themselves as professionals in the same way as doctors or lawyers, then they must attend more closely to the implications of professional-client accountability (see paragraph 2.6).

The controversial issue of the status of the teacher comes under close scrutiny in paragraph 2.7.1, where literature sources report that teachers readily defended their right to autonomy on their basis of their expert knowledge and parents were ready to accede to their claims. It is claimed that teachers experienced anxiety with regard to the threat to their professional status and were therefore, cautious of foraying into the realms of working with parents.

An important aspect of this research, which has a direct bearing on the empirical investigation in chapter four is the obstacles to parental involvement in education (see paragraph 2.8). Numerous problems associated with the family and the school have been identified.

Amongst the problems experienced by the parents, lack of time (see paragraph 2.8.3.1), stressful conditions at home (see paragraph 2.8.3.2), negative attitudes of teachers and the air of unassailability projected by them, feature prominently (see paragraph 2.8.3.3).

The major problem identified with the educational system was the reluctance of educators to accepting parents into the mainstream of parent involvement (see paragraph 2.8.2).

Literature sources claim that teachers often seek refuge in their professional expertise as a means of safe-guarding their autonomy (see paragraph 2.8.3.3).

It is claimed that not all teachers are competent in handling parents (see paragraph 2.8.4.1). The problems experienced by teachers in involving parents in the education of their children are exacerbated by the prejudices of the parents.

Having unreasonable expectations and demanding preferential treatment for their children, are not uncommon (see paragraph 2.8.4.3 & 2.8.4.4).

Chapter three explores the role played by school managers in other communities and schools in involving parents in education. The main thrust of the discussion in chapter three is that the school principals, as managers, have all the resources and the advantages and together with their status and authority can initiate the move towards involving parents in education (see paragraph 3.1).

One of the roles of the principal is to establish a healthy spirit in the school. Central to the establishment of a healthy spirit is the development of trust and cooperation between parent and teacher (see paragraph 3.2.1), which can only be generated if parent and teacher work together. But resistance from teachers are not uncommon. A number of commonly encountered rationale from teachers for non-cooperation is discussed (see paragraph 3.2.1.1). These include the following:

- (1) Lack of consensus with regard to the degree of involvement.
- (2) Teachers were not certain of the administration's response to their efforts to involve parents.
- (3) Teachers expressed uncertainty with regard to the response from parents.
- (4) Teachers were disillusioned as a result of past disappointments in trying to involve parents.
- (5) Many teachers claimed that parental involvement will take a great deal of their time (see paragraph 3.2.1.1).

Counter arguments are discussed and proposals are made to overcome resistance from teachers (see paragraph 3.2.1.2).

The principal's role as a manager and leader is viewed in some

detail (see paragraph 3.3). It is asserted that the principal plays a vital role in determining whether the parents will be involved as volunteers or participate as partners; a distinction is made between parents as volunteers and parents as partners. A theoretical model is used to provide a framework for the principal with regard to the formulation of overall policy and plans for the involvement of parents in education (see paragraph 3.3).

Strategies employed in such aspects as communication (see paragraph 3.3.1), parent education (see paragraph 3.3.2), teacher education (see paragraph 3.3.3) and involving parents in decision making (see paragraph 3.3.4) are discussed.

It is claimed that poor communication can be responsible for numerous problems, amongst which, misunderstanding and prejudices may be common. Communication, therefore, must be unambiguous, relevant and effective. Principals play a major role in influencing the form, frequency and the likely result of the information sent to parents (see paragraph 3.3.1).

Numerous forms of communication are discussed. These include, written communication, face to face communication and group meetings (see paragraph 3.3.1.1).

For parent involvement to be successful, parents too, need to be educated to ensure that they are sensitive to the role functions of the other players and to effectively carry out their functions as parents (see paragraph 3.3.2). Examples of schools implementing programmes to educate parents are

mentioned (see paragraph 3.3.2.1). Education from a different perspective is necessary for the teacher (see paragraph 3.3.3); reference is made to relevant examples concerning teacher education (see paragraph 3.3.3.1).

Decision-making is a pervasive feature of the whole organisation in education, albeit at different levels. It is incumbent upon the principal, as the school manager, to make provision for the parents to take their rightful place in the decision-making process (see paragraph 3.3.4).

In chapter four the researcher has given a detailed analysis of the empirical research carried out by means of questionnaires to parents, teachers and principals of schools in the North Coast of Natal. The questionnaires focussed on eliciting problems experienced by all three players in the education process, namely, parents, teachers and principals, so that appropriate recommendations may be made to the school administrators to circumvent, eliminate or minimise problems in their efforts to maximise parental involvement in schools.

The investigation was carried out using a sample of one hundred parents, one hundred teachers and twenty principals in the Phoenix North area. Besides the number of correlation studies undertaken (see paragraphs 4.2.1; 4.2.2 & 4.3.1), the investigation has yielded numerous pertinent statistics with regard to issues such as such as, 'reasons for not attending parent-teacher evenings', 'parents' perception of teacher competency', 'parents' perception of the status of the

teacher' and 'parents' perception of degree of difficulty of the task of the teacher' (see paragraph 4.2.5). Chapter four concludes with a comparison of the data gathered from parents, teachers and principals. Comparisons are made between such aspects as the opinions of teachers and principals on including parental involvement in education in tertiary institutes for teacher training (see paragraph 4.5.1), criteria for the selection of parents for parent evening (see paragraph 4.5.2) and the views of parents, teachers and principals with regard to the importance accorded to the various areas of involvement (see paragraph 4.5.5).

Based on the literature study of chapter two and three and the empirical research in chapter four, numerous recommendations in the various categories of parental involvement are made to maximise parental involvement in the education process.

### 5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions stated below are based on the literature study of chapter 2 and 3 and the empirical study of chapter 4; the conclusions are pertinent to secondary schools only. The researcher makes no claim to its applicability to primary schools, since the empirical investigation was confined to secondary schools only.

- \* No significant correlation was found between the level of income of parents and the interest they show in terms of enquiring about school from their

children (see paragraph 4.2.1).

- \* The relationship between the mother's level of education and the interest in school shows a significant positive correlation (see paragraph 4.2.2).
- \* No significant correlation was found between the father's level of education and their interest in the child's school day (see paragraph 4.2.2).
- \* Time, appears to be by far, the biggest problem preventing parents from communicating with the school (see paragraph 4.2.3).
- \* Most parents who were dissatisfied with the parent-teacher evenings, did so because they received no new information regarding their children (see paragraph 4.2.4).
- \* Most parents perceive the teacher's task as being difficult (see paragraph 4.2.5).
- \* Most parents view teaching as a profession rather than a trade (see paragraph 4.2.5).
- \* Not all secretaries of schools were friendly and hospitable to parent visitors ((see paragraph 4.2.6).

- \* Parents ensuring that children do their homework is viewed as an important function by parents, teachers and principals ((see paragraph 4.2.7)).
  
- \* The parents were not afforded enough privacy to discuss their child. Teachers were sometimes oblivious of the sensitive nature of the information imparted; negative aspects of the child's performance were discussed openly in the presence of other parents who were also waiting for an interview (see paragraph 2.8.3.5 & 4.2.4).
  
- \* The teachers were forced to rush through the interview, hence failing to help and advise the parents adequately because of the long queues of parents, which the teachers find intimidating (see paragraph 4.3.2).
  
- \* There is no complete consensus between parents and educators (teachers and principals) on the extent of parental involvement in governancy of schools. While parents express a desire for greater involvement in this regard, teachers and principals are less enthusiastic ((see paragraphs 2.8.2; 2.8.3.4 & 4.5.5)).
  
- \* A significant number of teachers and principals were of the opinion that parental involvement in education is a specialised field for teacher training and warrants a slot in the curriculum of colleges and

universities (see paragraph 4.3.1).

- \* Most teachers and principals prefer to invite parents of selected groups of pupils, such as, parents of underachievers, for parent-evenings (see paragraphs 4.3.2 & 4.4.1).
  
- \* Most principals did not have complete confidence in all their teachers in their ability to handle parents (see paragraph 4.4.2).
  
- \* Parents of weak pupils, often, do not respond to invitations to visit schools to discuss their children (see paragraphs 4.4.1 & 4.5.2).
  
- \* Many principals fear that parental involvement, if not controlled, can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school (see paragraph 4.4.2).

#### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

By involving parents in their children's education, parents build up a much deeper understanding of the methods of the school and what the schools are trying to achieve. Indeed, this understanding is mutual. Teachers develop a greater understanding of their pupils, their backgrounds, their culture and come to realise that education is not confined to the school only and that parents play a vital role as primary educators in educating the child.

But this type of involvement of parents will not materialize without initiative, effort, organisation and planning. It is here that the principal, as the school administrator, plays a vital role in initiating parental involvement, maintaining it and sustaining it at a high level. The following recommendations drawn from the literature and the empirical studies are pertinent to secondary schools:

#### **5.4.1 Recommendations for Implementation**

The literature study of chapter two and three and the empirical study of chapter four form the basis for the following recommendations:

- \* Practise an open-door policy for parent visitors. Although this means that parents should not be prohibited from coming to school, parents should be encouraged to telephone the school to arrange for the best possible time to see the teachers concerned.
- \* Secretaries must be exposed to workshops either at school level or regional level. Principals can initiate and facilitate the process by making recommendations to the governing bodies.
- \* The school environment can be improved by making notices less formal, more informative and more inviting. There should be clear directions to the secretary's and the principal's offices. The

administration area where parents are normally received must be such, that the parents feel welcome.

- \* There should be a comfortable waiting room for parents away from the main traffic routes of the school.
- \* Administrators can ensure the success of parent-teacher evenings by discussing with teachers the purpose of the meeting and by organizing it to make the best educational use of the teachers and parents' time; by requiring the attendance of all teachers; and by requiring reviewing materials prepared by teachers to provide information to parents (see paragraph 4.2.4).
- \* Parents should be invited on a needs basis in order to limit the numbers so that the teacher may do justice to the interview (see paragraph 4.5.3).
- \* Teachers should be alerted to the fact that parents may be acutely sensitive to other parents listening to interviews between themselves and parents and therefore, appropriate steps should be taken to afford parents privacy during the interviews (see paragraph 4.3.4).
- \* It is common knowledge that some parents experience a feeling of awkwardness about coming to school. While very little can be done about the inherent

feeling towards the school, the school principal can alleviate the situation by ensuring that the teachers are spoken to beforehand and to prevail upon them to be warm and civil to all parents and to avoid the natural desire to spend more time with a select group of parents. Concerted efforts should be made to identify the more reserved parents and to engage them in a conversation to make them feel at home (see paragraph 2.8.4).

- \* It is essential for teachers to prepare adequately so that the exchange of information is accomplished smoothly and effectively. They should have an outline of the information they would like to disseminate or collect. They should prepare an agenda, giving a copy to the parents prior to the meeting. The objectives of the conference should be stated clearly in terms the parent can understand (see paragraphs 2.5.1; 2.8.3.10 & 3.3.1).

- \* It is imperative that the manager creates lines of communication. Written communication is an important form of tangible evidence about what a school believes and does. This may be in the form of newsletters, brochures and letters (see paragraphs 2.5.1; 2.8.3.10; 3.3.1).

- \* It is of utmost importance that parents are kept informed not only of the progress of their own

children but also about the various other aspects of the school, such as school educational policies, school rules and regulations pertaining to such issues as school uniform and school times, information concerning changes in the staff, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and the ways in which parents can, through their goodwill and cooperation, aid the school in realising its objectives. This may take the form of a newsletter, the frequency of which may be dictated by the school (see paragraphs 2.5.1; 2.8.3.10 & 3.3.1).

\* Administrators can set the tone by clarifying for teachers that neither they nor their students will be judged on the education or family arrangements of their students' parents, nor on the achievement levels of the students when they enter the teacher's class. Teachers might involve more parents if they knew they would be judged solely on the accomplishments and attitudes of the students while they are in the teacher's class, and on the success of the teacher's communication with the students and their parents. In other words, the teachers will be judged on the quality of instruction and not on the educational outcomes (see paragraph 2.7.1).

\* The principal's leadership and initiative can influence teachers to develop workshops for parents. Conducting workshops for parents often involves the

use of school resources. The principal should make the necessary arrangements for this. The teacher may require the principal's assistance in obtaining a room, materials, secretarial help, or custodial services ((see paragraphs 3.2.1; 3.2.1.2 & 3.3).

- \* If the parents have some special expertise that is relevant to other parents and which can be used in improving the lot of their children, then the principal can play a vital role in getting such parents to share their expertise with the other parents (see paragraphs 3.2.1.2 & 3.3).
  
- \* Parental anxiety can be lessened through school sponsored parent education programmes. These programmes can take the form of educational films, speakers and panel discussions (see paragraphs 3.2.1 & 3.3).
  
- \* The principal should make a concerted effort to acquaint himself with information pertaining to the parent. This may include such information as the occupation of the parent, general interests and areas of special skills and expertise. This would be possible only if the principal has a profile of the parent. This information can prove invaluable to the principals in their efforts to make parents feel welcome and comfortable.

- \* Principals should have the political astuteness to interpret the needs and expectations in the external and internal environment and to translate them into viable objectives for the involvement of parents in education (see paragraph 2.9).

#### 5.4.2 Recommendations for Research

The dynamic nature of parental participation in education lends itself to further research in areas such as the following:

- \* Parental involvement in the governance of education- the scope and nature of their involvement, their powers and their limitations and the infrastructure within which they will operate.
- \* The interactions and simultaneous influence of school and family environments (see paragraph 2.2).
- \* The role of the school manager in a multicultural society.
- \* The development of school policy for the participation of parents.
- \* Parental involvement as a course for teacher trainees in tertiary institutions (see paragraph 1.2).

- \* The role of the school manager in parental involvement in primary schools.

Numerous recommendations were made for implementation and research. The researcher hopes that this will help not only to improve the quality of involvement but also to increase the number of parents becoming active participants in the education of their children so that one can project a vision of both parents and teachers as central figures with complex roles that embrace the child.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE TO PARENTS

INSTRUCTIONS  
 Please be assured that your responses shall be held in the strictest confidence. You are required to place an X in the appropriate block. Below is an example:

How many children attend school in your family?

ONE		1
TWO	X	2
more than TWO		3

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			(1-
Card No.		1	(4

SECTION A

1. Who is the respondent? mother 

	1
--	---

father 

	2
--	---

(5)

2. Which of the following best describes the present occupation?

FATHER

Economically Active	Employer (others work for you)		1
	Self-employed (you work for yourself)		2
	Employee (you work for others)		3
	Temporarily unemployed (seeking work)		4
	Other		5
Not Economically Active	Pensioner		6
	Disabled		7
	Student		8
	Other		9

(6)

If you responded "other" to the above question, please specify in the space below.

--

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MOTHER

Economically Active	Employer (others work for you)		1
	Self-employed (you work for yourself)		2
	Employee (you work for others)		3
	Temporarily unemployed (seeking work)		4
	Other		5
Not Economically Active	Pensioner		6
	Disabled		7
	Student		8
	Housewife		9
	Other		10

(7)

If you responded "other" to the above question, please specify in the space below.

--

3. Total Income of the family (per month)	R10 000 +	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
	R6000 - R9999	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
	R2000 - R5999	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
	R1000 - R1999	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
	Below R1000	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

(8)

4. MOTHER'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Standard 10 + Tertiary Education

	1
--	---

Standard 10 or Standard 9

	2
--	---

Standard 8 or Standard 7

	3
--	---

Standard 6

	4
--	---

Below Standard 6

	5
--	---

(9)

5. FATHER'S LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Standard 10 + Tertiary Education

	1
--	---

Standard 10 or Standard 9

	2
--	---

Standard 8 or Standard 7

	3
--	---

Standard 6

	4
--	---

Below Standard 6

	5
--	---

(10)

SECTION B

1. How often do you:

(a) enquire about school from your child?

almost daily

	1
--	---

at least once a week

	2
--	---

once or twice a month

	3
--	---

very rarely

	4
--	---

never

	5
--	---

(11)

(b) call for your child's written work either from the teacher or your child to determine how your child is working.

almost daily

	1
--	---

at least once a week

	2
--	---

once or twice a month

	3
--	---

very rarely

	4
--	---

never

	5
--	---

(12)

2. Do you ensure that your child does his/her homework regularly?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(13)

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USE ONLY

3. How often do you communicate with the teachers of your child in order to discuss his/her progress?

More than once a term

	1
--	---

At least once a term

	2
--	---

At least once a year

	3
--	---

Very rarely

	4
--	---

Never

	5
--	---

(14)

4. RESPOND TO THIS QUESTION ONLY IF YOUR RESPONSE TO QUESTION THREE ABOVE WAS "NEVER".

If you have never spoken to the teachers of your child regarding his or her progress, you may have good reasons for it.

Rate the following in terms of applicability to your circumstances according to the following key:

PLACE AN X IN THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK

- 1 Not applicable
- 2 Slightly applicable
- 3 Applicable
- 4 Very applicable

(a) Time does not permit you to do so.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(15)

(b) You are afraid of being accused of interference.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(16)

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(c) You do not see the need to do so.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(17)

(e) You are afraid of what may be revealed to you.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(18)

(e) It never occurred to you to do so.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(19)

(f) Personal circumstances do not permit you to do so.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(20)

(g) You do not enjoy a good relationship with the school.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(21)

IF NONE OF THE REASONS MENTIONED ABOVE IS APPLICABLE TO YOU, YOU MAY USE THE SPACE BELOW TO WRITE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT REASON/S.

-----

-----

-----

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USE ONLY

5. Schools under the House of Delegates generally hold a parents' evening at which function parents are afforded an opportunity to meet the various subject teachers and to discuss the child's progress. The following questions are designed to establish your views on this parent-teacher evening.

- (a) Do you or your spouse generally attend this meeting?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(22)

- (b) Do you think that a parent-teacher evening is necessary?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(23)

- (c) If you have attended parent-teacher evenings in the past, did it satisfy you in terms of your expectations? DO NOT RESPOND TO THIS QUESTION IF YOU HAVE NEVER ATTENDED ANY PARENT-TEACHER EVENINGS.

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(24)

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USE ONLY

(d) If your response to question (c) above was "NO", you may have several reasons for this. Rate the following in terms of applicability to your circumstances according to the following key:

- 1 Very applicable
- 2 Applicable
- 3 Slightly applicable
- 4 Not applicable

(i) You received no new information regarding your child.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(25)

(ii) You were afforded no privacy when discussing your child.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(26)

(iii) You were not allowed enough time to discuss your child.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

(27)

PLEASE INDICATE ANY OTHER REASONS YOU MAY HAVE IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

-----

-----

-----

(e) Do you find most if not all the teachers hospitable and friendly during these evenings?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(28)

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USE ONLY

(f) If there are any suggestions you would like to make with regard to the parent-teacher evening, please feel free to do so in the space provided.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

6. Do you find the teachers adequately competent to assist you to help your child in problem situations?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(29)

7. How do you perceive the task of the teacher in the secondary school, in terms of difficulty?

VERY  
DIFFICULT

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

VERY EASY

(30)

In the following question the term "professional" is not used to describe the ability of the educator but your perception in terms of the status of the educator. Medicine and law, for example, are regarded as professions while carpentry is regarded as a trade.

8. Where in terms of status would you place the teacher as an educator?

PROFESSION

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

TRADE

(31)

9. How do you rate the atmosphere in the school?

WELCOMING  
AND  
WARM

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

COLD,  
INTIMIDATING  
AND OFFICIAL

(32)

FOR OFFICIAL  
USE ONLY

10. How do you rate the attitudes of the secretaries in the schools?

FRIENDLY  
AND  
HOSPITABLE

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

COLD,  
UNFRIENDLY  
AND  
BUSINESSLIKE

(33)

11. If there are any suggestions you would like to make with regard to improving the general atmosphere of the school, please do so in the space provided?

-----

-----

-----

-----

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USE ONLY

12. Rate the eight factors below with regard to parental involvement in education in terms of importance, in accordance with the key below. Put a cross (X) in the appropriate block. REMEMBER THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. THESE ARE YOUR VIEWS.

- 1 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
- 2 NOT SO IMPORTANT
- 3 IMPORTANT
- 4 VERY IMPORTANT

FACTORS	1	2	3	4	
Ensuring that children do their homework					(34)
Taking part in decision making and the governance of the school					(35)
Raising funds for the school					(36)
Appointment of staff					(37)
Assisting in extra-curricula activities					(38)
Having a say in the development of the curriculum					(39)
Providing background information on the pupil to the teacher					(40)
Resolving behavioural problems					(41)

ARE THERE ANY OTHER CATEGORIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO INCLUDE. PLEASE SPECIFY.

-----

-----

-----

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USE ONLY

13. What else can the school do to improve parental involvement? LEAVE BLANK IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ANY FURTHER CONTRIBUTION.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

-----  
MR. M. PERUMAL

90

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

**INSTRUCTIONS**  
 Please be assured that your responses shall be held in the strictest confidence. You are required to place an X in the appropriate block. Below is an example:

Do you approve of parents visiting you during normal instruction time?

YES  1

NO  2

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1-3)
Card No.	2		(4)

SECTION A

1. State your qualification in the subject you teach.

Honours +	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
Majors	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
Ancillary	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
Matric or lower	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

(5)

2. Indicate your teaching experience.

0 - 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
6 - 10 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
11 - 15 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
16 - 20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	4
More than 20 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	5

(6)

SECTION B

1. Consider parental involvement as assistance rendered in extra-curricula activities; taking part in decision making and the governance of the school; and having a role in the appointment of staff.

How do you perceive parental involvement in terms of its usefulness to education?

VERY  
USEFUL

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

DISRUPTIVE,  
SERVES NO  
USEFUL PURPOSE

(7)

2. Do you agree with the following statement:

"Parental involvement in education is a field that entails so much specialised knowledge, that it warrants a slot in the curriculum of colleges of education and universities."

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(8)

3. Rate the eight factors below in terms of importance, in accordance with the key below. Put a cross (X) in the appropriate block. REMEMBER THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS. THESE ARE YOUR VIEWS.

- 1 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
- 2 NOT SO IMPORTANT
- 3 IMPORTANT
- 4 VERY IMPORTANT

FACTORS	1	2	3	4
Ensuring that children do their homework				
Taking part in decision making and the governance of the school				
Raising funds for the school				
Appointment of staff				
Assisting in extra-curricula activities				
Having a say in the development of the curriculum				
Providing background information on the pupil to the teacher				
Resolving behavioural problems				

(9)

(10)

(11)

(12)

(13)

(14)

(15)

(16)

ARE THERE ANY OTHER CATEGORIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO INCLUDE. PLEASE SPECIFY.

-----

-----

-----

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USE ONLY

4. The following questions have been designed to establish your views on the annual parents' evening held by schools under the House of Delegates:

(a) Do you think that a parent-teacher meeting is necessary?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(17)

(b) Did the parent-teacher meetings you have attended in the past, satisfy you in terms of your expectations?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(18)

(c) If your answer to question (b) above was "NO", what exactly were you unhappy about?

-----

-----

-----

-----

(d) Do you feel confident when discussing pupils with their parents?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(19)

(e) If the response to the above question was "NO", give reasons.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

(e) Which lot of parents do you normally get to meet?

Parents of bright pupils	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>1</td></tr></table>		1
	1		
Parents of weak pupils	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>2</td></tr></table>		2
	2		
Mixed lot of parents	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>3</td></tr></table>		3
	3		

(20)

(f) Are you of the opinion that the meeting should be called for...

the parents of pupils of the whole school	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>1</td></tr></table>		1
	1		
the parents of pupils of a specific standard	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>2</td></tr></table>		2
	2		
the parents of selected groups of pupils	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>3</td></tr></table>		3
	3		
others (please specify)	<table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td>4</td></tr></table>		4
	4		

(21)

-----  
-----  
-----

7. What is your opinion with regard to teachers undertaking home visits?

It falls outside the ambit of an educator's call of duty

	1
--	---

This is the job of the school counsellor

	2
--	---

It is the duty of every educator

	3
--	---

(22)

8. What in your view can the principal, as the school manager, do to maximise parental involvement in the education of their children?

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

(23)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

-----  
M.PERUMAL

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE TO PRINCIPALS

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**INSTRUCTIONS**

Please be assured that your responses shall be held in the strictest confidence. You are required to place an X in the appropriate block. Below is an example:

Do you have a parent-teacher association in your school?

YES

X	1
---	---

NO

	2
--	---

		(1-2)
Card No.	3	(3)

1. Consider parental involvement as assistance rendered in extra-curricula activities; taking part in decision making and the governance of the school; and having a role in the appointment of staff.

How do you perceive parental involvement in terms of its usefulness to education?

VERY USEFUL	1	2	3	4	DISRUPTIVE, SERVES NO USEFUL PURPOSE
----------------	---	---	---	---	--

(4)

2. Do you have complete confidence in all your teachers in their ability to handle parents?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(5)

3. Rate the eight factors below with regard to parental involvement in education in terms of importance in accordance with the key below.

PUT A CROSS IN THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK.

- 1 NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
- 2 NOT SO IMPORTANT
- 3 IMPORTANT
- 4 VERY IMPORTANT

FACTORS	1	2	3	4
Ensuring that children do their homework				
Taking part in decision making and the governance of the school				
Raising funds for the school				
Appointment of staff				
Assisting in extra-curricular activities				
Having a say in the development of the curriculum				
Providing background information on the pupil to the teacher				
Resolving behavioural problems				

(6)

(7)

(8)

(9)

(10)

(11)

(12)

(13)

ARE THERE ANY OTHER CATEGORIES YOU WOULD LIKE TO INCLUDE. PLEASE SPECIFY.

-----  
-----  
-----

4. The following questions have been designed to establish your views on the annual parents' evening held by schools under the House of Delegates:

- (a) Are you of the opinion that parents are given information that they could not otherwise have received?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(14)

- (c) Which lot of parents do you normally get to meet?

Parents of bright pupils

	1
--	---

Parents of weak pupils

	2
--	---

Mixed lot of parents

	3
--	---

(15)

- (f) Are you of the opinion that the meeting should be called for

the parents of pupils of the whole school

	1
--	---

the parents of pupils of a specific standard

	2
--	---

the parents of selected groups of pupils

	3
--	---

(16)

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- (g) Are there any group/groups not mentioned in (f) above that you would like to include?  
PLEASE SPECIFY
- 
- 

6. Are you of the opinion that there is a healthy involvement of parents in the education of the children in your school?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(17)

7. Notwithstanding your response to question 6 above, are you of the opinion that there is a need to have workshops to orientate the teachers with regard to their role in maximising parental involvement in education?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(18)

8. Do you agree with the following statement?  
Parental involvement in education is a field that entails so much specialised knowledge, that it warrants a slot in the curriculum of colleges of education and universities.

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(19)

9. Are you of the opinion that parental involvement, if not controlled, can threaten the internal sovereignty of the school?

YES

	1
--	---

NO

	2
--	---

(20)

10. What is your opinion with regard to educators making house calls?

It serves no useful purpose and it falls outside the call of an educator's duty

	1
--	---

It serves a useful purpose but it falls outside the call of an educator's duty

	2
--	---

It serves a useful purpose and it falls within the call of an educator's duty

	3
--	---

(21)

11. Do you have a means of eliciting the resources available to your school from the parent community in terms of expertise?

YES

	1
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NO

	2
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(22)

12. Are there opportunities afforded to the teacher and parent for working together? If so, what are these opportunities?

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13. Some schools in the United States of America give teachers two planning periods a day during which time they may confer with parents or set up appointments for meetings at other times. Are you of the opinion that such a strategy is implementable in your school?

YES

	1
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NO

	2
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(23)

14. You may want to comment on this. Please feel free to do so.

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15. Is there a need (in your opinion) to have a waiting room, specifically, for parents in your school?

YES

	1
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NO

	2
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(24)

16. How do you rate the attitudes of the secretaries in your school?

FRIENDLY  
AND  
HOSPITABLE

1	2	3	4
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COLD,  
UNFRIENDLY  
AND  
BUSINESSLIKE

(25)

17. Are there any suggestions you would like to  
make with regard to improving parent  
involvement in education?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

Yours faithfully

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Mr.M.Perumal