

**THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF  
PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
RURAL AREAS IN NORTHERN PROVINCE**

by

**HASANI PIUS RISIMATI**

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**SUPERVISOR: DR JN VAN WYK**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that **THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS IN NORTHERN PROVINCE** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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**H.P. RISIMATI**

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**Date**

(i)

## **SUMMARY**

This study explores the role of the principal in the management of parent involvement in secondary schools in Northern Province. A literature study investigated existing theories and models of parent involvement; parent involvement in the South African context and the provision of education in South Africa in historical perspective. It also investigated the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement.

A qualitative investigation in three secondary schools in Northern Province was done. Data were gathered by means of participant observation, in-depth interviews with principals and focus-group interviews with teachers and three parents on the school governing bodies. Analysed data revealed the following findings: principals lack knowledge on parent involvement and schools lack policies and organisational structures dealing with parent involvement as well as home-school relations.

As a result of these findings, there is a need to equip principals with ways in which they can involve parents in their schools.

## **KEY TERMS**

Parent involvement: Theories, models, advantages of.

Managerial role of principals relating to parent involvement

Education: Provision of education in rural communities of Northern Province.

Qualitative enquiry: In education; in-depth interviews; focus-group interviews; data analysis.

(ii)

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS DEDICATED TO:**

**MY CHILDREN:**

**VONGANI, RHULANI AND KULANI**

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Parent involvement is accepted throughout the world as having many benefits. Many of these benefits particularly those pertaining to improved learner achievement can be linked to effective schools or quality schools (Swap 1993:1). As it is the overarching tasks of principals to manage the schools in such a way that the school is effective, it follows that principals should also deal with parent involvement within their schools.

In the same vein, Van der Westhuizen and Basson (1991:425) argue that: "It is an important management task of the principal to activate parents to a partnership with the school and to ensure reciprocal communication between the school and the home." In this way the potential of parents can be tapped and their constructive contribution to the school ensured.

Van Schalkwyk (1990:19-24) supports the importance of parent involvement by stating that:

- Parents as natural educators of the child bear the chief responsibility for the learner's instruction and education.
- Parent involvement in education is juridically prescribed.
- It guarantees the maintenance as well as promotion of the community values.
- The intellectual development of the child calls for parent-teacher co-operation.

Bastiani (1995:7) underscores the importance of parent involvement by adding that from birth to age 16,85 percent of the child's waking hours is spent in the home and 15 percent in the school.

Since the 1994 democratic election, the national government of South Africa has expressed concern about the lack of involvement of parents in the academic activities of the learners. The fact that the Central Government has made the institution of governing bodies at schools compulsory demonstrates that the government considers parent involvement essential to

improving education in the country (1996:14). A more comprehensive programme of parent involvement is needed. The principal, as the head of the school management team is often instrumental in ensuring that parents are included in many aspects of parent involvement. However, having a number of parents serving on a school governing body is not sufficient in itself to ensure that all the benefits associated with parents involvement are obtained (cf Chapter 2).

From my experience as a teacher and Head of Department in a secondary school since 1986, I have found that only a small number of parents in rural areas of Northern Province are actively involved in their children's schools. Likewise, I have also observed that principals of schools in the area do not seem to be encouraging or promoting parent involvement. My concern regarding this lack of commitment to parent involvement lent impetus to my decision to undertake this research.

### **1.1.1 Parent involvement: General**

Defining the phrase 'parent involvement' is not an easy task as the phrase is used to encompass a broad spectrum of activities (Van Wyk 1996:1). Any research on parent involvement needs to begin with a greater understanding of the concept and the ways in which this could improve schools. The problem is compounded by the fact that "involvement", "participation", "collaboration", et cetera, are used synonymously. Moreover, the meaning and definition of the phrase 'parent involvement' differs widely. For example, Squelch and Lemmer (1994:93) define parent involvement as follows:

It is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities which may be educational or non educational. It extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children's homework at home.

The Unisa-Metropolitan Life Project for training teachers in parent involvement (1994:2) defines parent involvement as an active and supportive participatory activity which aims at achieving the objectives of education as fully as possible.

Chrispeels (1992:2) provides another perspective of home-school participation:

The mutual collaboration, support, and participation of families and school staff at home or at school site in activities and efforts that directly and positively affect success of children's progress in school.

Chrispeels (1992:2) goes on to explain that "the school has good parental involvement if there is a ready pool of volunteers who help to raise funds, provide other resources, and attend all meetings regularly called by the school".

Bastiani (1993:113) argues that it is perhaps more helpful to see home-school partnerships as "a process, a stage in a process or something to work towards rather than something that is a fixed state or readily achievable."

Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1997:8) suggest that parent involvement in the intellectual and social development of the child is essential and should be broadly defined. This means, according to Epstein et al (1997), that when one speaks of parent involvement it should ideally be a comprehensive programme. Epstein's typology of six areas of involvement fulfills these criteria and is extensively used throughout the world. Epstein (1996:215-216) identifies six areas of home-school relations:

- Parenting: Help all families fulfil their parenting tasks and create a learning environment at home.
- Communication: Communicate with families about school programmes and students' progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication.

- Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programmes.
- Learning at home: Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities as well as decision making.
- Decision-making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy through Parent Teacher Associations/Parent Teacher Organisations (PTA/PTO's), school councils, committees and other parental organisations.
- Collaborating with community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students and the school with business, agencies, and other groups and provide services to the community.

In this study parent involvement is broadly defined and therefore supports the idea of comprehensive programmes of parent involvement.

### **1.1.2 The benefits of parent involvement**

Chrispeels (1992:10) argues that the benefits and characteristics of parent involvement are similar to the characteristics of an effective school. As it is the task of the principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place within the school, the establishment and improvement of parent involvement becomes a key task of the principal.

Effective schools help parents to encourage and support their children's learning (Bastiani 1995:8). This indicates that effective schools are also schools that work hard to relate effectively to the parent body. The principal must provide opportunities for parents to see their children's work and discuss progress. Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:2) state that: "...there is a clear argument, supported by extensive and convincing evidence, that most effective education occurs when families and schools work together in a shared enterprise".

Swap (1993:1) supports the above by making the following statement:

Home-school partnership is no longer a luxury. There is an urgent need for schools to find ways to support the success of all our children. One element that we know contributes to successful children and successful schools across all population is parent involvement in children's education. When our focus is on improving the achievement of children at academic risk, partnership with families is not just useful - it is crucial.

The following literature indicates that improved home-school relations benefits all the role players: learners, parents, teachers and the school.

Very briefly, effective parent involvement benefits learners as it improves the student's academic achievement (Dauber & Epstein 1993:53); improves student's attitude to learning (Henderson 1987:4); decreases drop-out rates ( Lemmer & Van Wyk 1996:5); improves behaviour and school attendance (Lemmer & Van Wyk 1996:5); and promotes the role of the school as a joint, social responsibility.

In addition to the above, it is also observed that parent involvement in children's education can have positive effects on parents. This is achieved because effective home-school relations increases the parents' self-esteem (Lemmer & Van Wyk 1996:7) and decreases their feeling of isolation from being responsible for the education of their children; gives them a better understanding of what is happening at school (Swap 1993:10; Gorton 1983:440) and helps parents' become more socially responsible people.

Effective parent involvement also benefits school and teachers. These benefits are attained because teacher's improved knowledge of the child's home situation can positively influence teaching (Squelch & Lemmer 1994:93), and parent involvement can lessen the teacher's workload (Van Schalkwyk 1990:25).

After extensive research, Dauber and Epstein (1993:63) concluded that regardless of parents' education, family size, children's ability or level, parents are more likely to become involved in their children's education if they perceive that the school has strong practices to involve

parents at school and at home. Epstein (1990:109) indicates that parent involvement will take place if the school has a policy and programmes for that purpose. It is the principal's task, together with his management and school governing body to see to it that such policies and programmes prevail and succeed in secondary schools.

### **1.1.3 Parent involvement in South African schools**

In South Africa parents are now being recognised by government as essential to effective schools and the transformation process of education. However, in general, this involvement is often restricted to the activities of school governing bodies. Governing bodies were established in terms of the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996:14) and provincial laws and regulations. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

The White Paper on Education and Training (DE 1995a:22) highlights the provision for parent involvement in education by stating that:

The principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system, by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups and role players.

In the same fashion, the report of the committee to review the organisation, governance, and funding of schools (The Hunter Report) indicates that the principal should facilitate the establishment of a governing body and assist in its operation (DE 1995b:58). The principal should communicate with the chairperson and members of the governing body as required.

The law now provides for parental participation in school governance, but makes no provision for other types of parent involvement. This unfortunately, will not attain all the benefits of effective parent involvement referred to earlier. The extent of this problem is clearly illustrated by Heystek and Paquette (1999:194) who refer to studies showing that the average of "good" participation from parents in all the possible activities is only 30 per cent.

#### **1.1.4 The managerial role of the principal**

Traditionally, the principal was appointed because he was a competent teacher, had a certain number of years of teaching experience and an acceptable personality. Because of numerous changes and increase in the complexity of the school, the qualities expected of a principal have also changed.

The role of a principal is marked by complex and diverse tasks in terms of educational management. Most researchers include the following when describing the managerial role of the principal: planning, organising, controlling, evaluating, supervising, co-ordinating, budgeting, staff-development, guidance, programme development and leadership (Sergiovanni & Corbally 1984; Sergiovanni 1990). The principal is also expected to fulfil the roles of facilitator, staff developer, a visionary in setting the school's mission, an instructional agent, as well as pastoral guide (Manz & Sims 1990:102). In exercising his task the principal should be able to listen, clarify and communicate with the school leadership team (Ellis 1996:54).

Professor Kader Asmal, Minister of Education, set out nine priorities for education in South Africa (DE 1999:10). Priority number 3 states that the principal has a crucial role of professional and administrative leadership and is responsible for high standards of teaching and learning in the school. Thus the argument of Van der Westhuizen (1996:136) that there is a direct link between effective principals and effective schools is supported.

Gorton (1983:20) identifies parent involvement as one of the managerial roles of the principal. Because of the social problems such as single parenthood and child molestation, it is imperative for the principal to have profound working knowledge of parental guidance. The principal, among others, must act as a public relations expert, and be able to meet the constant demands made on his time by parents (Manz & Sims 1990:102). The role of the principal is to participate in community activities in connection with educational matters and community building (RSA 1999:14). DE (1999:10) states that:

The principal needs to forge a working partnership with the governing body, so that they can jointly serve the vision and mission of the school in the community. Both parties require guidance in exercising their respective roles.

The Government Gazette no 19767 of February 1999 (RSA 1999:12-13) indicates the following duties of the principal:

- Provide professional leadership within the school.
- To be responsible for professional management of public schools.
- To serve on the governing body of the school and render all necessary assistance to the governing body in the performance of their functions in terms of the South African Schools Act, 1996.
- To meet parents concerning learners' progress and conduct.

The role of the principal is to initiate change and set a positive school climate that will culminate in open communication channels among learners, staff and parents (Van der Westhuizen 1996:2). This means that the principal should use a democratic leadership style and supportive educational management. This also indicates that effective schools have effective principals. Thus, the main task of the principal is to strive towards having an effective school - a school where things "work". Chrispeels (1992:10) argues that the benefits of parent involvement are similar to the characteristic of effective school, and should therefore be pursued.

The principal's major task is to make a difference. That difference should be evident in learners, teachers, parents and all others associated with the school (Drake & Rose 1994:183).

### **1.1.5 Rural communities in Northern Province**

Schools are influenced by the communities they serve. Likewise, the type and extent of parent involvement is similarly affected. It is therefore important to take cognizance of the context within which education takes place before embarking on any research.

In South Africa the education system is organised under a single national education department, supported by nine provincial departments of education. Northern Province is one of the nine provinces of the Republic of South Africa which needs to provide education to its constituents. This province is one of the largest and most underdeveloped provinces of the Republic of South Africa (Ramathlodi 1994 par 6 & 11). This underdevelopment is particularly evident in rural areas of the province where many parents are illiterate, and most schools ill resourced (Bot 1997:1-4). Such parents are difficult to reach whereas schools serving such communities are actually the type of schools where the benefits of parent involvement are most needed. Therefore, research into the role principals play in improving or establishing parent involvement in their schools is of such great importance.

In a policy speech, Ngoako Ramathlodi, Premier of Northern Province; indicated that 91 percent of people in Northern Province live in rural areas (Ramathlodi 1994 par 12). These are areas of the country which shows unmistakable signs of lack of parent involvement (Heysteck & Paquette 1999). Thus governing bodies in rural areas should be given the support they need to be strong and viable (DE 1999: 10). This support must be given by the principal and his management team.

Rural schools generally include schools which are found on white - owned commercial farms, that is, farm schools, and schools which are found in villages (McGregor 1992:208). School found on private farms are generally referred to as farm schools and cater largely for the children of black farm workers. In the villages and surroundings, community schools are found. These schools are generally built and maintained by communities (DE 1995b:18). Unofficially these categories of schools still exist although the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996: 17) only differentiates between public and private schools. In general these rural schools are still ill-resourced and often staffed by un- and under qualified staff. This is in spite of the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996:25) which indicates that: "The state must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure proper exercise of the right of the learners to education and the redress of past inequalities and education provisions".

Although these types of schools should receive more funding according to the principle of redress, in reality not much has changed and learning still has to take place under difficult circumstances. This means that parents are asked to partially finance the education of their children. In the same vein the Hunter Report (DE 1995b:xv) argues that: "The provision of quality education for all at no direct cost to parents and communities is not affordable from the resources currently allocated by the state for education".

Schools in Northern Province generally compare poorly to schools in the other provinces. Bot (1997:2-4) indicates the following situation in the Northern Province:

- Less than 15% of schools have electricity;
- A shocking 27% of schools are not suitable for education because the majority of the buildings need repairs;
- 5% of schools have library facilities;
- 73% of schools use pit latrines.

In his opening address to parliament on 25 June 1999, President Thabo Mbeki indicated that the government is now in a position to implement a programme for the integrated development of rural areas (Sowetan, 2 July 1999a:13). Mbeki indicates that the government should deliver to the poorest of the poor. However, in the rural areas of Northern Province very little has changed, and insufficient classrooms, and overcrowding is still found

The White Paper on Education and Training RSA (1995a:67) states that:

Unavoidably, because inequality is so deep-rooted in our educational history and dominates the present provision of schooling, a new policy for school provision must be a policy for increasing access and retention of Black students, achieving equality in public funding, eliminating illegal discrimination, creating democratic governance, rehabilitating schools and raising the quality of performance.

The Sowetan (1999b:1) indicated that the Northern Province produced poor matric results. In 1998 the pass rate was 35,2 percent whereas in 1999 the pass rate was 37,5 percent. The above is another reason why the benefits of parent involvement are needed.

## **1.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION**

The above indicates that parent involvement in education can contribute to improving the academic achievement of learners. This is of paramount importance in rural secondary schools in Northern Province. It is therefore important to find more effective ways of involving parents in these schools. Research indicates that the principal can play an important role in achieving this. Against this background a need exists to investigate the role played by principals in rural areas in the management of parent involvement.

The following questions facilitate the demarcation of the problem more clearly:

- What are the prevailing theories of parent involvement in education, particularly as pertaining to schools in deprived rural areas?
- What provision has been made for parent involvement within the South African school system?
- What is the managerial role of the principal, particularly relating to the management of parent involvement?
- How do teachers, principals and governing body members see the role of the principal in initiating and encouraging parent involvement in rural secondary schools in the Northern Province?
- How can these findings contribute to assisting principals in managing parent involvement more effectively?

## **1.3 AIMS OF STUDY**

In the light of the above research problem, this research attempts to achieve the following aims:

- This research aims at providing a through background to parent involvement in education by studying different approaches to parent involvement, particularly as implemented within deprived communities. The provision of education and the role of parents in the South African context are also examined.
- The investigation also aims at examining the managerial role of the principal in general, as well as how this pertains to managing parent involvement.
- Since research has shown that parent involvement world-wide has profound benefits for learners, teachers and parents, and since it has also shown that the managerial role of the principal is vital, it is intended to investigate the role played by principals in rural areas in managing parent involvement. These will be done by means of a qualitative study. Knowledge thus gained may be used to make recommendations with a view to improving the role principals need to play in facilitating parent involvement.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this research is to probe the role of the rural secondary school principal in the management of parent involvement. To carry out this research and accomplish the goal, the first method used by the researcher will be **literature study** of local and international sources on parent involvement such as journals, official documents on South African education including legislation, recognised authoritative books, research papers on related fields, periodicals as well as newspapers. This literature study is focussed on South African education in general and the rural communities of Northern Province in particular. However, literature with a universal perspective and context is also included.

The second method used by the researcher is qualitative research. This is a research method which investigates data which is in the form of words rather than numbers (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:64). Moreover, the phenomenon is observed in its natural setup (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh 1990:33). This means that qualitative research studies qualities or entities and seeks to understand them in a particular context (Smith 1987:174).

Qualitative inquirers believe that it is impossible to develop a meaningful understanding of human experience without taking into account the interplay of both the inquirers and participants' values and beliefs (Aray et al 1990:446). This suggests that the researcher needs to experience what others are experiencing. Qualitative research looks for the complexities of human decision-making and behaviour (Johnson 1994:7), which is particularly relevant to this study.

In a qualitative research, experience has shown that although all data are coloured by the meaning which the participant attaches to them – a meaning which may not be fully shared by the researcher – such data are nevertheless the rational outcome of the way the participant sees the world (Johnson 1994:7).

Schumacher and McMillan (1993:372) indicate that qualitative research requires a plan for choosing sites and participants for the commencement of collection of data. In this research, the rural areas of Malamulele in Northern Province are chosen since it can be said to be the same as other rural areas of South Africa. It has permanent black inhabitants and the majority of them are poverty stricken. Research will be conducted in three secondary schools because seemingly, parent involvement is more lacking in this phase of schooling.

The selection of all participants is done by means of purposeful sampling. The researcher will identify information-rich participants because they are likely to be "... knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating" (Schumacher & MacMillan 1993:378). Accessibility and willingness to participate also plays a role in determining the participants to be included.

Participant observation will also be done in order to see in which way the principal is involving parents in the school. This will allow the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality from the point of view of the stakeholders. In this regard, the researcher will observe a few meetings of school governing bodies to determine to what extent principals are encouraging parent involvement.

The researcher will interview principals to find out what they understand under the term "parent involvement", and whether they think it is important. The researcher also wants to find out how principals see their roles in initiating and encouraging parent involvement. The researcher will try to determine what principals are actually doing regarding parent involvement in their schools.

In the interview with teachers, the researcher wants to determine if the principal is informing them about parent involvement and the benefits thereof. The researcher also wants to determine if the principal is encouraging parent involvement in the school.

In the interview with parents, the researcher needs to determine what they understand under the term 'parent involvement'. The researcher wants to find out if they feel that the principal is doing anything to encourage or improve parent involvement in the school. For this reason parents serving on the school governing body were chosen as participants as it was felt that they are in a good position to evaluate what role principals are playing in encouraging parent involvement.

All the interviews will be recorded on audio tape and then transcribed. Thereafter, the researcher intends to discover how themes relate to one another, what patterns emerge and what implications there are.

Qualitative enquiry holds that the research for generalisation (law-like) statements or theories that are invariant over time and place is misguided (Ary et al 1990:445). Qualitative research aims to generate hypotheses and theories from data that emerge. It is, however, not the aim of the research to establish cause and effect relationships under experimental conditions. Rather, the research is designed to be exploratory and descriptive and to describe and understand what role principals are playing in parent involvement in rural areas of the Northern Province.

## **1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY**

As indicated in 1.4 above, this study attempts to identify and investigate the role that the rural secondary school principals in Northern Province are playing in encouraging and managing active parent involvement in the education of their children. Rural secondary school principals and parents will be selected by means of purposeful sampling as participants in this investigation. Research will be conducted in rural secondary schools of Malamulele because of proximity and because Malamulele can be said to be representative of other rural areas.

## **1.6 DEFINING CONCEPTS**

### **1.6.1 The role of the principal**

Management is seen as one of the main roles of principals and relates, among others, to the facilitation of effective teaching and learning and the involvement of parents in the process. As such, the managerial role of the principal is of importance to this study.

Management is seen as one of the main roles of principals and relates, among others, to the facilitation of effective teaching and learning and the involvement of parents in the process.

Management is a continuous process through which members of an organisation seek to co-ordinate their activities and utilise their resources in order to fulfil the various tasks of the organisation as efficiently as possible (Hoyle 1981:8). In the same vein Manz & Sims (1990:410) define management as :

The process of planning , organising actuating and controlling an organisation's operations in order to achieve a co-ordination of human and material resources essential in the effective and efficient attainment of objectives.

According to Theron and Bothma (1990:179), educational management is based on authority, freedom, orderliness and managerial dynamics, and always has an educational aim. Educational management can be best described as a specific type of work in education which comprises

those regulative tasks or actions executed by a person or body in a position of authority in a specific field or area of regulation, so as to allow formative education to take place (Van der Westhuizen 1996:55).

For the purpose of this study, educational management means all the management activities or management tasks of principals, in conjunction with their management teams, with the intention of facilitating effective teaching and learning.

### **1.6.2 Parent**

According to the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996:4) the term parent refers to:

- The parent or guardian of the learner;
- The person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or
- The person who undertakes to fulfil the obligation of a person referred to above, towards the learner's education at school.

Thus, Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:2) suggest including biological parents, guardians, grandparents or any other adult who is responsible for the child when attempting to establish or improve home-school relations.

For the purpose of this study, the word parent would mean anyone who has children in his or her care and who is willing to take an interest in their education.

### **1.6.3 Rural school**

Rural means areas outside the main urban centres, with a low population density and consists of either dispersed settlements or small towns and villages (John 1993:162). Rural means belonging to, characteristic of, the country life, in contrast to the town or urban life (Audrey 1990:275)

For the purpose of this study, rural schools are defined as schools which are situated in remote areas that are infrastructurally underdeveloped. In the South African context such areas are mainly occupied by black people. The researcher will use "black" as signifying particular racial groups in the country. This is not meant to be derogatory in any way, but is necessary in a country which, until recently has been racially divided and until 1994 had a racially based education system. This means that many areas and schools still reflect the racial divides of the past. This means that in this study, the majority of participants will belong to black racial groups.

## **1.7 CHAPTER DIVISION**

Chapter 2 deals with literature review on parent involvement focussing on the different approaches to parent involvement. A report on parent involvement in South Africa is included. The chapter ends with a discussion of the managerial role of the principal regarding parent involvement.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to investigate the management of parent involvement by school principals.

In chapter 4 an exposition of data analysis is given, and the results regarding the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement in rural communities in Northern Province are discussed.

Chapter 5 includes a synopsis of the findings and deals with the recommendations emanating from the study.

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

In most societies, particularly the rural communities of Malamulele in Northern Province, a gap exists between parents and the school. The principal has an important role to play to ensure

that this gap is bridged, because the smooth running of the school today requires that the school, parents and learners work together.

In chapter 2, a broad interpretation of the literature review on parent involvement in secondary schools is done. The literature review will be specifically within the South African context.

The second part of the next chapter will present a literature review of the managerial role of the principal concerning parent involvement. This will be done as a background to the subsequent research on the role of the principal in the management of parent involvement. Epstein's typology of parent involvement is to be interlinked with this discussion, as it is a comprehensive programme of parent involvement in education of learners, and as such accepted as involving most parents and thus having the most benefits.

## CHAPTER 2

### PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AND THE MANAGERIAL ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, most principals have kept parents away from the school situation because they regarded them as critics. Like-wise, education has been seen as the exclusive domain of the school, and parental participation has, therefore, been limited. More recently, however, there has been a move from this practice towards an increasing awareness and recognition of the central role of parents as significant partners in the education process. The previous chapter indicated that effective education requires that both teachers and parents participate meaningfully in their children's education (Riley 1994:16).

Parent involvement in the education of learners will not occur automatically. It is therefore important that the principal and management staff should establish, encourage and manage participation of all relevant sectors/shareholders in education. According to Van Schalkwyk (1990:116), efficient management is a precondition of effective parent involvement in the education of children.

The message then, seems clear: both principals and parents need to consider the collaborative involvement in children's education as important. The question to be asked is: Why are parents not effectively involved?

Epstein (1990:109) argues that it is because the school, and by implication school management, does not have a policy of involving parents. Epstein (1990:109) elaborates:

At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies and teacher practices and family practices are more important than race, parental education, family size, marital status, and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education.

To fully understand why parents are not involved in the education of their children, a greater understanding of what constitutes parent involvement is needed. The primary goal of this chapter is to present existing models of parent involvement. The benefits for parent involvement as briefly mentioned in 1.1.2 will also be discussed in more detail in this chapter, as well as the way in which parent involvement is conceptualised and practised in South African schools. In all this, the principal plays an important role.

## **2.2 FRAMEWORKS AND APPROACHES TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Family-school relationships are characterised by competing viewpoints and ideologies, widely differing experiences and contradictory arguments and evidence. Likewise, the theoretical stance of the role players towards home-school relations is a modifying factor influencing the outcome of these relations (Van Wyk 1996:40). This is because the degree to which educators and parents are influenced by a specific theoretical stance will influence the extent to which collaboration between the home and the school exists. Substantial theorising has been done on this topic to which attention will now be given.

Shartrand, Weiss, Keider and Lopez (1997:20) describe a framework which recognises four approaches to training in family involvement which can be used alone or in combination. The approaches illustrate the kind of attitudes, knowledge and skills that principals can acquire to increase their relationships with the families of learners. These approaches are: the functional approach, parent empowerment approach, cultural approach and social capital approach.

## **2.3 THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH**

Basically, the functional approach emphasises the roles and responsibilities of teachers and parents in promoting student achievement (Shartrand et al 1997:20). Thus the emphasis here is on parent involvement which will include as many parents as possible in as many roles as possible, with the aim of improving learner achievement. An example of the functional approach can be found in the work of Epstein.

### 2.3.1 The Epstein theory of parent involvement

Epstein has written extensively on parent involvement and is widely quoted, particularly within the United States of America (USA). In this study, only the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's typology of parent involvement will be discussed.

### 2.3.2 The theory of overlapping spheres of influence

In the 1980's Epstein (1996:214) developed a theoretical perspective called "overlapping spheres of influence" based on data collected from teachers, parents and students. This was based on a social organisational perspective that posits that the most effective families and schools have overlapping, shared goals and a common mission concerning children, and conduct some of their tasks collaboratively. Later, a third sphere of influence, the community, was added.

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence includes both an *external* and *internal* model. The external model of overlapping spheres of influence recognises that there are three major contexts in which students learn and grow: the family, the school and community. These spheres may be drawn together or pushed apart (Epstein et al 1997:3). These forces are:

- (i) Time: To account for changes in the ages and grade level of learners;
- (ii) The philosophies, policies and practices of the family;
- (iii) The philosophies, policies and practices of the school.

(Epstein 1990:103).

In the external model there are some practices that schools, families and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development.

The internal model of interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between

individuals at home, at school and in the community. These social relations may be studied and enacted at an institutional level (i.e. when a school invites all families) and at an individual level (i.e. when a teacher and parent meet in conference or talk by phone). The model locates the students at the centre of the interaction between families and school. Epstein et al (1997:3) indicate that this is so because "the inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development and success in schools".

School, family and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energise, and motivate students to produce their own success (Epstein et al 1997:3). Epstein et al (1997:3) assume that if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of students, they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, learn other skills, develop yet unearthened talents and to remain at school.

The model also indicates that learners are crucial for the success of school, family and community partnerships. This is so because "students are often their parents' main source of information about school (Epstein et al 1997:3)". The assumption made by the theory of overlapping influence is that there are mutual interests and influences of families and school that can be more or less successfully promoted by the policies and programmes of the organisations and the actions and attitudes of individuals in the organisations (Epstein 1987:130).

According to Epstein (1987:131), when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required by teachers and parents to produce educated and successful students. Their combination of labour pushes the spheres of family and school influence together, increases interaction between parents and school personnel about the developing child and creates school-like families and family-like schools.

The third sphere of influence, the community, together with groups of parents, create school-like opportunities, events and programmes that reinforce, recognise, and reward students for good progress, creativity, and excellence (Epstein 1995:702). Communities also create family-

like settings, services and events to enable families to better support their children. Community-minded families and students help their neighbourhood and other families. When all these concepts combine, children experience learning communities or caring communities.

### **2.3.3 Epstein's typology of parent involvement**

Epstein (1996:215-216) identifies six areas in which the family, school and the community should be involved. She indicates that there will be more or less overlap and shared responsibilities depending on whether few or many practices of the six types of involvement are working. Each practice opens opportunities for varied interaction of teachers, parents, students and others. The six types of involvement are: assisting parents in their parenting skills; communication between home and school and school and home; volunteering; decision making; learning at home; and collaborating with the community. These areas were described in section 1.1.1. Each type presents particular challenges for its successful design and implementation (Epstein 1996:216). Lastly, each type is likely to lead to different results for learners, teaching practice and for school climate (cf.1.1.1). This framework helps educators develop more comprehensive programmes of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practice (Epstein et al 1997:7).

### **2.3.4 The role of the principal in the functional approach**

According to Shartrand et al (1997:25), the attitude that all educators should learn skills and sensitivity in dealing with parents should be maintained. The principal should know the benefits and barriers of parent involvement. He should have skills in involving parents of all backgrounds in school as well as knowledge of the role of the principal in promoting or limiting parent involvement.

Shartrand et al (1997:29) indicate that the principal should understand the different cultural beliefs, lifestyles, childrearing practices, home structures, and living environment when using this approach to parent involvement. Furthermore, Shartrand et al (1997:30) argue that there should be effective interpersonal communication which will help principals to deal with

defensive behaviour, distrust, hostility and frustrated parents. Shartrand et al (1997:36) also indicate that the principal should develop skills in involving parents in their children's learning outside the classroom.

Shartrand et al (1997:45) point out the following roles the principal should develop if he were to use the functional approach to parental involvement:

- Skills in supporting and involving parents as decision makers, advocates, curriculum developers and the like.
- Skills in sharing information and leadership to help parents make decisions.
- Skills in interacting with parents on equal footing.

It is apparent from the above that the principal who is committed to instituting a comprehensive model of parent involvement in his/her school will need a wide variety of skills as well as the ability to ensure that all staff share in these skills.

## **2.4 THE PARENT EMPOWERMENT APPROACH**

In this approach the emphasis is on the strengths of disenfranchised families, that is families without much power, the disadvantaged groups (Riley 1994:14). The empowerment approach is based on the belief that schools are key institutions in local communities and thus are in a special position to enhance or retard the empowerment process. An example of the parent empowerment approach can be found in the works of Swap, in particular her "School to home" model.

### **2.4.1 Swap's 'School-to-home' model**

According to Swap (1992:580) this model emphasises that educators specify what parents should do to help their children at home. This can be done in two ways. Firstly, parents will help their children's learning by endorsing the importance of schooling and making sure that their children meet the minimum academic and behavioural requirements. Parents are expected

to ascertain that their children complete homework. Secondly, parents need to spend enough time with their children to transfer cultural capital to them. Swap (1992:58) indicates that the latter includes the way of being, knowing, writing, talking, and thinking which characterises those who are successful within the dominant culture. Thus schools hope that parents can in some way contribute to the cultural capital of the child. A minimum version of this expectation is that parents will read to their children and will listen to their children reading to them.

Swap (1993:30) indicates that the school personnel are responsible for defining goals and programmes used by the parents to support the school. Two-way communication is not sought because the goal is for parents to understand and support the school's objectives. Parent programmes based on the school-to-home transmission model sometimes have components that show unwillingness to regard parents as equal partners having important strengths (Swap 1992:59).

Swap (1992:60) indicates that parent education programmes are designed to assist parents in becoming more effective and to instruct them in the values and skills needed to do so. Swap (1993:31) indicates that parents should be trained to parent, talk to their children and interact with their children more. The school can play an important role in teaching parents how to support learning at home. In the parent empowerment model, parents are encouraged to become involved in social action in the community and to finally become active in the schools their children are attending (Cochran & Dean 1991:262).

According to Swap (1992:60-61), the limitations to the School-to-home model of parent involvement are:

- Parents may not be able to devote enough time and energy to parent involvement activities.
- There is a possibility that the promise of equal opportunities through education and hard work could be false.
- It may be difficult to draw clear boundaries between the roles of school and home in formal education.

- There is a danger of demeaning the value of the child's culture in the effort to transmit the values and goals of the social mainstream.

#### **2.4.2 The role of the principal in the parent empowerment approach**

According to Shartrand et al (1997:25), the attitude that all parents want what is best and want to be good parents should be maintained. Parents are the children's first educators. The principal should know that most useful knowledge of rearing children can be found at home. Therefore, the principal should respect the role of the home in the nurturance and education of children.

When employing the parent empowerment approach, the principal should have knowledge of the history of disenfranchised families (Shartrand et al 1997:29). He must have knowledge of the effect of a family's disadvantaged status on its interaction with the school. The principal should not control parents, rather the parents' views and need should be understood.

The principal should have skills in making parents feel valued by inviting them to contribute their knowledge in the classroom and in the school (Shartrand et al 1997:39).

According to Shartrand et al (1997:45), this approach also indicates skills in promoting political empowerment for parents through:

- Advocating shared decision making at school.
- Informing parents of governance roles in the school.
- Recruiting parents to sit on boards and councils.
- Preventing parents' voices from being overridden in meetings.

Riley (1994:19) indicates that the principal should equip parents with the information about language used in schools with a view to help parents understand the functioning of power structures. Empowered parents will be able to make independent decisions and to act autonomously with a view to making a contribution towards the development of their children.

The principal should ensure that his staff understands this approach and they have the necessary skills to implement it.

## **2.5 THE CULTURAL COMPETENCE APPROACH**

According to Shartrand et al (1997:20), this theory sees the school as an inclusive setting where diversity (i.e. people belonging to different cultures) is welcomed. Basically the approach here is to respect and use the cultural diversity found within the school. Examples of the cultural competence approach can be found in the works of Gordon (School impact model) and Swap (Curriculum enrichment model). This theory explains the influence of culture in the education of learners.

### **2.5.1 Gordon's School impact model**

Gordon (1977:76) indicates that most of the influence in this model goes from the home to the school. In this model parents are involved in the school as volunteers or parent advisory committees, with a view of changing the school so that it is more responsive to the needs of the family. The assumption is that if educators and other agency workers become more attuned to the home and its culture, then a better working relationship with parents will lead to greater effectiveness in educating learners. The school impact model is defined as one based on teachers learning from parents and visa versa (Gordon 1977:77). Gordon (in Berger 1991:216) states that "Teachers and school administrators, or any other professional ...need to learn new attitudes towards parents, new skills in communication and group process and sharing".

Gordon (1977:77) indicates that this model changes the way parents and professional educators see each other. The premise is that parents develop a more positive attitude to the school when they are involved in school activities.

### 2.5.2 Swap's curriculum enriched model

Swap (1992:61) indicates a philosophy of interactive learning which undergirds this model. There should be mutual respect between parents and educators, mutual learning and mutually developed objectives (Swap 1993:38). Thus, in order for schools to become productive and comfortable environment for children, they will have to meaningfully incorporate the familial and cultural skills and values learned in homes and communities.

Swap (1992:61) identifies the valued outcomes that justify parent involvement as: learners' successful achievement in the mainstream and the valuing of the goals and beliefs of the non-mainstream culture. This model differs from the other models of parental involvement in that its assumptions do not necessarily permeate all aspects of the school culture and structure.

In the curriculum enriched model, parents and/or educators recognise the importance of continuity between home and school. Epstein (1992:1139) indicates the importance of a home-to-school connection. Interestingly, if students succeed, schools and families both claim responsibility, and sometimes acknowledge each other's contribution to the children's success.

Cultural based differences in communication styles, expectations for teachers, parents and children, and views on the best way to raise and educate children can create a discontinuity between families and schools (Swap 1992:62). Van Wyk (1996:53) suggests the solution to the discontinuity between the home and school is:

- To recruit more teachers who respect and value the child's culture into the school.
- To bring more parents into the school.
- Parents or teachers learn the difference between their culture.
- To provide a lexicon for the children that would allow the children to become fluent in and appreciative of both cultures.

Swap (1992:63) indicates that this model present problems when used to underpin parent involvement programmes. Firstly, it should be acknowledged that it is not easy to decipher the

important elements of another person's background. Moreover teachers may need to be responsive to children and families from several different cultures and traditions. Without consultation, attempts to respond to this variation may result in fragmentation of teachers and instructional programmes. Some teachers may feel that it is unethical to maintain and celebrate cultural differences.

### **2.5.3 The role of the principal in the cultural competence model**

Shartrand et al (1997:25) indicate that minority and low-socioeconomic status (SES) learners can benefit academically from parent involvement in schools. The role of the principal in this approach is to have the ability of selecting appropriate themes in the curriculum, which will reflect the cultural diversity of the school.

Riley (1994:19) indicates that the principal should equip parents with the information about the language used with a view to help parents understand the functioning of the power structures. Empowered parents will be able to make independent decisions and to act autonomously with a view to making a contribution towards the development of children.

The principal should have knowledge about cultural influences on discipline, learning and childrearing practices. If the learner's culture is negative, it can serve as a hindering force to school improvement efforts (Robbins & Alvy 1995:24). The principal should therefore be able to reverse the negative stereotypes of parents, families, and community members (Shartrand et al 1997:29). The principal should be able to accommodate parent's preferences of parent programmes in school involvement activities (Shartrand et al 1997:42)

According to Jansen (1996:90), the management style of the principal can be regarded as an important aspect of the culture of the school. On the other hand, the culture of the school can influence the management style of the principal and visa versa. Furthermore, Jansen (1996:87-88) also indicated that rituals, ceremonies, school uniforms, school buildings, facilities and equipment are some of the things which indicate the culture of the school. As such, the

principal should know the culture of his/her school and must continually communicate it to parents, learners and teachers.

## 2.6 THE SOCIAL CAPITAL APPROACH

The social capital approach consists of families and schools' shared expectations and goals, which are reinforced through social interactions between children and adults. This means that the attitudes and ideas of children about the importance of education and learning are taken into consideration. This approach builds community support for education (Shartrand et al 1997:20). One example of such an approach to parent involvement is Coleman's theory of parent involvement.

### 2.6.1 Coleman's theory of parent involvement

Coleman (1987:32) argues that in recent times various factors have led to the weakening of family structures and an inability of the family to fulfil some of the tasks previously ascribed to it, such as the socialisation of the child. This has placed an additional burden on the school. Coleman (1987:35) argues that the home and school provide different inputs for the socialisation process of children. One group of inputs, opportunities, demands and reward, comes from school. Another group of inputs comes from the child's closer, more intimate and more persistent environment. These inputs can be loosely described as attitudes, efforts and conception of self, which is instilled mainly by the social environment of the home. Education comes from the reciprocal interaction between the qualities the child brings from the home and the qualities of the school. This shows that the principal

...can learn from parents-about child rearing practices and family skills and resources and tailor suggestions for involvement activities to meet the individual circumstances of each family (Shartrand et al 1997:33).

Many supportive educational practices are undertaken in the home outside the purview of the school. Families provide the building blocks that make learning possible (Coleman 1987:36).

This indicates that family variables play an important role in the learner's achievement at school. Likewise where family variables are absent, problems are likely to occur.

Coleman (1987:36) argues that families provide the social capital needed by school to optimise learners' outcomes. The social capital is seen as norms, the social networks, and the relationship between adults and children that are of importance for the learner's upbringing. Thus the failure to bridge the social and cultural background gap between home and school, may lie at the root of the poor academic performance of poor minority children. In the same fashion, Alsphaugh (1991:53) indicates that the socio-economic status is measured by a number of factors such as parents' educational level, parents' occupation, family income et cetera.

Shartrand et al (1997:29) indicate that the school and homes can have different norms and values, and that such differences influence partnership between home and school. Joyce and Weil (1996:59) contend that socio-economic differences are the greatest prediction of learners' success in school. Chrispeels (1992:7) adds that failure to close the gap in socio-economic status can also lead to disillusionment with the roles of advisory councils. This means that the principal must be able to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school which, otherwise, may result in poor academic achievement of many children.

Chrispeels (1992:5) indicates that socioeconomic status alone may not be as important as family values, attitudes, educational aspirations and cultural factors which influence family practices in regard to children's education and schooling. Chrispeels (1992:6) adds that poor families can be involved in practices that influence the learner's school success. In the same vein, Thompson (1992:38) argues that:

...poor people care just as much about their children as middle-income families; that poor people are not stupid. If you ask them to become involved but don't give them any real decisions to make, they're no more likely to become involved than you would under that circumstance.

According to Coleman (1987:37), the social capital of the home is declining. This is evidence in the absence of parents from home as well a decrease of exchange between parents and children about academic, social, economic and personal matters. Under such circumstances, the schools are obliged to play an even more significant role in children's lives.

### **2.6.2 The role of the principal in the social capital approach**

The principal should have knowledge of the social capital approach and parents' investment in their children's education (Shartrand et al 1997:25). He should be aware that schools and homes have different knowledge which influences partnership between home and school. The home and school may have different values emanating from different cultures and institutions. Therefore, principals should be able to manage conflict, should this occur as a result of different values.

The principal should be able to communicate values with a view of building trust among community members. Shartrand et al (1997:32) state that the principal should have skills in communicating with parents in a way that models how values will be transmitted between other members of society (parent-child, teacher-child, or parent-teacher).

Shartrand et al (1997:36) indicate that the principal should have skills in motivating parent involvement in home-learning activities, home visits and collaborating with the community. He should be able to involve parents in volunteering, attending school events, and fundraising. The principal should create social capital. He should be able to involve parents in designing one curriculum that represents shared values (Shartrand et al 1997:45). Once more, the principal should ensure that all members of the staff share this knowledge and are capable of involving parents and the community in schools.

## **2.7 RELEVANCE OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES**

Each of the approaches mentioned above are distinctive. But the commonalities outweigh the differences and add up to a new definition of what has usually been called parent involvement.

Davies (1993:377) lists three common themes of central importance, which should inform all educational endeavours.

- Provide success for all children: This means that no children should be labelled as likely failures because of social, economic or racial characteristics of their families or communities.
- Serving the whole child: Social, physical and academic growth and development are intrinsically linked. To foster cognitive and academic development, all other facets of development must be addressed by school, families and other institutions that affect the child.
- Shared responsibility: The social, emotional, physical and academic development of the child is a shared responsibility of the school, the family and the community. In order to promote the social and academic development of children, the key institutions must change their practices and their relationships with one another.

It is important for the school principal and his staff within the South African context to weigh their approach to parent involvement against these three themes. If not, one or more aspects of importance to the child may be lost.

## **2.8 ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The first chapter discussed the situation in rural areas of Northern Province where there is a dire need for parent involvement. Setting parent involvement is challenging and will initially take time. The question to be answered is: "Is it worth it?" The answer to this is affirmative as the literature review indicates that parent involvement programmes benefit all the role players: parents, teacher, school and community as a whole (Van Wyk 1996:34).

### **2.8.1 Advantages for learners**

According to Squelch and Lemmer (1994:93) the benefits of parent involvement includes improved school performance, reduced drop out rates, a decrease in delinquency and a more positive attitude towards the school.

Epstein (1990:111) indicates that students whose parents and teachers use frequent parent involvement practices showed a more positive attitude towards school; more regular homework habits; greater concurrence between the school and family practices; more familiarity between teacher and the parents; and more homework completed on weekends. This shows that parental involvement improves commitment to school work on the part of the learner.

Katz (1993:14) indicates that researchers conclude that children whose parents stay in touch with the school "...earn higher marks than children of similar aptitude and background whose parents are not involved". Dauber and Epstein (1995:53) support the above by stating that children are more successful learners at all grade levels if parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home. This shows that parent involvement can improve the learner's achievement at school.

Epstein et al (1997:2) indicate the advantages of parent involvement for the student by stating that "the main reason to create such a partnership is to help all youngsters succeed in school and later in life". In the same vein, Henderson and Berla (1994:1) state: "The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life".

Some studies identify parent involvement and support as a major factor in pupil achievement (Riley 1994:16; Purkey & Smith 1983:444). Epstein (1987:120) sums it up:

The evidence is clear that parental argument, activities, and interests at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements,

attitudes and aspirations, even after student ability and family socio-economic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasise schooling, let children know they do, and do so continually over the school years.

In South Africa, public opinion is starting to move along the same lines. For example, The Sowetan (1999:10) warns that the learners' attitudes, opinions and value system are influenced by the community in which they live. This means that for the child to succeed in education, parent involvement is essential. Furthermore, the Sowetan (1999a:10) indicates that parent involvement supports the learner by way of building schools, arranging school functions and opening an effective channel of communication between home and school.

### **2.8.2 Advantages for teachers and schools**

According to Epstein et al (1997:2) the advantages of parent involvement for the school and teachers is that it:

- can play a significant role in improving school programmes and climate,
- may provide family service and support to the school,
- improve relationships and contacts between home and school.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:6) support the above by stating the following advantages of effective parent involvement: it improves the relationship among parents, teachers and school; the teacher's knowledge of child's home situation improves which can influence his/her education; it positively increases commitment to teaching by the teacher, and reduces the teacher's workload.

It is also comforting for the teacher to know that parents recognise the complexity of their role in the classroom. Swap (1993:11) agrees stating that in programmes where parents and teachers work together, teachers experience support and appreciation from parents and a

rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving. In addition, Gorton (1983:440) argues that:

Through participation by parents and other citizens, the school will receive ideas, expertise and human resources, all of which will improve school decision-making and the educational programme of the school.

In the same vein, Swap (1993:10) indicates that collaboration broadens the teachers' perspectives as well as increasing their sensitivity to varied parental circumstances.

According to Haynes and Bennie (in Booth and Dun 1996:46) the advantages of parent involvement for the school is that parents can be used as a powerful force of change at school. For example, parents can be a political asset when they argue for the interest of children and schools at board meetings or in legislative sessions (Swap 1993:11).

In conclusion, Davies (1993:206) indicates that increased parent and community participation benefits school as teachers' workload can be made more manageable; parents who are involved have more positive views of the teachers and the school; and parents and community members who participate in schools are more likely to be supportive of the school.

### **2.8.3 Advantages for parents**

Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:7) state that the benefits parents can derive from involvement in the education of their children include: increased self-esteem; improved skills in teaching their children and decreased feeling of isolation. Jantjies (1995:295) identifies more of these advantages as: actualisation of parental potential, development of their strengths and talents, greater understanding of involvement procedures as well as realising the nature of contributions they can make in the best interests of their children, the school and the community.

Many benefits of parent involvement for parents are listed by Davies (1993:206). The benefits include: greater appreciation of their important roles; strengthened social networks; access to

information and materials; personal efficiency and the motivation to continue their own education. Van Wyk (1996:7) argues that when parents understand the problems of their children at school, parents are in a position to work with the school in resolving them as well as regarding other school related issues.

Shartrand et al (1997:23) state that when teachers work in partnership with parents, the parent's self-esteem is developed, that is, they feel valued.

#### **2.8.4 Advantages for the community**

According to Lockhead and Levin (1993:15), community involvement is vital for attaining the ideal of the effective school. As such, a community should be encouraged to contribute to local schools through monetary and voluntary participation.

Davies (1993:206) indicates that increased links between schools and community have shown to have multiple positive results such as: increased access to schools and facilities; cost saving and improved services through collaboration and community pride. Davies (1993:206) further indicates that parental and community participation in the schools can also contribute to advancing the prospects of a more democratic and equitable society.

Another advantage of parent involvement for the community is that when those two primary societal institutions (the family and the school) team up, the school becomes a potent force in the community in promoting healthy holistic development among all children (Haynes & Ben-Avie in Booth & Dun 1996:46). Furthermore, they argued that:

Schools need to encourage the parents to broaden their spheres of activities so that parents become catalysts for change in the school and the community and informed advocates for their children.

**In summary**

The above literature clearly illustrates that parent involvement benefits all stakeholders involved in education particularly learners. However, in many schools parent involvement remains a distant reality due to a number of factors which limit or impede this involvement.

**2.9 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Despite that fact that parent involvement in education has many advantages for parents, teachers and learning, a good relationship is difficult to achieve. The following are some of the major barriers to parent involvement.

**2.9.1 Time**

The first obstacle to parent involvement in education of the learners is time. Time constraints are especially problematic for economically disadvantaged parents, because they work at jobs that do not promote the flexibility that is characteristic of professional occupations (Burns & McClure 1994; U.S. Department of Education 1994). Shartrand et al (1997:9) state that dual-income families will be less involved in the education of the learners because they have less time to spend on school involvement. In the same vein, Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:9) indicate that single parents also have time-constraints because most work outside the home. This suggests that parents want to be involved but have difficulties arranging for additional time. Accordingly, Comer and Haynes (1991:274) relate that it is sometimes difficult to get parents involved in school management and planning because many work during the school day when meetings might take place.

**2.9.2 Different understanding of parent involvement**

Not all types of parent involvement are acceptable to both parents and schools. According to Van Wyk (1996:33), schools often feel more comfortable with traditional family involvement activities, whereas parents are often interested in advocacy and decision-making. Dodd

(1995:100) supports the above view and states that parents who do not understand how a certain approach will lead to the outcomes they desire will not want to be involved in their children's schools. As such, different expectations by both schools and parents can hinder parent involvement in the education of the learners.

### **2.9.3 Negative school experience and language barriers**

A third barrier to parent involvement in the learners education are previous negative experiences of schools and language barrier. According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:9) parents who are not involved in the learners' education include:

- Parents who are unable to communicate effectively with an English speaking teacher.
- Parents who have had little education.
- Parents with a negative school experience.

In the same vein, Riley (1994:17) argues that parents sometimes feel intimidated by school principals, staff or teachers, and feel that they lack the expertise to help educate their children.

### **2.9.4 Uncertain about what to do**

The fourth obstacle to parent involvement in education is uncertainty about what to do. Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996:9) indicate that many parents seem unwilling to be involved in the learners' education because they are uncertain about what to do. Dodd (1995:98) supports the above and states that "parents seemed to oppose some practices because they did not understand how they could help their children develop the knowledge and skills they could need in future".

### **2.9.5 Lack of facilitation of parent involvement**

The last stumbling block to parent involvement in the education of learners is that school principals do not facilitate parent involvement in their schools. Ellis (1996:54) states that

principals need to have training beyond basic management before they embark on involving parents in the education of their children. The school which does not have a policy to involve parents will not be able to establish successful home-school relations (Epstein et al 1997; U.S. Department of Education 1997). Furthermore, Epstein (1992:1147) indicates that "the future of school and family partnerships rests on improving teacher and administrator education and training." In this, the principal needs to play an active role.

## **2.10 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

In South Africa the definition of parent involvement in educational discourse has changed over time, according to the social institutions which have used the term. In general, this discourse can be divided into two periods: the period prior to 1994 and the period following the first democratic elections held in 1994.

### **2.10.1 The situation prior to 1994**

In most traditionally white schools statutory parent bodies (usually called management councils) were instituted. These bodies had certain powers given to it by law, hence the term statutory (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88). All members serving on these bodies were elected by parents.

In educational provision for blacks, school committees were established by the government in 1953 (Mkwanazi 1994:25). However, in contrast to white schools, only four to six of the committee members could be elected by parents, the rest were government appointees.

In general, these structures were rejected by the black community, and many schools elected to institute Parent-Teachers Associations (PTAs). However, these bodies did not have powers granted to it by law (Heystek & Paquette 1999:189). In both black and white schools parent bodies dealt mostly with issues of school fees.

### 2.10.2 The situation after 1994

In 1996 the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996:14) made the establishment of school governing bodies (SGB's) compulsory for all public schools. This is highly commendable. However, on the other hand it means that parent involvement is being narrowly defined and limited to a few people serving on SGB's. This is unlikely to attain all the benefits that were listed in section 2.8.

According to Townsend (1989:30) statutory parent involvement have the following limitations:

- Parents' involvement is restricted to their voting rights with regard to the election of a school's management council.
- A statutory parent body cannot create the same opportunities for debate and research.

Governing bodies are the formal structures which are established in terms of the South African School Act (RSA 1996:14-22) and provincial laws and regulations. Each governing body must have a constitution which provides for:

- A meeting of the governing body at least once every term.
- Meeting of the governing body with parents, learners, educators and other staff at school.
- Recording and keeping of minutes of governing body meetings.
- Making available such minutes for inspection by Head of the Provincial Education Department and other staff of the school at least once a year.

The Provincial Gazette (Northern Province 1995:17) argues that members of the governing bodies should be subjected to courses and training programmes. The principal must see to it that members of their governing bodies are trained. In the rural secondary schools of Northern Province, the 'King Luthuli' programme is currently tasked with training governing body members in the province.

More will, however, need to be done. In a research project conducted in previously black-only schools, it was determined that relatively few parents participate positively in the governing body and the parent-teacher association. Only 58 per cent of the schools reported positive participation from parents in these activities (Heysteck & Paquette 1999:194). Other parent involvement activities received even less support and the average level of "good" participation from parents in all the possible activities is given as 30 per cent (Ibid).

## **2.11 THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The school principal occupies a crucial management position in South African schools. In section 1.3 an introductory orientation to the managerial roles of the principal was given. In this chapter, the managerial and leadership roles of the secondary school principal are discussed as they relate to principalship. Dlamini (1995:10) indicates that these roles include planning, organising, leading and control.

Evard and Morris (1995:X) contend that some schools are effective and successful "... partly because they are well managed and organized, which is partly because their heads and senior staff have learned management systematically."

In discussing the managerial and leadership roles of the secondary school principal relevance to parent involvement will be touched on. The principal should have a policy for managing parent involvement. This is done as research indicates that the role of the principal, and more specifically the policy of the school regarding parental involvement stands central to effective home-school-community partnership (Epstein 1990:102).

### **2.11.1 The principal and the South African education system**

The South African Schools Act (RSA 1996:14) provides for the professional management of public schools to be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of Department. The principal has a responsibility to take the necessary steps (management activities) to ensure that the functional activities of the school will be effective. This implies that

the principal as an educational manager is responsible for managing the day-to-day activities of the school which include parent involvement.

The Government Gazette (RSA 1999:11) maintains that the role of the principal is: "To ensure that the school is managed satisfactorily and in compliance with legislation, regulations and personnel administration measures as prescribed."

The principal has to bear the responsibility for everything that occurs in school. He acts as a vehicle which carries the school in a certain direction. Accordingly, Listowell (in Maake 1990:13) maintains that Julius Nyerere of Tanzania regards principals as "lifting levers, and as such they must remain below and bear the whole weight of masses to be lifted".

The Government Gazette (RSA 1999:12) asserts that the duties and responsibilities of the principal are individual and varied, depending on the approaches and needs of the particular school. In this chapter, the researcher is concentrating on the aspects of the principal's role which are relevant to this study. In no way does this chapter reflect the diverse role of the principal.

### **2.11.2 The principal as an effective communicator**

The principal is in a communication situation every moment he is in contact with people. The principal needs to communicate effectively with all the stakeholders, that is, learners, teachers, parents and the entire community. Monareng (1995:61) adds:

For the principal to communicate effectively with parents, he needs a superb strategy to deliver a message through a medium which will engender the desired response in the relevant people, especially parents.

For this reason Epstein et al (1997:8) maintain that school principals should design effective forms of school-to-home as well as home-to-school communication with all families about school programmes and their children's progress. This is often a difficult task, particularly when having to communicate with a multicultural/multilingual community.

Communication between home and school should be considered as a two-way activity. The school principal and educators communicate with parents and parents communicate with the school (Rue & Byars 1992:86). Warner (1991:372) indicates the role of the principal in communication as: "... to facilitate the kind of two-way communication that enables parents to stay in touch and to become partners with the school in the education of children". Thus, the principal should be able to create opportunities for parents to communicate with the school. According to Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:430), the school principal communicates with parents in different ways. These include formal and informal communication. Formal communication with parents may be through interviews, report cards, parent-teacher conferences and the like. Informal communication occurs when the principal and parents communicate through phone contacts or incidental meetings during school functions.

The principal should see to it that the lines of communication are always open. This implies that the staff, learners and parents will be free to talk and get information from the principal. Potter and Powell (1992:64) assert that the principal should "...keep all members of the community informed on a regular basis and to involve them, where appropriate, with the decisions that are likely to directly affect them".

To promote effective communication with parents, the principal could also communicate with parents through learners. The principal can send learners home with verbal as well as written messages to parents. Warner (1991:375) indicates that the principal

...helps parents fulfil their parenting roles by providing information and ideas about the characteristics of and suggesting strategies for the development of a home environment that supports the learning behaviours of children at each grade level.

According to Epstein et al (1997:8), the principal should send clear information to parents on how to choose schools or courses, select curricular, programmes and activities at each grade level. This can make parents' communication with the principal about matters relating to their children's achievement, more effective.

There are of course, some challenges to communication. Epstein et al (1997:9) indicate that some parents cannot speak and read English well. This is a serious challenge to effective communication with families particularly within the South African context. According to Warner (1991:375), communication should reach the parents. This presumes that if the school communicates with parents, the information must not only get home, but must be understood by the parents. This implies that the information must be sent home in a language and vocabulary that all families can comprehend or access, and interpret correctly. In order to optimize communication, a principal should therefore, determine the home language of parents and use this as far as possible in written communication. The principal should also consider using interpreters when conferring with parents.

Because communication is central to effective home-school relations, Potter and Powell (1992:64) suggest that principals should have a policy regarding all aspects of communication. They further suggest that all stakeholders should be involved in drawing up such a policy. Thus, the principal should assess the current communication process of the school. This will enable him/her to review the readability and clarity of all forms of communication. However, Chrispeels (1992:20) is of the opinion that both parents and teachers need to be involved in the assessment of the communication process. Information gained through this assessment can help the principal and the parents to redesign and increase effective home school communication.

Since "effective communicator" is likely to continue as role expectation for secondary school principals, finding ways to improve the principal's skills in this regard is essential. This information should be shared with educators at school.

### **2.11.3 Leadership and decision-making**

Leadership is an important managerial role of the principal. Many researchers regard leadership as a complex process which involves intricate social relations and mutual influence between leaders and followers.

According to Gronn (1996:9) leadership can be defined as a process whereby one person influences individual and group members towards goal setting and goal achievement with no force or coercion.

The behaviour of the school leadership has substantial impact on the school as a whole. For this reason no parent involvement can take place without the commitment and effective leadership of the principal. In the same vein Spence (1994:31) indicates that the future success of education is:

...dependent to a considerable extent on the quality of leadership provided in schools; it is the style of leadership exercised, especially by the principal, which sets the tone and largely determines the quality of education offered by the school.

Although principals currently speak of "our" school, instead of "my" school, as was the tendency in the past, thus also including parents and the community, they are still in a strong leadership position. To support this, Silins (1994:273) asserts that:

The principals do not have a monopoly on leadership, but they do have a position of privilege in terms of status, power, and mechanisms readily available to them that facilitate the operationalization of leadership into process strategies which can lead to school improvement.

Chapman and Burchfield (1994:401) argue that particularly in Third World countries headmasters are powerful gatekeepers, mediating the impact of central policies on their school, sharing, shaping the educational and social transactions within the school, and interpreting school priorities and activities to the local communities. This is also true of policies dealing with parent involvement. Thus in many schools the leadership style of the principal will determine the way parents are involved in the education of their children. In general, such leadership styles may be described as autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire (Maake 1990:29; & Dlamini 1995:40).

A principal with an autocratic leadership style is authoritarian and management of the school is hierarchical and top down. The autocratic principal is unlikely to be willing to involve anyone in the running of the school. Thus parents will also not be involved in the education of learners, and the principal will forfeit the benefits of parental involvement mentioned in section 2.8. Thus, in many cases, principals require instruction in new approaches to parent involvement which are conducive to democratic management and governance.

Maake (1990:30) contends that "the laissez-faire principal cannot manage his staff." This presumes that such a principal will manage parent involvement in a piece-meal fashion, and also implement parent involvement in an unorganised way. This will negatively affect parent involvement as school programmes which are clearly stated and efficiently implemented are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein 1993:61).

A democratic leadership style is "people centred" leadership. It involves all role players through mutual consultation in the decision-making process and is characterised by a positive school climate and successful interpersonal relationships (Van der Westhuizen et al 1995:190). In the same vein, Maake (1990:29) indicates that "A democratic principal; tries to involve members of his staff in the solving of problems and awareness of tasks with which they are busy". An extension of this could be for the school to involve parents in decisions affecting them or their children.

A democratic principal should encourage group members to take the initiative and responsibilities in the realisation of group objectives. Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:190) indicate that a democratic leadership style provides staff with the opportunity to make a contribution. This indicates that the contributions made by the staff should assist the principal in involving parents in the education of learners.

Dlamini (1995:40) contends that communication in this leadership style is multi-dimensional. This also indicates why the democratic leadership style is often linked to effective school principalship. Communication with staff on how to help parental involvement is vital for the school.

Silins (1994:273) maintains that a principal demonstrates leadership by sharing it with other stakeholders in the school. This does not mean that a democratic principal will never make a decision about his or her school when necessary. However, it does not mean that as far as possible all role players, including parents will be included in the decision making process.

Chapman (1991:357) agrees and argues that decision-making should include the involvement of parents in governance, advocacy, participation in parent/teacher organisations and various advisory roles. This can make parents feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them. As such, parents will develop greater commitment and can take greater responsibility in what happens at school.

Swap (1993:30) indicates that the principal should have thorough knowledge of the community in order to support learners at home. The principal should have good communication skills. Above all, the principal should have the ability to extend the school to home model to also allow parents to be involved in decision making.

According to Gorton (1983:35), the essence of decision-making is a choice between alternative possibilities. The principal needs to give more parents the opportunity to decide on aspects affecting their children. This is in line with the new democratic dispensation in the country and also builds the leadership capacity of the parents of the school. Epstein (1992:1145) points out that:

Schools assist by training parents to be leaders and representatives in decision making skills and how to communicate with all parents they represent, by including parents as true, not token contributors to school decisions and by providing information to community advocacy groups so that they may knowledgeably address issues of school improvement.

According to Epstein et al (1997:9) one of the challenges of decision-making is to include parent leaders from all racial, cultural, socio-economic and other groups in the school's

decision-making. The principal should include parents from various racial and socio-economic groups in decision-making. This helps parents to have a sense of responsibility for the school.

The principal should encourage parents "...to play meaningful roles with staff approval and support in school and with clear direction and purpose" (Comer & Haynes 1991:277). By doing so, parents will be included in significant participation in decision-making in order to enhance the educational process and improve the overall climate of schools (Comer & Haynes 1991:271). The principal should involve as many parents as possible in decision-making. This will make parents to feel that the school belongs to them. Parents will also feel committed to the decisions that are made at school, if they are part of the process.

According to the South African Schools Act RSA (1996:14), the school governing body has extensive decision-making powers. However, the SGB only involves a few parents in the decision making process. It is, therefore necessary for the principal and his/her staff to provide additional opportunities for parents to participate in decisions which will ultimately affect the children.

According to Epstein (1997:9), parents serving in governing bodies should be trained to enable them "... to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents". However, training of parents serving on governing bodies in South African schools, which should be provided by the provincial departments of education, often does not take place due to lack of funds. This leaves parents in decision-making position with little or no knowledge of ways in which to fulfil their tasks.

#### **2.11.4 The principal as an effective planner**

Planning is one of the most important tasks of the principal. Bookbinder (1992:72) indicates that:

A major task of principals, while performing their managerial roles, is to plan the efforts of the school and its members and to use those available resources necessary to achieve state organizational goals.

Maake (1990:16) indicates that planning must be done in advance because if it is delayed it may result in a manager neglecting very important tasks. This, in turn could result in a management crisis as well as neglect of other work which must of necessity then be pushed aside (Dlamini 1995:13). Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:13) indicate that "planning may fail because educational leaders do not carry out planning". Thus, in many ways, planning is the point of departure of the principal as a manager.

Planning entails determining the future position of the school and the guidelines needed to reach that position. Accordingly, Bookbinder (1992:73) asserts that effective principals should decide "what needs to be done, when and how it needs to be done and who is to do it". Certainly, this should include determining the future position of the school regarding parent involvement.

The principal should inform all who are concerned with planning. Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:143) contend that "the most important characteristic of effective planning is still that the particular responsibility and position of every one involved should be clearly indicated." This implies that the principal who informs parents of his plans makes them feel that they are partners in education.

Maake (1990:16) maintains that the principal, when planning, should distinguish between matters that have to receive immediate attention and those which have to receive attention over a long period. This indicates that while planning is being done, thoughts and ideas should be systematised so that a distinction can be drawn between what is important and what is unimportant.

According to Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:137), planning is a thinking activity. Principals should think through their goals and actions in advance. Principals should therefore, think about their plan or framework before the beginning of the year, school term, week or day. This should include planning the role parents are to play in the school, as well as the ways in which this involvement can be effectively managed.

Planning forms the basis of all the management tasks of the principal. In order to organise, lead or control the activities of the school, the effective principal should plan these activities (Bookbinder 1992:73). Manz and Sims (1990:102) agree adding that effective school principals need to define goals and missions of the school. This presumes that the school principal should also define goals regarding parent involvement.

Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:143) asserts that policy should be taken into consideration in the planning action. The principal, when planning at school management level, should take the guidelines of existing government policy into consideration.

As both the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA 1995) and the South African Schools Act (RSA 1996) support the involvement of parents in schools, principals are able to plan their school's approach to home-school relations in accordance with government policy. However, the type and extent of parent involvement need careful thought and planning. Thus Epstein (1990:102) advises that schools draw up a policy on parent involvement and that a wide range of activities be included. Manz and Sims (1990:102) agree, but place emphasis on the inclusion of parents in the education of learners. This strongly supports the work of Epstein (1987; 1990; 1992).

It is clear that the ability of the principal to plan is central to having an effective programme in parent involvement. Different authors present the following steps which the principal can follow during the planning process:

- Bookbinder (1992:74) asserts that the first step of planning is to establish a goal or set of goals. The principal, when planning for parent involvement, should establish a goal or set of goals concerning parent involvement.
- The planning process of parent involvement begins with decisions about what the school wants or needs. Identifying priorities and being specific about their aims enable organisations to focus their resources effectively.

- The second step of planning is to define the present situation (Bookbinder 1992:74). The principal should define the present situation concerning parent involvement. This includes asking the following questions:

How far is the school from its parent involvement goals?

What resources are available for reaching these goals?

In other words, plans for further progress can only be made after the current situation regarding parent involvement has been assessed.

- The third step of planning is the identification of factors which could aid or impede the attainment of the set goals (Bookbinder 1992:74). Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:141) contend that principals should "identify the necessary resources and limitations which may influence planning, particular previous actions and planning." This implies that principals should identify the aids and barriers to effective parent involvement, by asking:

What are the external and internal factors which can help the school to reach its parent involvement goals?

What factors can create problems in parent involvement?

- According to Bookbinder (1992:74) developing a plan or set of actions for reaching the goals is the fourth step of planning. This implies that the principal should develop a plan or set of actions for reaching the parent involvement goals. Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:138) contend that "each plan should be able to contribute towards achieving set objectives". Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:139) further assert that planning "provides the opportunity to consider alternative plans." These include the development of various alternatives for reaching the desired parent involvement goal(s), evaluation of such alternatives, and choosing from among them the most suitable alternative for reaching the goal(s).

- The fifth step in planning is the implementation and evaluation of the plan (Bookbinder 1992:74). In the same vein, Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:141) indicate that the plan (planning) should be evaluated and the necessary changes should be made. As such, the principal should evaluate and make the necessary adjustments of the parent involvement plan.
- The last step entails the implementation of a parent involvement plan of action. This involves making decisions about future actions as well as giving guidelines for decision-making. Van der Westhuizen et al (1995:138) contend that "how to implement the decision is the focal point of planning."

Epstein et al (1997:13) support the above and suggest that an Action Team be formed in schools to coordinate the planning and organisation of parent involvement.

### **2.11.5 The principal as a manager**

Chapman and Buchfield (1994:402) contend that in most countries the principal's central responsibility is school management. The principal manages all aspects of the school. This section does not aim at providing all the information on the principal as a manager since this is a vast topic to be covered. The aim of this section is to briefly identify and describe the managerial skills and strategies required by the principal in the management of change as well as parent involvement.

- **Managing change**

The most important task of the principal in any public school in South Africa today is to manage change. In essence this is because "the school principal fills a key role in any change that takes place at school - whether as initiator or supporter" (Van der Westhuizen et al 1995:646). Thus, the principal, as a change agent, has responsibility of initiating, facilitating and implementing change (Holmes 1993:73).

Change may be initiated from within the school or imposed from outside (Evard & Morris 1995:5). Thus the principal may need to initiate change to achieve ongoing goals, or may have to cope with new imposed goals and challenges. Both take time and principals must be able to set clearly defined deadlines. This is also applicable to the attainment of goals relating to parent involvement.

The principal should also include parents in change. Holmes (1993:34) indicates that "parents should always be invited to comment on the wisdom or effectiveness of what is being done, even if this means modification or change to the leader's purpose". Parents will therefore, accept changes made at the school if the principal actively involves them in the implementation of change. Likewise, more success will be achieved if the principal is able to plan, organise, motivate and direct people towards achieving genuine change and school improvement (Van der Westhuzen et al 1995:648).

Both Holmes (1993:76) and Kingsley (1993:43) indicate that a school principal should plan for change. This implies that the principal has to give special attention to:

- Managing change as a process.
- Evaluating the effect of change.
- Persuading the school community to accept the changes, and
- Communicating the aims of the changes to the school community.

The principal needs certain skills in order to initiate, facilitate and implement change successfully. Evans (1993:21) indicates:

Principals whose personal values and aspirations for their schools are consistent, coherent, and reflected in daily behaviour are credible and inspire trust- they are leaders worth following into the uncertainties of change.

According to Fullan (in Silins 1994:273), for more powerful change to take place, there must be more powerful strategies. The principal should have strategies which can be used to achieve genuine transformation and school improvement. Fullan (1993:21) gives eight conditions which can be used by the principal for managing change, one of which is 'connection with the wider environment'. This supports the inclusion of parents in the management of change in schools.

- **Managing parent involvement programmes**

As the head of the school, the principal plays a crucial role in managing parent involvement as "improving parent involvement ... is one of the most challenging tasks facing educators today" (Vandegrif & Greene 1992:57).

School principals are ultimately responsible for managing the whole parent involvement programme. They must establish an organisational structure to initiate, coordinate and review the parent involvement programmes. Epstein et al (1997:13) call this organisational structure the Action Team. The members of the Action Team should be divided into six subcommittees that plan, implement and evaluate the different types of parent involvement.

However, Epstein et al (1997:13) contend that the principal alone cannot create a lasting comprehensive programme that involves all the families through all grades. Thus, along with clear policies and strong support from the education departments, an action team comprising parents and teachers is necessary. The school governing body should help the principal in this regard.

As already mentioned (cf. 2.1), this includes having a written policy on the type and extent of parent involvement as well as the commitment of parents to involvement in the education of their children by having them sign a home-school agreement (Hood 1999: 373). However, both the school and parents should participate in drawing up of this agreement. Signing these contracts may play an important role in strengthening the relationship between the home and the school. Warner (1991:373) argues that "although principals are not parties to the contracts,

they commit themselves to endorsing parent involvement and to ensuring that the building climate encourages learning".

Robbins and Alvy (1995:20) extend the commitment of the school to also include the community, suggesting that the principals join civic associations where the principal can have the opportunity of "regularly reporting on school affairs."

#### **2.11.6 Ensuring academic excellence**

The effective school principal should ensure that learners at school are successful. This should include involving parents as research shows that parent involvement improves learner achievement (Dauber & Epstein 1993:53). This is only true if parents are involved in activities which relate to schooling. Thus, for example, learning will not be improved by only involving parents in fund-raising activities. However the principal will probably get better academic results if he sees to it that parents are shown how to support learning at home.

Potter and Powell (1992:44), Thomas (1994:2) and Bookbinder (1992:30) maintain that effective principals have an important instructional leadership role. This does not mean that the principal should teach each and every class but should spend time in classroom-related issues because they "exert the most direct influence on the intermediate goal of improved teaching and the ultimate goal of improved learning" (Thomas 1994:2).

Bookbinder (1992:42) contends that the role of the principal in ensuring academic excellence is to define the mission of the school. This should include leading the parents and staff during the development of these goals and objectives and communicating them to the total school community. This will encourage the staff, learners and parents to develop shared and common goals.

The principal should manage the instructional programme of the school (Bookbinder 1992:42), and work with a staff in the evaluation, development and implementation of the school's curriculum and instructional programmes. Bookbinder (1992:42) indicates that the principal

should coordinate the curriculum and monitor the learners' progress, keep parents informed of the progress of their children, thus including them in any remedial work needed.

It is also important for the principal to promote a positive school climate (Bookbinder 1992:42) as well as allocate resources and implement structures to support the achievement of goals (Ridden 1992:14). The established climate should also be conducive to parent involvement.

According to Ridden (1992:14), the principal can ensure academic excellence by having a clear and informed vision of his school. This vision should allow parent participation in learning activities of learners. In addition, learning outcomes can be managed by the principal maintaining high visibility, thereby communicating priorities and modeling expectations. Furthermore, Bookbinder (1992:42) asserts that the principal should create a system of rewards that reinforces academic achievement. Parents should be invited to participate when their children are being rewarded at school. The issue of academic excellence is therefore essential to give a strategic direction and support to the school. It also creates a situation and conditions for instructional capacity and positive experiences for learners and staff.

## **2.12 CONCLUSION**

This chapter summarises different models with a view of explaining the shared responsibilities of home, school and community for children's learning and development. Regardless of the approach chosen, there is a need to equip the principal with management skills needed to manage parent involvement in education. Making use of relevant models, the principal is able to instruct teachers of ways of involving parents in different activities aimed at improving and supporting learning

The chapter also indicates that effective educational management is an important factor in developing schools and managing parent involvement. It should be noted that the general managerial and leadership roles discussed in this chapter relate to effective principalship. As such, this chapter shows that the principal should be an effective planner, instructional leader as well as manager of change.

The principal needs to be a leader who can cope with the myriad of changes occurring at educational and organisational level. Furthermore, the managerial and leadership roles of the principal concerning parent involvement were discussed. Here, attention was given to the principal as a communicator, manager of change as well as parents as decision makers.

Special attention was also given to the democratic leadership style of the principal as it relates to interaction with staff and parents.

In the next chapter, (Chapter 3) the researcher discusses the research design.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, a literature review on parent involvement and the prevalent managerial roles of the principal regarding parent involvement was presented. The outcomes of this chapter necessitated a qualitative investigation, as described in this chapter. This is important for the study because it intends to report on the reactions and responses of principals regarding the way he/she manages parental involvement.

This chapter focuses on the research design of this study which investigates the role of the principal in managing parent involvement in the rural areas of Northern Province, particularly the Malamulele district which is one of the six districts in region three. The research undertaken in this study addressed some of the questions on the topic through in-depth interviews with school principals, teachers as well as parents serving on school governing bodies (SGB's), in selected secondary schools.

In this chapter, qualitative research will be briefly described. The researcher will also justify the choice of the data gathering research method. The researcher will describe the procedure for conducting the research. This will include the criteria for the selection of participants. Subsequently, the data analysis, validity and reliability will be discussed and a conclusion based on this chapter will be made.

#### **3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

For the purpose of this study, which aims to explore the role of the secondary school principal in managing parent involvement in rural areas of Northern Province, a qualitative study will be undertaken.

Qualitative research is one of the approaches followed in descriptive research. It is defined differently by different researchers. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 17) define qualitative research

as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.

Leedy (1993:140) defines qualitative research as follows:

It is a creative, scientific process that necessitates a great deal of time and critical thinking, as well as emotional and intellectual energy. Qualitative research is interpretative in character, meaning that the enquirers try to account for what they have given an account of. It displays the use of expressive language and gives attention to particulars.

De Vos (1998:252) indicates that the terms qualitative and quantitative differ inherently, and that a qualitative research design does not provide the researcher with fixed steps to follow. For this reason, the researcher will in the next section, discuss characteristics which serve as reasons for the choice of qualitative research.

### **3.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SERVING AS REASONS FOR THE CHOICE OF THIS METHOD**

In this study, the researcher aims to determine the role of the secondary school principal in managing parent involvement in the rural areas of the Malamulele district. The fact that there is no clarity on the topic indicates a need for an exploratory research design which will enable the problems explored and questions asked to become more specific as the study progresses.

The characteristics of qualitative research which make it an appropriate approach for this research are as follows:

#### **3.3.1 In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument**

Patton (1990:14), Hammersly, Gomm and Woods (1994:59) contend that in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. Validity in qualitative methods hinges to a great

extent on the skill, competence and rigor of the researcher. This shows that the researcher will have to develop an understanding of the skills needed to work with people with a view of gathering data for the study. The researcher will not be an objective bystander as is the case in quantitative research. Thus the researcher's own actions are as much part of the study design as the research instruments used.

As a research instrument, the researcher must prepare himself/herself thoroughly. De Vos (1998:258) maintains that "this training requires self-examination as well as the mastery of interpersonal skills and data analysis techniques". Thus, an extensive review of the literature on parent involvement, the role of the principal and qualitative methodology was undertaken.

### **3.3.2 Meaning is an essential concern to a qualitative approach**

Qualitative researchers are interested in the ways different people make sense of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:32). Bruner (1990:10) asserts that qualitative enquiry forces both the researcher and the researched to see themselves in a new way. At the heart of the qualitative enquiry is a quest to understand on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind people's actions.

In this research, the researcher tries to understand the actions of the secondary school principal in managing parent involvement in the rural areas of Malamulele in Northern Province.

### **3.3.3 Qualitative research is holistic**

Qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it attempts to study people in the context of their past and the situations in which they find themselves. Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephen (1990:10) add that it attempts to understand the complex interrelationship of cause and consequences that affect human behaviour.

Sherman and Webb (1990:6) contend that the aim of the qualitative research is to understand experience as unified. In this research a holistic approach will be followed as parent

involvement is studied in context. In other words, against the background of rural areas and educational provision in rural areas of Northern Province.

#### **3.3.4 Qualitative data are analysed inductively**

The objective of qualitative researchers is not to search out data for proving or disproving the hypothesis they hold before entering the study: rather the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:31). This indicates that the qualitative research concepts, insights and understanding are developed from patterns in data. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:32) maintain that the researcher does not collect data to assert preconceived models, hypothesis or theories.

In this study, data will be analysed inductively. In this research, the interactive form of the interviews and observation lends itself to inductive logic. Schumacher and McMillan (1993:91) indicate that the problem is most clearly stated after much data collection and preliminary analysis.

An inductive analysis of data done in this study aims at revealing the themes and concepts that would lead to abstractions built from grouping together the particulars of similar data (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:31). The researcher will analyse the interviews and categories sentence by sentence or phrase by phrase and then code them into themes.

#### **3.3.5 Qualitative research is descriptive**

Data collection in qualitative research is always in the form of words rather than numbers. Data is said to be a detailed, thick description, using direct quotations to capture people's personal perspectives and experience (Patton 1990:40). The world is approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial. Everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. No statement escapes scrutiny (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:30). Thus everything said to the researcher is considered to be important.

### **3.3.6 Qualitative research is concerned with processes rather than outcomes or products**

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the realisation of behaviour rather than with outcomes or products. Vulliamy et al (1990:11) maintain that by focusing on the process of social interaction, qualitative research involves the ongoing collection of data.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:31) assert that the researcher attempts to penetrate the layers of meaning and uncover and identify the range and depth of situations and perspectives that apply in the area under study. Thus, the researcher did not just seek knowledge for knowledge's sake, but tried to determine the significance of this knowledge.

### **3.3.7 Small samples are used**

Lemmer (1992:294) contends that most qualitative research methods use small samples because these research studies focus on the detailed and quality of an individual or small group's experience. This attribute is also applicable to this research study. Furthermore, Lemmer (1992:294) maintains that making use of qualitative research enables the outside world of the formalised education to relate to the inside world of the participants.

In this study, the researcher will use a small sample, that is, he will interview the principal, three teachers as well as three governing body members per school (cf 3.4.1). Ary et al (1990:178) assert that "the size of the sample depends upon the precision the researcher desires in estimating the population parameter at a particular confidence level."

### **3.3.8 In qualitative research the researcher is bound by values**

Qualitative researchers are always bound by values. Ary et al (1990:446) indicate that "it is impossible to develop a meaningful understanding of human experience without taking into account the interplay of both the enquirers' and participants' values and beliefs". In the same vein, De Vos (1998:45) maintains that the qualitative researcher admits the value-laden nature

of the study and actively reports his values and biases, as well as the value of gathered information.

Qualitative researchers are value bound in their choice of the problem of investigation, way of interpreting results, et cetera. To add to this, Ary et al (1990:446) contend that qualitative researchers need frequent, continuous and meaningful interaction with the participants. This is also typical of this study.

### **3.4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

De Vos (1998:253) maintains that qualitative researchers employ a wide range of strategies in their effort to understand the phenomenon being studied. These strategies vary depending on the purpose, nature of research questions as well as skills available for the researcher. Each strategy has its own perspective and method of data collection.

This study is in essence about what principals, teachers and parents understand about parent involvement in general and what role principals should play in establishing or improving parent involvement in their schools. This understanding can best be achieved by using such qualitative methods as participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews. Such methods yield rich, descriptive data (Patton 1990:10).

#### **3.4.1 Selection of schools and participants**

Research was conducted in Northern Province, one of the nine provinces of South Africa. The district of Malamulele was chosen as it is a rural area and the researcher is known and trusted by residents involved in education in the area. This facilitated access to schools.

Malamulele district includes 41 secondary schools. Three were selected on the grounds of their accessibility, seemingly typical of the schools in this area and the willingness of their principals, teachers and parents to participate in the research. Moreover, both schools and participants are deemed to be "information rich" with respect to the purpose of the investigation (Gall, Gall

& Borg 1999:287). Particulars of the schools selected are presented in Table 4.1 and elaborated on in section 4.3.

At each of the three schools an in-depth interview was conducted with the principal. As the researcher wanted information-rich participants, schools were chosen where the principal had been in his/her post for at least two years. Particulars of the principals are presented in Table 4.2.

One focus-group interview with teachers and one with SGB members/parents were conducted in each of the three schools. In total nine teachers and nine parents were included in the interviews. Particulars of teachers are included in Tables 4.3–4.5 and those of SGB members in Tables 5.6–5.8. the decision to interview parents on the SGB relates to the fact that these parents have more knowledge of the role principals play in managing parent involvement in their schools.

The interviews with principals were conducted in private in their respective offices, while those with teachers and parents were conducted in a suitable classroom on the school premises. The interviews with principals and parents were conducted during school hours but teachers' interviews were conducted in the afternoon. The principals and teachers' interviews were conducted in English but parents' interviews were conducted in Xitsonga. All the interviews were audio taped and later transcribed.

The number of schools (3) as well as the number of participants (21) of this study are typical of qualitative research where the aim is not to generalise but to gain some understanding of the complexity of the problem and issues and extent of the role played by principals in parent involvement. However, it should be noted that the qualitative methods of in-depth and focus-group interviewing produce a vast amount of detailed information from intensive periods of talk (Patton 1990:371). Only one interview is included as Appendix VIII to serve as an example of the manner in which interviews were conducted and the data thus obtained.

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

LeCompte and Pressle (1993:58) maintain that data are any kind of information which can be identified and accumulated by the researcher to facilitate answers to their queries. *problems*

LeCompte, Millroy and Priessle (1992:19-29) contend that the data gathering techniques employed in qualitative research are observing, interview and document analysis. In the same vein, De Vos (1998:48) reminds us that data gathering techniques in qualitative research involve four basic types: observation (particularly participant observation), interviews (including focus-group interviews), documents and visual images. *NB*

However, only participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews will be discussed in this study as they are the dominant strategies employed in this investigation.

#### 3.5.1 Observation

Best and Kahn (1993:198) maintain that observation in qualitative research "...consists of detailed notation of behaviours". Observation is used to study the principal, teachers and parents serving on governing bodies in different settings within the school. The aim of observing for the researcher will be to get a general feel of what is happening at schools. Van Wyk (1996:148) contends that this is necessary because "the beliefs and practices associated with parents involvement constructed by teachers and parents is influenced by the beliefs and norms embodied in a school culture".

In this study, the researcher is interested in viewing each participating school as a separate cultural site. As such, the researcher spent some time in each school observing what is taking place during school governing body meetings. The researcher also visited schools on the days school reports are given out. Thus the researcher spent time as an observer in each of the three schools during the first quarter of the year.

Moreover, the researcher spent a number of days in each of the three schools where he observed the following: the interaction between teachers and parents (when parents collect reports), the principal speaking to parents who visited the school, parents cleaning the school yard, parents (SGB members) attending a meeting as well as parents selling food to learners during breaks.

The observation sessions served to clarify the school context, and get a general *feel* of the schools. This assisted the researcher in assimilating information and forming impressions which were of assistance when analysing the interviews with principals, teachers and parents.

The researcher also attended SGB meetings at each of the three schools. In the meetings the interaction of the parents with school staff, particularly the principal was observed. The researcher observed that principals in the three visited schools allowed parents to take decisions which affect their children at school.

A participant observer, by virtue of being actively involved in the situation being observed, often gains insight and develops interpersonal relationships that are virtually impossible to achieve through any other method (Patton 1990; Leedy 1993; Schumacher and McMillan 1993). Everything observed was fully noted and formed part of the data.

### **3.5.2 Individual interviews**

Qualitative researchers collect data by means of interviews. According to Van Wyk (1996:131) the aim of interviewing is to enter into the other person's perspective. In the same vein, Patton (1990:278) maintains that:

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in or on someone else's mind.

The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind (for example, the interviewer's preconceived categories for organising the world) but to assess the perspective of the person being interviewed.

In this research use is made of semi-structured interviews to elicit data from rural secondary school principals in Malamulele district. Patton (1990:279) maintains that "...the quality of information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer". This supports the fact that in qualitative interviewing the researcher is the research instruments.

Qualitative in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories (Van Wyk 1996:131). The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's perspective, but respects how the participant frames and structures the responses.

The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach has to do with an attitude of acceptance that the participant's information is valuable and useful. This calls for the interviewer to have good listening skills, personal interaction, question framing and the like (Van Wyk 1996:132-133).

In these interviews with secondary school principals the researcher developed first hand information and recorded the information as it occurred. Leedy (1993:142) maintains that:

The qualitative approach is concerned with human beings, interpersonal relationships, personal values, meanings, beliefs and feelings. Its attempts to attain rich, real, deep and valid data from a rational point of view is inductive.

Principals in the research were seen as key informants, individuals who "...possess special knowledge, status, or communication skills" and who are willing to share this with interviewer (LeCompte & Preissle 1993:166). Principals were also chosen because of the important role they play in defining school policy on parental involvement.

The researcher made use of an interview guide in his interviews with principals (cf. Appendix V). This interview guide should not be seen as a structured schedule or protocol, but rather as a list of general areas to be covered with each participant. The researcher asked questions to

initiate discussions, but then allowed participants to talk without restraint on aspects they considered to be of importance.

During the interviews with principals, the researcher was able to conduct the interview with minimal interruptions. All principals seemed willing to give everything they had regarding the questions they were asked. English was used as a medium of communication in these interviews. One principal had some documents to backup what he was saying. All interviews were conducted in the principals' offices. As mentioned each principal was interviewed individually.

### **3.5.3 Focus-group interviews**

Qualitative researchers have become interested in the use of focus-groups to collect data. Krueger (1988:18) defines a focus-group interview as follows: "[It is] a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perception of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment". In this way, focus-group interviews bring the researcher and the subject together.

Focus-groups are a special type of group concerning the purpose, size, composition and procedures used. Krueger (1988:18) contends that "it is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer". However, Burgess (in Van Wyk 1996:134) argues that focus-group interviews can comprise of as little as three participants. In this research it was felt that three teachers per focus-group and three parents per focus group would be adequate to stimulate discussion but small enough to capture all relevant data.

Patton (1990:17) maintains that group interviews give rise to insight and solutions that should not come about without them, and that the interaction among the participants can stimulate them to state their feelings, perceptions and beliefs that the participants would not express if interviewed individually.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:100) maintain that problems may arise when group interviews are tape-recorded. These include problems of recognising who is speaking if a focus group interview has been conducted a long time ago. In this study, the researcher avoided such problems by transcribing the cassettes soon after the interview session.

Krueger (1988:18) indicates that in a focus-group interview members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion. This shows that focus group interviews avoid putting the interviewers in a directive role. The role of the researcher in this study was to ask questions to initiate the discussions. The researcher then allowed the participants to make major contributions by stating their view as well as drawing up the views of others in the group.

Fontana and Frey (1994:365) indicate that focus group interviews can also be used for triangulation purposes. This is important for this study because the researcher will use different data gathering techniques.

The focus-group interview should have similar interview skills to those needed by an interviewer of individuals. In addition, the researcher should also be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction.

In this study, focus-group interviews with teachers and parents were conducted. Teachers were included in the groups based on their willingness to be part of the study and their referral by other teachers. Parents serving on the school governing body were included as it was felt that they would be in a better position to comment on the role of the principal in parent involvement in the school. In the focus-group interviews with teachers and parents interview guides were used (Appendix VI and VI). However, these interview guides were used as guidelines and did in no way prevent participants from discussing issues they considered important. The interviews took the form of conversations, with the participants being encouraged to talk without restraint.

These focus-group interviews were audio taped with the participants' permission. This was done to free the researcher from taking notes during the interview and allowed the researcher to pay full attention to the interviews. Verbatim transcriptions of the tapes were made.

Focus-group interviews with teachers were conducted in the afternoon so as not to disrupt schooling. Focus-group interviews with parents were conducted at school. For each of these interviews, a suitable classroom was used. In each school one focus-group interview with parents and one with teachers was conducted. Thus in total the researcher conducted three separate focus-group interviews with three groups of teachers and three separate focus-groups with three groups of parents/SGB members.

#### **3.5.4 Transcribing the data**

To facilitate analysis of data, all the interviews were transcribed. The parents interviews were translated by the researcher since they were conducted in Xitsonga.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:48) contend that there are different ways of handling and analysing data. Patton (1990:371) asserts that the type of research will have an effect on the analysis and presentation of findings. This presumes that the method used by the researcher will also have an influence on data analysis and presentation.

Patton (1990:371) maintains that the culminating activities of qualitative enquiry are analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings. This indicates that research does not end with the collection of data but the collected data should be analysed. Patton (1990:371) argues that:

The challenges are to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:132) view data analysis as a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview scripts, field notes, and other materials which were accumulated by the researcher to increase his/her understanding of them, and which enables the researcher to present that which was discovered to others. Complicated as this process may seem, it can be broken down into the following stages.

### **3.6.1 Organising data**

The data generated by qualitative methods are usually voluminous (Patton 1990:379). Organising all this data usually involves a process of "data reduction" which is a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the raw data. Other authors (discussed below) refer to this process of "coding". This is the procedure followed in this research.

### **3.6.2 Coding of data**

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:57) coding is the operation by which data is broken down, conceptualised and re-compiled into new units. The three forms of coding are conceptualising of data, categorising data as well as axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990:63) describe conceptualising of data as follows:

By breaking down and conceptualizing we mean taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea or event a name, something that stands for or represent a phenomenon.

On the other hand, categorising of data is the process of grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1990:65). Various authors use different words when referring to this process. As an example Patton (1990:381) calls it 'content analysis' which he defines as a process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:96) contend that axial coding is referred to as:

A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between categories. This is done by utilizing coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/intentional strategies and consequences.

De Vos (1998:48) asserts that "coding makes it possible to retrieve all text pertinent to the topic". De Vos further indicates that coding has the following three single steps:

- Early in the project a set of content categories is developed.
- A single code, usually a brief, easily remembered word, is assigned to each category
- Codes are used to mark the text, usually by jotting them down in the left-hand margin next to the relevant sentences.

In this study, the transcripts of all interviews were read over and over to gain familiarity with them. The aim was to see if any interesting patterns could be identified. In this way categories and subcategories started to emerge. These were noted and all data pertaining to these categories and subcategories were placed under the appropriate headings. Where appropriate, theory was grounded in the data.

### **3.7 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

The main form of data analysis used in the present study was that of content analysis (De Vos 1998; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns of the data (Patton 1990:381). This entails using codes to identify topics or recurring themes (De Vos 1998:48).

The above was achieved by a process of listening to the tape recordings of the interviews, reading the transcripts over and over again, while looking for any interesting pattern or themes.

As categories and themes emerge they were colour coded. These categories and sub-categories are discussed in chapter 4.

Schumacher and McMillan (1993:386) assert that: "reliability issues are handled within the actual study to obtain consistency of research strategies". For the purpose of this study, consistency is achieved by coding the raw data in ways others may understand and arrive at the same themes and conclusion.

Reliability in this research was enhanced by a complete description of the research process (cf 3.5) so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedures in compatible settings. Consistency in data recording, data analysis and interpretation also contribute to the reliability of the study.

Validity was enhanced by the researcher spending time in each of the three schools and interviewing a total of 21 participants. In all instances participants were encouraged to tell their stories "in their own words" and at no time did the researcher attempt to influence their narratives.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter described the qualitative research and research design. An attempt was made in this chapter to describe the rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach for the study of the role of the principal in managing parent involvement in rural areas of Northern Province. This chapter also described the methods used to obtain data, namely observation, unstructured interviews and focus-group interviews. Subsequently, the data analysis procedures were also given.

In the next chapter, the data gathered and analysed will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 2 parent involvement in secondary rural schools as well as the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement was discussed. Education and parent involvement within the rural communities were discussed to provide an understanding of the role played by the principal in parent involvement in disadvantaged communities of Northern Province.

In chapter 3 the researcher described the research design of this study, including criteria for selection of participants, research methods, data analysis, validity as well as reliability. The researcher also gave a justification for the choice of the data gathering method.

This chapter represents and describes data generated during in-depth interviews with secondary school principals and focus-group interviews with teachers and parents of the three schools used in the research. In total three principals, nine teachers and nine parents on the school governing bodies were interviewed.

Firstly, a presentation and discussion of Malamulele district and its villages, the characteristics of schools as well as the characteristics of participants are given.

When participants answered in the local vernacular, specifically parents on school governing bodies, their responses were translated by the researcher. Where the meaning of the remark in a quotation is not clear, the researcher added a word or phrase in brackets. Care was taken in translation not to lose the meaning of words or remarks made.

The presentation of the key themes emerging from the interviews is given in paragraphs 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9.

## **4.2 MALAMULELE AND ITS VILLAGES**

Malamulele district is situated in Region three of Northern Province. In this district there is a township called Malamulele. This township is surrounded by a number of smaller villages. Research was conducted in rural secondary schools situated in some of these villages.

Most of the people in the villages live in round mud huts with thatched roofs. In many cases the huts have no windows. Generally, three to four people share a hut. Most have electricity. However, few have running water in the home, although water taps are situated in the streets in front of the homes. Most families use pit-toilets. These are always located in one of the four corners of the yard. However, there are still families without even a pit-toilet. When nature calls the inhabitants of such families run to the bush to relieve themselves.

Most roads leading to secondary schools and also found in these villages are gravel roads and are in a poor condition. Learners walk along these dusty roads to and from school in the morning, during breaks as well as after school. They share the gravel streets with taxis, buses and privately owned cars. Driving in Malamulele village roads is not an easy task, as cattle, goats and donkeys are often found in the road.

The district of Malamulele is divided into four circuits and research was conducted at three secondary schools falling under the following circuits: Malamulele-east, Malamulele North-East and Malamulele-West.

## **4.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS**

This section presents the characteristics of schools that are included in the research. These characteristics are presented in Table 4.1

**TABLE 4.1: SELECTED SCHOOLS**

	<b>SCHOOL A</b>	<b>SCHOOL B</b>	<b>SCHOOL C</b>
Ethnic group	Xitsonga	Xitsonga	Xitsonga
Number of learners	986	433	637
Number of teachers	26	22	19
Number of class-rooms	19	16	16
Telephone	No	No	No
Electricity	Yes	Yes	Yes
Water	No	Yes	Yes
Toilet	Pit-toilet	Yes	Yes

School B and School C have the same number of classes. These schools are constructed face brick. School A with 19 classrooms is in need of repair because the classrooms are old. School B and C have insufficient classrooms as some of the rooms are used as the principal's office and staffrooms respectively. None of the schools have a hall, library or science laboratory. All three schools have soccer fields used for almost all the sporting activities. Toilets at School B and C are flush toilets whereas School A uses a pit-toilet. Although the communities served by the three schools are similar, these schools differ as far as resources are concerned. This is so because School B and C have running water which School A does not have.

#### **4.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS**

This section presents responses by participants, which are related to personal characteristics. The above characteristics of schools should be read in conjunction with those of the participants. The participants are from the three schools visited by the researcher. As indicated in paragraph 3.4.1, principals, parents on governing bodies as well as teachers served as participants. These were selected because the researcher felt they were "information-rich" and could discuss parent involvement in detail..

##### **4.4.1 The principals of schools**

Table 4.2 presents the relevant background information, which is needed to understand the participants' responses.

**TABLE 4.2: PRINCIPALS OF SCHOOLS**

<b>PRINCIPAL</b>	<b>SCHOOL A</b>	<b>SCHOOL B</b>	<b>SCHOOL C</b>
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Teaching experience	17 years	28 years	21 years
Principalship experience	02 years 08 months	11 years	07 year
Marital status	Married	Married	Married
Home language	Xitsonga	Xitsonga	Xitsong
Workshops on parental involvement	0	0	0

All the participants are married males who speak the Xitsonga language. They have more than two years of principalship experience as indicated in 3.4.1. No principal had attended a workshop on parent involvement during the previous year. All schools received a manual on parent involvement (mainly as this pertains to school governance), but were not workshopped on its content. Principals were interviewed in their offices during the afternoon. The data reflected in Table 4.2 were obtained from the questionnaire included as Appendix II.

#### **4.4.2 Teachers interviewed**

This section summarises the characteristics of teachers interviewed in this research. These characteristics are included in Tables 4.3 through 4.5 and are included so that the participants may be known to the reader without their identify being compromised. The data in these tables was obtained from answers to questionnaires included as Appendices III and IV.

**TABLE 4.3: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL A**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Teaching experience	21 years	05 years	07 years
Marital status	Married	Single	Single
Home language	Xitsonga	Xitsonga	Tshivenda
Highest qualification	HED	HDE	ST
Parent involvement workshop attendance	Yes	No	No

STD = Senior Teacher's Diploma

HED = Higher Education Diploma

HDE = Higher Diploma in Education

**TABLE 4.4: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL B**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Teaching experience	15 years	11 years	07 year
Marital status	Married	Married	Married
Home language	Xitsonga	Xitsonga	Tshivenda
Highest qualifications	STD	BA(ED)	STD
Parent involvement workshop attendance	No	No	No

STD = Senior Teacher's Diploma

BA(ED) = Bachelor of Arts in Education

**TABLE 4.5: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL C**

<b>TEACHERS</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Male	Male
Teaching experience	13 years	07 years	07 years
Marital status	Married	Married	Single
Home language	Xitsonga	N. Sotho	Tshivenda
Highest qualifications	B.A(Hon)	B.A	STD
Parent involvement workshop attendance	Yes	Yes	No

STD = Senior Teacher's Diploma

BA = Bachelor of Arts

BA(Hon) = Honours Bachelor of Arts

The majority of teachers interviewed have many years of teaching experience. Of these nine teachers, three of them speak the Tshivenda language, only one speaks the N.Sotho language whereas the rest are Xitsonga speaking teachers. Only three of the nine teachers have attended

a workshop on parent involvement. These were workshops aimed specifically at helping the school governing body activities at school and not parent involvement in general. Teachers were interviewed in a suitable class during the afternoon so as not to disturb teaching and learning.

#### 4.4.3 Parents interviewed

As set out in 3.5.3 parents who are members of the school governing bodies were interviewed as part of the research. The researcher interviewed parents serving on the SGB because he felt that they are in a better position to discuss parent involvement and the role the principal plays in furthering this. The information which is relevant to the discussion of the data in subsequent paragraphs, is included in Tables 4.6 through 4.8.

**TABLE 4.6: PARENTS ON SGB AT SCHOOL A**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Marital status	Married	Married	Single
Children at this school	05	01	01
Highest qualification	Grade 12	Grade 12	Grade 12
Currently employed	No	No	Yes
No of years on SGB	05 years	02 years	01 years
Position held on SGB	Chairperson	Additional member	Deputy secretary
Meetings attended last year	Plus or minus 09	09	06

**TABLE 4.7. PARENTS ON SGB AT SCHOOL B**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Marital status	Married	Single	Married
Children at this school	02	01	03
Highest qualification	Grade 12	PTD	Grade 12
Currently employed	No	Yes	No
No. of years in SGB	04	02	04
Position held on SGB	Chairperson	Additional member	Additional member
Meetings attended last year	04	04	04

PTD = Primary Teacher's Diploma

**TABLE 4.8: PARENTS ON SGB AT SCHOOL C**

<b>PARENT</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>III</b>
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Marital status	Married	Married	Married
Children at this school	01	02	01
Highest qualifications	Grade 12	Grade 12	Grade 10
Currently employed	No	No	No
No. of years on SGB	04	02	01
Position held in SGB	General secretary	Vice-secretary	Deputy chairperson
Meetings attended last year	09	09	09

The nine parents are comprised of three females and six male parents. Of the six males, one of them is single and five are married. Of the three female parents, only one of them is a single parent. Except for the one male parent in School C who has passed grade 10, all participants passed grade 12. Thus all members of the SGB's interviewed are literate. Although all SGB members had attended a workshop for school governing bodies, advice on how to involve parents, was not included.

The high number of meetings reflect all the meetings attended by SGB members during the previous year. In spite of the advanced level of schooling attained by these parents, only two SGB members are employed as labourers. This indicates the state of the economy in these rural areas. Three males interviewed, one from each school, receives a state pension. SGB members (parents) were interviewed at school during school hours. Although all parents are able to speak English, they felt that they could better express themselves in their home language. Thus the interviews were conducted in Xitsonga (cf 3.5.3) and later translated into English.

#### **4.5 SCHOOL POLICY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

None of the schools visited have a policy on parent involvement. Moreover, none of the principals have discussed parent involvement as a way of improving schooling and none has any clear idea of what they want from parents, or what they, in turn, are willing to offer. In

spite of this, the principals of all participating schools claim to strongly support parent involvement.

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The principal of School A acknowledged that the school does not have a written policy on parent involvement, but defines parents as anyone from the community who has an interest in the school. The principal explains:

But in actual fact we are also allowed to involve parents in the communities even if they are not directly involved as parents of the children in the school situation. So anybody from the community can be regarded as a parent.

A teacher at this school says parents are only involved, when there is a specific issue which concerns them. These issues relate to non-payment of school funds as well as their children's misbehaviour.

The principal of School B argues that "the general school policy" is sufficient to support parent involvement. The school does not have a specific policy on parent involvement.

The principal of School C states that the national policy is sufficient for supporting parent involvement. The principal explains: "We do have a policy. It is a national policy which states that parents should form part and parcel of the day-to-day running of the school."

In spite of this acknowledged lack of policy, both teachers and parents seem to regard parent involvement highly.

An SGB member at School A feels that parents should be involved in school matters because involvement will make their children "very productive parents or leaders of the future." However, principals involve only those parents who are living near the school, the entire parent community is not involved.

An SGB member at School B feels that parent involvement enables parents to encourage their children to do well at school. Parents seem prepared to be involved to help their children with school activities but due to lack of policies at their schools, this does not realise.

An SGB member at School C feels that parent involvement brings parents closer to the school. He indicates that such parents are in the position to know what is happening at school. However, the school itself does not take the initiative in establishing or strengthening this involvement, mainly because they have no policy on parent involvement.

However, some teachers express the concern that parents are not being meaningfully involved. Thus a teacher at School C argues: "presently parents are not involved in the way we are expecting them to be." Once more the lack of clear guidelines is cited as a reason.

A teacher at School B links the lack of meaningful parent involvement to the lack of a policy on parent involvement. He puts it this way:

Presently at this school we don't have a policy. The principal just engages parents in some aspects. For example, when there is a need to purchase say school items. That's where parents are involved because some of them are signatories in the school's account.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to Epstein (1993:61), a formal policy on parent involvement as well as school and teacher practice, are the strongest predictors of parental involvement in school and at home. The fact that no school has moved beyond a general desire to have more parental involvement indicates that the situation will, in all probability, not improve in the near future

The role the principal should play in establishing a policy is to take the initiative and leadership in this regard. However, principals interviewed do not seem to be taking their leadership position seriously in this regard. Chapter two indicated in which way the principal should lead parent involvement.

## 4.6 TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

It is important for schools to have in their repertoires a variety of ways in which parents can be involved in school. In chapter two of this study the researcher discussed the different frameworks in which parents can be involved (cf. 2.2). This paragraph summarises the types of parent involvement mentioned by the participants during the interview. Principals, teachers as well as parents serving on the school governing bodies mentioned the following types:

### 4.6.1 Communication with parents

#### 4.6.1.1 *Parent meetings*

In the schools visited, parent meetings are the main means of contact between parents and the school. All schools hold these meetings at the beginning and at the end of the year. The principal at School A says: "We always get inputs from parents in the parents' meetings at the end of the year or at the beginning of the year."

According to the interviewees, the meetings are well attended, although teachers at School B complain that parents do not come to meetings. A teacher at School B argues that:

If we call meetings, I think parents themselves are not responding. Maybe sometimes because of them not responding when they get letters, maybe he (principal) thinks it is better if he doesn't involve them.

Some parents report that attending meetings is of some help. A parent in SGB at School B says:

Before parents collect reports at the end of the quarter, we hold a meeting. We are told the school's needs and many other things which are needed by the school. When this meeting comes to an end, we are given the progress reports.

All schools hold meeting at their respective tribal authorities. Parents go to the chief's kraal to discuss school issues. As a strong community leader, the chief advises his people on school

issues. This has an advantage that when the chief calls the parents, they come in large numbers. On the whole these meetings are well attended. However, the danger is that a discussion in such meetings may be on something else rather than educational issues. An SGB member at School A says they discuss about problems caused by learners at school.

#### **4.6.1.2      *Home visits***

At School C the principal usually visits children's homes when there are serious problems. These problems include learner pregnancy, truancy and children bringing dangerous weapons to school. A teacher at School C confirms the occurrence of such visits and says:

He (the principal) tries his best. Most of the times he tries to go even to the family. He drives his own car and goes and meets them (parents) if there are problems.

Another teacher at School A supports this and argues that the principal "visits them (parent) if possible at their different homes encouraging them to support their learners."

SGB members at School A visit the villages to talk about non-payments of fees as well as other important things. An SGB member says: "The principal just accompanied us because he is an SGB member. Otherwise, the whole job was done by the chairperson and also the members of the SGB."

However, it appears as if this dealt mainly with non-payment of funds. Nevertheless, it is not a negative thing for SGB members to visit parents. The question is whether the principal is playing a sort of leadership role in this regard.

This principal also seems to be delegating his important task of managing parent involvement to the SGB. Furthermore, principals seem to visit parents when there are problems at school. They should also visit parents to discuss matters other than problems.

#### **4.6.1.3      *Written communication***

Schools A and C are able to duplicate letters and are in the position to send out letters to parents to inform them of meetings. These letters are usually given to learners so that they can pass them on to their parents. This may be problematic because not all learners deliver these letters. A teacher in School A confirms this and says: "some of the learners are cheaters. They cheat their parents."

The majority of letters sent to parents relate to problems a child may be experiencing at school. School B sends another type of letter to parents to inform them about school activities. A teacher at School B explains:

During the last week we had a choir which was participating at Shingwedzi College Eisteddfod. They were invited through the letter so that they have to be part of that Eisteddfod.

In an exceptional case School A sends information to parents through circulars. The principal at School A confirms:

We also at the school communicate directly with the parents through circulars or letters whenever maybe we need them to know something that is taking place in the school situation which involves administration and many other things.

An SGB member at School A says the principal writes letters to parents if their children are often absent from school or behave badly. This is also done at Schools B and C.

#### **4.6.1.4      *Communication between class teachers and parents***

All teachers state that they invite individual parents to come and speak to them. These invitations usually concern a problem with the child. Parents at School A state that the principal

gives parents a chance of seeing what is happening in the classroom situation. A parent on the SGB at School A explains:

That happened when children were overcrowded in classes. Some of the learners were sitting even on top of small tables, some were two in a small table which is supposed to be used by one learner. We invited the chief and Indunas to come and see this. Later we invited the parents. That happened at this school.

The chief was in the position to ask his people to donate money for a school building. The chief is a strong community leader who can also ask the government to do something about this state of affairs.

Although parents in the SGB at School A confirm that parents are involved in the classroom situation by paying visits when the lessons are in progress, teachers from the same school state that parents do not make use of this opportunity. A teacher at School A elaborates:

The opportunity is there but unfortunately they (parents) don't use this opportunity because they don't have knowledge how can they come and help in the classroom situation.

The principal at School A also confirms his support of teachers at this school in contacting parents. He states:

And then in the classroom situation ...all the class teachers are encouraged to involve parents in running of the school in classroom management.

This principal encourages teachers to invite parents to come and see when the lessons are given. They are also encouraged to invite some parents with expertise to come and share this expertise in the classroom situation.

SGB members at School B say that the principal allows them to visit the classes while lessons are in progress. However, this does not seem to be taking place because teachers at School B says they communicate with parents only when they are issuing progress reports. The principal at School B elaborates:

They don't necessarily communicate about progress reports, they communicate about looking after the child and also helping the child at home and also about the school uniform and about the way in which learners should behave at school and the way in which the parents should help these learners at home so that they can cope with school matters as well as to cope with... life in general.

Teachers in School C do not involve parents in the classroom situation. They indicate that parents are called to come and collect progress reports only:

But is not often that parents come and meet us. We just meet them maybe when we had to issue a report wherein we invite all parents and for that matter we will be issuing reports. We don't meet and discuss in most of the cases.

Asked whether parents came to school when invited, the principal of School C answers:

Some do, some don't. So in a form of percentage I would say thirty percent would come when there is a burning issue, like when we are talking about the school fund. But when we invite them for a farewell function where there will be catering and all that, seventy percent usually turn up.

#### **4.6.1.5      *Opportunities for parents to communicate with the school***

This is the area where most school principals fail. They communicate with parents, but parents have few opportunities of communicating with the school.

Teachers at School B confirm that the only time they speak with parents is when they "...distribute reports at the end of the quarter. Other ways of communicating with parents we have never been exposed to." These opportunities, as well as formal meetings at school (cf 4.6.1.1) are valuable, but do not allow parents to communicate with the school when there is a need to do so. The principal should create opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate frequently.

The principal at School A creates opportunities for parents to communicate with the school. The principal says he uses "the SGB, which hold meetings with them and they in turn report to parents, either in the school level or in their community meetings." Although the principal is creating opportunities for the school to communicate with parents, the principal does not encourage parents to communicate with the school.

A teacher at School A adds: "As teachers we sometimes ...call parents whose children are performing very well so that they may prepare their children for further education, above matric." This is done on an individual level where parents are invited to school.

The principal at School C gives an example of how he communicates with parents verbally. The principal explains: "Like for example, inform all the parents that there will be a team from Home Affairs who will come here to make applications for ID's (identity documents), death certificates."

A teacher at School C explains how they communicate with parents:

Normally when we want to communicate with parents the principal makes sure that he types letters and gives them to parents. So he has many ways of communicating with parents but the best one I see him using is that of calling kids and he gives them letters and they send to parents.

An SGB member at School C confirms that the principal creates opportunities for parents to communicate with parents at this school. He says the principal goes to the community to speak

to parents when there are problems at school. This shows that parents are welcomed but it does not imply that they could visit the class teachers if they wished to.

## **DISCUSSION**

The success of parent meetings in schools visited is commended, but much still needs to be done to establish two-way communication. Epstein (1995:704) suggests the following relating to home-school communication: Conference with every parent at least once per year, with follow-ups as needed; use language translators to assist parents as needed; provide weekly or monthly folders of student work for review and comments; arrange parent/student pick up of report card, with conference on improving grades; provide a regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and other communications; provide clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs and activities within schools; circulate information on all school policies, reforms and transition. Although this is suggested for schools within the USA, the principles are also applicable to the local context.

### **4.6.2 Including parents in decision-making**

It is necessary in a democracy for people to be included in decisions that affect them or their children. This means that parents should be involved in school governance, or in decisions taken on classroom level. The researcher, during participant observation, observed that principals encouraged SGB members to take decisions.

#### **4.6.2.1 *The role of the SGB in decision-making***

In all three schools parents contribute to decision-making through the school governing bodies. The principal of School B feels the school governing body at his school is "fairly active." In addition, there is a good relationship between the principal and the SGB, especially the chairperson. He describe him thus:

Here at school we are fortunate because we have an ex-policeman who helps much in attending all activities and who helps us by reminding us of doing this and that. He is just as good as the principal.

At all schools, SGB members have certain rights by virtue of the South African Schools Act. The principal at School A argues: "we always have the SGB as the legitimate body to take decisions", thereby implying that this affords all parents the opportunity to be part of decision-making.

An SGB member at School A confirms that they are allowed to take decisions at school. He explains: "When we are having meetings we are the ones who take decisions. We take decisions which are not destructive but constructive."

A parent on SGB at School C supports the above and states that:

The principal arranges meetings for us where we take decisions. When we take good decisions, he accepts it. If it is a bad decision the principal interferes and show us the right way to do it.

School C trains its SGB Members. The principal explains:

Yes, they are empowered by manuals which are sent to the school by the department. In addition, they also attend workshops like the Kgatelopele project wherein they are trained in issues like leadership, conflict management, financial management and so forth.

Asked whether SGB members are trained at School C, a parent on SGB says: "Mmm, it is true. Last year we went to a workshop which was conducted at Giyani Hotel where we were trained on how we should assist in running the school."

In other words, SGB's are taught how to contribute to the management of the school. However, none seem to have been shown how to improve the involvement of all parents.

School A does not have its own programme for training the SGB members on parent involvement. The principal says that such a programme is provided by the department or government and not by the school. The principal confirms:

We as a school don't take the initiative at the moment but I think it is good for the school to also have a programme where we always indicate that when and where we are going to train parents in this issue and so on and so on.

#### 4.6.2.2 *Considering the opinion of parents*

The SGB represents the parents and should report to them. Moreover, when important decisions need to be taken, the principal and SGB members can consult parents.

The principal at School B, situated in the western circuit of Malamulele district does not allow parents who are not members of the school governing body to take decisions. The principal explains:

No, we don't allow that, otherwise the school will become a shambles. Whenever they have problem, they come and tell me but I will note that problem and I will take it back to the SGB.

The principal maintains that involving parents who are not SGB members can result in the school being a school for individuals instead of a community school. He further states that allowing parents who are not SGB members to take decisions "is suicidal for the institution."

Although this principal stresses that non-SGB parents are not allowed to take decisions, parents in the SGB at the same school say that should be involved in decisions which affect them. An SGB member at School B explains:

Parents who are outside the SGB have a big responsibility. For example, when we realised that the amount paid for school funds is insufficient, we call a meeting. They decide themselves whether the amount paid must be raised or not.

It seems as if parents who are not SGB members are only involved when it comes to deciding on school fees and nothing else. The principal should strive to involve parents in all areas related to the education of their children.

Asked whether he allows parents who are not SGB members to take decisions at his school, the principal at School C answers:

Yes, they are allowed to take decisions because those parents who are elected to represent them go and meet them at, outside the school level and these parents do make decisions. And those who are representing the school in the SGB will come with the decisions which was influenced by non-members of the SGB.

The principal at School A adds that he allows parents who are not SGB members to take decisions "because without them sanctioning or adopting the decisions that are taken by the principal, the teachers and the SGB we will not be able to carry anything in the school situation."

Although Schools A and B also include parents in some decisions made on their behalf, it does not seem to be according to any specific guidelines. The ad hoc involvement of parents in decision-making is a step in the right direction, but clearer guidelines on when this should occur are suggested.

#### **4.6.2.3 *Involving parents in decisions at classroom level***

Often decisions are taken at classroom level about issues that directly affect parents. To confirm this, the principal of School A says: "at the same time if we have got trips we involve

parents. ...Not actually the members of the SGB but also members of the public community." This principal asks the parents' advice on whether the children should go on a trip. Principals of Schools B and C maintain that they involve parents when learners undergo a trip. The principal at School B explains: "When there is a trip they (parents) do come and escort or take these learners out." These principals ask parents to decide whether they want to accompany the children or not.

An SGB member at School B says that when an excursion is being planned for learners, parents are called and told what the cost of transport will be. Parents can then decide whether the fees are acceptable or whether teachers have to look for cheaper transport.

A teacher at School A says the school involves parents at classroom level when learners regularly come late to school. He says that in that case parents are consulted on the problem and asked for advice "before we take maybe some major steps dealing with learners who are coming to school late."

The principal at School A asserts that the class teacher and parents solve learners' problems together at class level. He says: "And they (class teacher and child) usually address their problem before the parents." These are problems of learners who regularly absent themselves from class, do not complete homework and the like.

A teacher at School A confirms that parents do take decisions at class level at their school. She says the principal tells parents that:

They are free, very much free to come and just sit and observe in the classroom to see how teachers teach and also how learners respond, so as not to blame teachers when the students fail or not to blame students if they fail.

Although teachers at School B regard the principal as an authoritarian manager who does not allow parents to take decisions, a parent on the SGB at the same school disagrees with this statement. She puts it this way:

I remember in a meeting where the principal told us that parents are allowed to come and observe what is happening in the classroom situation provided they notify the principal first.

The presumption here is that this may lead to parents having a greater say in what is happening in the classroom.

## **DISCUSSION**

All schools seem to welcome the idea of having parents as part of governance structure. However, some schools do not allow parents who are not SGB members to take decisions at school. School B is a case in point. Epstein et al (1997:9) confirm that parents serving in governing bodies should be trained to enable them to perform their duties efficiently. However, some participants reveal that SGB members at their schools are not trained, which will have a negative effect on their ability to contribute to decision-making at school level.

The ability of the principal to encourage participation in decision-making by the SGB and by ordinary parents is related to his/her management style. The different leadership styles were discussed in paragraph 2.11.3.

### **4.6.3 Assisting parents with their parenting tasks**

Most of the children are in the care of grandmothers, single mothers, brothers, sisters, et cetera. A teacher at School A confirms: "Some of them (children) are being cared by their grandmothers. Some are being looked after by their brothers and sisters at home." This is not surprising considering that the majority of parents are migrant labourers or deceased due to HIV/Aids. Many are very young due to teenage pregnancies.

Given the fact that many learners are in the care of grandmothers, single mothers or siblings, these caregivers in the community need assistance in their parenting tasks. However, in most schools it seems as if such assistance is lacking and only individual parents who are experiencing problems are helped.

A teacher at School A says that they: "try to give them (parents) ideas how they treat that particular problem of that particular child while they are at home." This refers to helping children with homework, truancy as well as delinquency.

The principal at School A says that he assists parents with their parenting tasks. He elaborates:

We give guidance to parents with regard to the attendance of their children, with regard to uniform, with regard to maybe how they may be able to plan for their children as far as uniform are concerned, as far as sports are concerned.

This is also done at an individual level when a parent is invited to come and talk to the principal. However, at times a few issues relating to parenting may be discussed by principal in an address to a number of parents together.

The principal at School C contends that he helps parents with their domestic problems. The principal explains:

Like for example, a child may be abducted by a boy and she stays there for a night or two and the parents come to school and find out if ever that is allowed. And then we usually come in and assist them and sometimes the matters are even reported to the police and the law takes its due course.

Violence in South Africa is rife and also affects the rural areas of Malamulele district in Northern Province. Violence is also found at school for example rape and child abuse. Principals should give guidance to all parents so that they are able to deal with these issues.

An SGB member at School B says that the principal organised a cultural day. The topic of the day concerned Aids Awareness. She says: "We were told everything concerning Aids. The day was organised by the principal at this school." The principal's move in this regard is commended bearing in mind that parents need to have knowledge of HIV/Aids so as to combat the spread of it among the youth of the community.

Furthermore, this principal assisted parents in improving the interaction between parents and children at home. The principal at School C adds: "All these elements of delinquency are taken care of even when they occur outside the school situation."

## **DISCUSSION**

Judging by the information set out in 2.3.3 it seems as if there is a need for secondary school principals in the rural communities of Malamulele to help parents cope with the demands of their parenting tasks, which are mainly due to the shifting relationships between children and parents both in the home and in the broader community. This can be addressed as part of a comprehensive parental involvement programme organised at school level.

Shartrand et al (1997:33) assert that educators can learn from parents about child rearing practices and family skills and resources and tailor suggestions for involvement activities to meet the individual circumstances of each family. However, although principals in this research explained how to assist parents in home learning, no one mentioned what he had learnt from parents as far as parenting is concerned.

### **4.6.4 Using parent volunteers**

Parent volunteers can be used in a variety of ways at school. The principal at School A make use of volunteers. In most cases it seems as if parents are asked to clean the school or to donate something to the school. The principal explains:

So when we invite them to come and clear the school or maybe to do any other job in the school they say 'but we are doing it in the primary school.' So in this case is very difficult for us to get the cooperation of the parents.

A teacher at School A confirms the presence of volunteers at this school. He says:

Yes we do have those who come and assist us by way of activities at school. For example, if we are building a class there are those who supported the school by transporting sand free of charge. By coming and repairing some of the school properties free of charge.

A parent serving in SGB at School A adds that: "volunteers are not trained at this school." In this way parents feel that they are encouraged to volunteer but their problem is that they sometimes do not know exactly what is expected of them.

At School B parents seem to demand to be paid for any help they may offer the school. The principal at School B explains: "Aaa, parent volunteers are quite rare. Why do I say they are quite rare? They think that the moment they volunteer then they should earn."

Parents in this area are poor and one cannot blame them for wanting to be paid. On the other hand, their children's education is important and they should be willing to help.

Asked whether there are volunteers at School B, teachers answer "No, we don't have parent volunteers at this school." However, a parent in SGB at School B says that parents are asked at times to clean the school premises.

At School C volunteers are sometimes also used to clean the schoolyard. The principal at School C puts it this way: "but sometimes parents do volunteer to come and do minimal work like weeding."

The conclusion can thus be made that there is a narrow definition of the use of volunteers and that it relates mostly to cleaning the school premises. This means that the various talents parents have are not utilised and the benefits thus lost to the school. The principal of School B acknowledges that using volunteers in a variety of ways would be difficult, but not impossible.

## **DISCUSSION**

All three schools visited could improve on recruiting, using and training volunteers. The three principals do not have a policy on volunteering. Principals who sometimes use volunteers do not train them. School A is a case in point. Epstein et al (1997:9) emphasise that volunteers and teachers must be screened, trained and acquainted with school policies in order to have a successful volunteer programme.

This is important for the Malamulele district in Northern Province because most principals seem to lack knowledge of managing volunteering.

### **4.6.5 Involving parents in home learning**

School A involves parents in learning at home. A teacher at School A states that when they detect a performance problem they "try to give them (parents) ideas how they can treat that particular problem with that particular child while they are at home."

The principal at School B says that his doors are open for parents to come and discuss issues relating to parenting. He explains:

And sometimes I call the parents and the learner together to counsel the child before them and also to tell the parents what is expected of them so that they can help the smooth running of the school so that at the end the child must benefit.

A teacher at School B confirms how they help parents with learning at home:

We show them the weaknesses of their learners and how they should assist learners at home like when learners come back home, they should sometimes if they are able to read and write, check the books of learners to see as to whether their learner is doing well or not doing well.

The principal at School C involves parents in home learning when learners are underachieving. The principal says: "Even when they (parents) are not able to read or write we ask them to make sure that when he (child) is at home, they must supervise him while he is doing his work." When asked to elaborate the principal could not explain how he expects the parent to do this supervision.

Teachers at School C complain that even though they try to involve parents in home learning, parents do not do what the teachers are asking them to do. One teacher expresses it as follows:

When we give them (learners) assignments we also give a little part which must be completed by parents. Even though in most cases that part is not completed by parents. We find that it is not done.

This teacher adds that parents fail to append their signatures to their children's written work when asked by teachers. This teacher puts it this way: "But in most of our books or our written work books when we get them from students we find that those signatures are not there."

## **DISCUSSION**

The fact that principals and teachers assist parents in supporting their children's schooling is commendable. However, it seems as if this is done on an ad hoc basis by individual teachers, or relates to problems with specific learners. What seems to be lacking is a general policy on involving parents in their children's' education. This is unfortunate.

Parents' assistance in home learning is a vital means of improving school performance. Moreover, interviews showed that principal needs information on the advantages of parents helping children at home. Northern Province has a high illiteracy rate (1.3) which makes it difficult for parents to be involved in their children's homework, but not impossible. However, principals need to be taught strategies of involving parents in children' homework. This can be done by arranging parent involvement courses for secondary school principals where home-work activities are workshopped.

#### 4.6.6 Community involvement

At School A and C community involvement relates to requesting businesses for donations. When they stage the grade 12 farewell function they approach the businesses for assistance. The principal explains:

And they always help us with mealie-meal (maize), with meat, many other things and we always have successful parties time and again. So this is how the business are involved.

A teacher at School A puts it this way:

Even when there are functions like farewell function or even when there is a trip, they give us something to carry along when we are going on trip. And when there is a function they support us with vegetables like tomatoes and onions and many other things.

In the case of School B, the lack of shops in the area means that donations need to be asked from businesses far from the school. The principal at School A shows that his school is also committed to playing a role within the community:

Jaa, the role that the school plays in the community is that ...usually if there is maybe a funeral in the community, we do encourage teachers to go and help the community as well as the children that are living in the community.

The principal at School A adds that teachers often serve as masters of ceremonies at funerals because many parents are illiterate. Children help by arranging chairs, hoisting tents and the like.

On the other hand, business also receives help from the school. The principal at School B confirms: "Businessmen sometimes are the ones who are coming to look for services for repairing say desks, windows and school buildings in general." The principal at School A adds:

If we want to transport pupils we always go to the taxi people around. Then at the end of the day they support us. So we have got that working relationship time and again with business.

An SGB member at School B says: "There are sometimes funerals, parties as well wedding ceremonies in the village. The school allows us to use its furniture during these different parties."

A teacher at School A says that when there is a funeral they help the community. He put it thus: "We do assist by lending, chairs, duplicating their programmes, because we have machines (photocopy) here at school. We do support the community."

Chairs are borrowed from school because the majority of people in this area are unemployed. As such they cannot afford hiring chairs for the funeral.

A parent on the SGB adds that the church is involved by way of the Student Christian Movement which is attended by learners. The principal of School A supports the close link between the school and the church, highlighting the values and morals supported by the church:

But at the same time for education to take place normally as we know it, we need the moral aspect in the education. Within the children in the sense that there must be, they must be able to be obedient to rules of the school and regulations

A parent on SGB at School B confirms the involvement of the church in this way: "In the morning, during assembly, priests are usually invited to come and preach the Word of God to learners."

School C does not involve the church in school matters. A teacher at School C puts it this way:

But in the case of the churches because there are different types of denominations, they feel it very hard to come to our school to assist because of learners belonging to Zion, others Roman, others, this different Christianity causing a lot of confusion.

In a country which supports religious freedom, imposing one religion or denomination on learners could pose problems.

School B uses a church for choir practices because they do not have a suitable venue. A teacher at School B explains: "And we once requested the church to assist us in accommodating the learners for practice sessions for the music Eisteddfod."

This is not surprising considering that the school has 16 classrooms. Out of these classes, one is used as a principal's office and two are used as a staff room. Moreover, the school does not have a hall.

School B provided the community with water in times of drought. The principal says: "When there was drought we did allow the community members, the villagers to come and fetch water from our school campus." An SGB member at School C says the school supplied nearby families with water during funerals because they have a tank at school.

This is important considering that a lot of water is needed for cooking during funerals. Water supply in the area is not good. Taps are found outside their yards but in most cases the water supply has dried up or been cut off and residents are left without water.

At School B the community is involved by way of selling food to learners during breaks and extramural activities. An SGB member at School B mentions a parent who has a tuck shop near the school.

The principal adds: "And sometimes we also let these learners go to these communities when we have these cleaning campaigns." Children, under the supervision of teachers visit the community to pick up dirt, tins and the like.

At School C the classes are used for Adult Basic Education and Training. Parents also hold meetings at school. The school assists parents financially when a parent in the village passes away. Teachers as well as learners collect money amongst themselves. This money is then handed to the bereaved family.

## **DISCUSSION**

In poor rural areas, the community needs to cooperate in order to survive. Thus schools, churches, businesses and community members should assist each other. This seems to be the case in the district of Malamulele. What is, however a problem, is that this cooperation seems to take place only when the need arises. What seems to be lacking is a well coordinated strategy to use the expertise and resources of the community to the benefit of all concerned.

### **4.7 ORGANISING PARENT INVOLVEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL**

It seems that principals and teachers are using a variety of ways to involve parents but there is no general plan of action. Epstein (1997:13) suggests that there should be a 'team' of some sort that is specifically tasked with involving parents.

The SGB's of the three schools seem to support involvement but do not have a specific task group dealing with this. In general, the SGB's and teachers look to the principals to provide leadership in this regard. They argue that the principal should play a key role in the involvement of parents at schools. In this regard a few ways in which principals should do so were mentioned by the participants. These are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### **4.7.1 Coordinating the relationship**

The principal at School A says that the principal's role is to coordinate the relationship between the school and the community. He says:

Whatever happens there should be a relationship between the school and the community, the principal should be the first to make sure that he coordinates the relationship.

A teacher at School A supports the above and adds that:

The role of the principal is good because he must try by all means to mediate between the department and parents, between parents and learners and between parents and teachers.

A teacher at School B maintains that the principal builds a relationship with parents if he involves them. This teacher explains:

In that way the principal will build a good relationship with the parents. And as such, in future the parents maybe will start to trust even the principal also and as such they (parents) will also be involved.

Involvement of parents in the education of their children also depends on the relationship between the school and parents. A relationship of trust can encourage parent involvement.

#### **4.7.2 Facilitation of parent involvement**

The principal at School B says that the principal is the major facilitator of parent involvement in rural settlements. At Schools A and B the school governing bodies and other stakeholders facilitate parent involvement. The principal of School C says:

Right, the facilitation is not solely done by the principal. Like we have indicated, in the school governing body we have got three stakeholders, parents, teachers and students. So the chairperson of the SGB will facilitate the choice of parents who need to participate in certain activities at school. Committees at school also co-opt parents to assist them in their venture.

The principal at School B confirms that the SGB facilitates parent involvement at his school. The principal explains:

So wherever we have got a project we elect a committee that can run the project and report to the SGB and the SGB is always there to monitor.

An SGB member at School A says that when they have gathered with parents, the SGB facilitates their involvement. The principal just add here and there.

Instead, of taking a lead in the facilitation of parent involvement, principals leave everything in the hands of the school governing bodies. This is acceptable, providing the SGB is equal to the task. However, the responsibility of facilitating parent involvement ultimately is that of the principal. As such the principal should play a more active role.

#### **4.7.3 Initiating parent involvement**

The role of the principal is to initiate the involvement of parents in school activities. The principal at School A says:

Aaa, for example, the SGB cannot take the initiative on its own because the SGB does not know the problem or problems that are actually taking place in the school situation.

A teacher at School B says: "the headmaster of the school should engage parents in all the activities that take place in that particular institution." An SGB member at School C confirms that the principal should initiate parent involvement.

#### **4.7.4 Calling meetings for parents**

A teacher at School A regards the role of the principal, as one of calling meetings for parents. He explains: "Another role is to call a meeting to give them (parents) reports about education which involves their kids at school." The principal at School C feels that when inviting parents for meetings the principal should involve other stakeholders. He argues:

And to go to the other stakeholders in the village. Like the development forum, SANCO, traditional authority and try to ask for assistance when it comes to invitation, so that when parents come here they can be told what they are supposed to do.

An SGB member at School A says that the principal invites parents whose children are problematic at school, but does not extend this invitation to the whole parent body on a regular basis.

Parents involvement needs the concerted efforts of a number of role- players in order to be successful. Although it is commendable for principals to initiate parent involvement, this vision needs to be shared if sustainable involvement programmes are to be implemented.

It seems as if these meetings are called only when there is a problem at school. In cases where everything is going smoothly, parents are never involved in the education of their children.

#### **4.7.5 Assisting parents with their problems**

The role of the principal in parent involvement is to assist parents with their problems. The principal at School B explains:

It may be a needy parent who needs some counselling then we do help that parent and maybe a parent who perhaps neglects their child we tell them we help one another in that way.

A teacher at School B says: "the principal must see to it that the parents mustn't come to school only when there is a problem. Even though things are running smoothly the parents must be invited to see how the school is going."

#### **4.7.6 Planning the involvement**

The principal can play a key role in planning the involvement of parents in school activities. In support of this, the principal at School A says that the school should design a programme for involving parents. This means that the principal should plan the date, time as well as place where parent workshops should take place.

A teacher at School A agrees that planning is central to the principal task of involving parents. She puts it this way:

Jaa, mmm, (laughing) as teachers we would want him (principal) to devise some means on how parents can get involved in making sure that every activity that we give to pupils, parents do see the activity and sign to make sure that their children have written that work.

Assisting parents with problems is highly commendable. However, this is often restricted to those parents whose children are misbehaving at school, or who take the initiative of contacting the principal about problems at home. Other parents who may be experiencing problems are thus excluded. Principals should therefore make a concerted effort to know the home backgrounds of learners in the school so that all parents who are in need of help can be given it. Likewise, the principal should make it known that parents are welcome to seek help at school should they have a problem. However, in a poverty stricken area, this could be a time-

consuming task and it is recommended that the principal involves other staff members, social services and the church in this endeavour.

A teacher at School B says that the principal must have a programme for meetings with his "SGB and with parents of learners in that particular school."

This discussion shows an understanding of the personal role of the principal in planning parent involvement. However, it also shows a lack of understanding of parent involvement. Parent involvement seems to be narrowly defined and the participants only gave stereotypical examples of parent involvement. This further illustrates the need for a policy/plan for parent involvement. In this, the principal needs to take the lead.

## **DISCUSSION**

Judging by the information set out in 2.11.5 it seems as if there is a need to help secondary school principals in the rural areas of Northern Province, especially the Malamulele district with the role they should play in parental involvement. This can be addressed by in-service courses conducted by the department on parent involvement. The department should also supply principals with sufficient information relating to the management of parent involvement.

### **4.8 PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The principals will only develop a specific strategy to involve parents and teachers and parents will only support this if they are convinced of the benefits of parent involvement. Although the knowledge of participants of the benefits of parent involvement seems to be limited, teachers and principals do list a number of advantages of parent involvement in their schools. In the interviews the following benefits were listed by the participants.

#### **4.8.1 Teachers can learn certain skills from parents**

The principal at School A says that parent involvement enables teachers and principals to acquire certain skills. These are skills in certain activities like sports, music and the like. The principal at School A argues:

We need some other people from the community or parents to convey those skills to the school so that we can be able to ...convey it to the students so that we can learn globally in as far as education is concerned.

The principal at School C comments on the skills received from other stakeholders in education. He says: "So these stakeholders are not only there to disrupt but they are also there to assist, they are checks and balances."

School A also makes use of parents' skills when they have projects. The principal puts it this way: "If we feel there is somebody who is an expert in that project, we do communicate with that person before we even involve the SGB."

Parents have skills that can be used in the education of the child. Principals should see to it that they make use of such skills.

#### **4.8.2 Improved learner behaviour**

Parent involvement is perceived to be a strategy to improve discipline. The principal at School B says that:

If parents do come because the learners give problems, such learners are somehow disciplined because they don't want to trouble their parents by coming to school to discuss issues or problems which are made by them.

On the other hand, the principal at School C is perturbed that parents no longer discipline their children. He puts it this way:

Parents are too permissive on the side of their kids. They no longer motivate kids to behave properly as it was in the past or in the past five years that we have gone through.

Thus, although role players seem to agree that parents can contribute to good behaviour of learners (cf.1.1.2), they also acknowledge that there are problems at home in this regard. This supports the notion that the principal should support parents in their parenting tasks.

#### **4.8.3 Parents' role in problem solving**

The principal at School A asserts that he encourages teachers to invite parents when there are problems concerning attendance and written work. These parents are invited to come and solve problems related to the school situation. The principal at School A says: "so, when we are gathered then we share the solving of the problem and also we share the vision of the school." One teacher explains it this way:

The problems which we encounter at school which we need parents to assist or help us. We got to make them aware of such problems so that they may try by all means to support us in educating their children.

The principal at School B also mentions getting assistance from parents to solve various problems at his school. A teacher at School B confirms: "In that case, we try together with the parents to find out as to what might be the problem."

A parent on SGB at School B says: "When there are problems at school, the principal calls us and we sit down and solve the problem." A teacher at School B confirms that: "When the principal is having a problem with the students he invites the parents to come and assist him or her in solving that particular problem."

#### **4.8.4 Parents' contribution to a child's schooling**

Principals recognise a parent's role in home learning. In most cases principals state that parents should check the child's homework regularly. The principal at School C argues:

We need to tell parents to monitor these things and by so doing they also make sure that student does his homework. Even when they are not able to read or write we ask them to make sure that when he is at home they must supervise him while he is doing his work.

A teacher at School A agrees, adding that parents who check their children's school work know "whether their children are progressing or not."

However, the parents' role in home learning, according to the participants' answers, does not include anything more than checking whether the homework has been completed.

#### **4.8.5 Parents' provision of financial support**

Principals believe that schools get funds through parent involvement. The principal at School A adds that parents can also receive funds through parent involvement. Asked whether a lady working outside was a labourer or volunteer, a principal answered:

She raised the problem that she does not have school funds. So we agreed with the SGB that we must give her a job so that she can be able to raise funds for her child's school funds. That is why she is busy working there. So at the end of the day we are going to pay her money. And then some of the money is going to be used for the school funds and some of the money is going to pay for the child.

This indicates that it is not only the school that receives money from the parents but parents can also receive funds from the school. However, this practice is very rare, especially in disadvantaged communities such the ones found in Malamulele.

#### **4.8.6 Parents provide norms and values to learners**

A teacher at School B says parents shape the morals and values of learners. This teacher puts it this way:

I think in shaping the morals of our kids it is not only the responsibility of the parents... but this time is a mutual benefit because both parents and teachers are helping in shaping the way for learners in a way of some morals and values.

The principal at School A agrees and says: "So if the church is involved in the moral aspect of the school then I think...we can have a conducive situation where we can have proper learning and teaching taking place."

Principals should always involve parents so that the moral aspect of the child can be developed. This is also consistent with the views of Coleman (cf. 2.6.1).

#### **4.8.7 Provision of academic achievement**

A teacher at School B says the benefit of parent involvement "is seen at the end of the year, it makes learners to pass well." The principal at School C puts it this way: "If more parents are involved the high pass rate will increase. That could translate into a high pass rate."

Asked what the benefits of parent involvement are, a parent on SGB at School A says that it makes learners to pass their subjects. As such, principals should involve parents in those activities which will make learners to pass at the end of the year.

## **DISCUSSION**

Principals and teachers were aware of the benefits to parent involvement. However, when these benefits are compared with the benefits mentioned in literature (cf 1.1.2) they show that the participants have a limited understanding of the benefits of parent involvement. One of the proven benefits of parent involvement is improved academic achievement and this was not greatly emphasised by the participants. This is important given the poor matric results of Northern Province. Important benefits which also need to be mentioned in South African context like decreased drop-out rates (2.8.1), decreased truancy (2.8.1) and more regular homework habits (2.8.1) are not mentioned.

### **4.9 PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

All the participants acknowledged that parent involvement could be improved, giving various reasons for lack of involvement. The following barriers to parent involvement were mentioned by principals, teachers as well as parents serving on SGB's.

#### **4.9.1 Lack of knowledge**

The principal at School B feels that lack of knowledge hampers parent involvement at schools. The principal of School C confirms this by indicating what principals can do to eradicate lack of knowledge by parents. He says:

We need to educate parents. We need to workshop them more especially those who are in the SGB that it is their right to support education of children.

A teacher at School B argues that teachers at that school have a limited understanding of parent involvement. Asked what types of parent involvement they have at school he answers:

Jaa, mmm, I think we still lack a lot when it comes to how we involve our parents. That's why we even lack we don't even know what are the types. In

fact, I think if we are maybe exposed to this next time we shall know as to how to involve our parents .

#### **4.9.2 Illiteracy**

A teacher at School A says that the illiteracy of parents result in their staying away from school activities. He says: "As most of our parents are illiterate, they don't get information about education or changes which are taking place nowadays. So that also may be the cause of them not participating fully to support the school."

An SGB member at School A agrees that parents do not come to school stating that some of them have "a problem of illiteracy." A teacher at School C puts it this way: "I think parents are not involved because most of them are really illiterate and this school issue really for them is a thing for teachers and pupils."

All the participants seem to agree that illiteracy is a cause of lack of parent involvement at schools. This is not surprising as the majority of parents in South Africa, including the rural areas of Malamulele in Northern Province are illiterate (cf.1.3).

#### **4.9.3 Ignorance of both teachers and parents**

The principal at School B says that parents are ignorant regarding their role in education. The principal puts it this way: "I don't want to say they (parents) are ignorant to do what they should do because we have to help one another."

When asked what the barriers to parent involvement are, the principal of School C admitted: "Jaa, it could be ignorance on the side of the management and the department." This answer shows that the principal realises that educators are not always knowledgeable on parent involvement and that this contributes to a lack of involvement. However, it does not seem as if anyone is making a concerted effort to improve the knowledge of all role players.

On the other hand, during the SGB meetings attended, the researcher found that all three principals were friendly during meetings, and seemed willing to involve parents. Thus, the problem seems to rather be one of ignorance regarding the role of parents and ways in which this can be improved.

#### **4.9.4 Management style of the principal**

Teachers believe that parent involvement is hampered by the negative attitude of the principal at their school. A teacher at School B explains:

Jaa, another thing is the attitude. The principal is having a negative attitude towards parents. And because of that negative attitude that makes parents who are able to, not coming out to assist in any way.

An SGB member at School B says that the principal involves them in school activities whereas teachers maintain that the principal does things alone. One teacher at this school says that if the principal can be open "maybe things will go well because some of the parents, they are afraid of him."

It is only in School B where the principal, according to the participants, does not seem to welcome parents.

#### **4.9.5 Lack of time**

Most parents do not come to school because they have no time since they work away from home. A teacher at School C puts it this way:

Mmm, I think most of the parents are not staying locally. They are working at places like Johannesburg. They only come back maybe for the winter holidays and also December, which makes it very difficult to communicate with them.

An SGB member at School A concurs: "The problem is that all parents are not at home, they are working in urban areas." This makes it difficult for the principal to involve parents because they are always away from home.

Although this is a difficult problem, efforts should be made to locate the person caring for the children in the absence of parents and involve them. In addition, all meetings should be arranged at a time convenient for the parents.

However, principals should involve parents at the time that is convenient for parents.

#### **4.9.6 Uncooperative parents**

The general apathy of parents to school was mentioned by many teachers. A teacher at School B says that when they call meetings parents do not respond. A teacher at School C supports this and states:

So I think he (principal) is involving them, is just that they (parents) are negative towards school as I have said. And when they are negative like they are, really you cannot even, I mean you don't have powers to force them to come and involve themselves.

An SGB member at School A confirms: "Parents who are in our villages consider agriculture more important than educational matters." On the other hand, the principal should encourage them to be involved in educational issues, by explaining that this could lead to a better life for their children.

#### **4.9.7 Long distances**

Parents have a problem of travelling long distances to schools. The principal at School A states that their school caters for learners from four villages which are situated about one kilometre

from the school. A teacher at School A says because of this the schools "end up having less participation of members of the community in the school."

An SGB member at School A confirmed that their school is surrounded by four villages which are a distance away from the school. Holding meetings in the villages where the parents live could alleviate the problem of travelling long distances.

#### **4.9.8 Previous experience**

The principal at School C says that parents are not involved because in the past they were denied the right to participate in the education of their children. The principal adds: "They were mere rubber stamps during the time of school committees." The principal at School A supports this:

In the past parents had that notion that everything is going to be done by the department or government in general. Classes are going to come from the government or department, books and so on and so on.

Principals should educate parents so that they have a better understanding of the present education system and the role parents are to play.

## **DISCUSSION**

The barriers mentioned by the participants are valid and include some of those listed in 2.8. However, many barriers are unique to the area and relate to a poor, illiterate rural community. This means that people living in the area, such as principals, educators and SGB members, are well positioned to work out solutions to these barriers. This is only possible if principals are willing to accept leadership in this regard. A clear policy on parent involvement will also greatly facilitate the alleviations of all problems.

#### 4.10 CONCLUSION

It seems as if all six types of parent involvement as set out in Epsteins' typology (cf. 2.3.3) are taking place to a very limited extent at all three schools visited, although not to the extent which may be found in better resourced and affluent communities. However, of more concern is that the organisation of parent involvement is piecemeal and often left to chance. As such in all areas there needs to be improvement.

In this regard a clear lack of leadership on the part of the principal can be seen. The principal is tasked with the responsibility of managing parent involvement (cf. 2.11.5). In spite of the important role the SGB should play in improving parent involvement in the schools, the principal is a 'change agent' (cf.2.11.5) and should be taking this task more seriously.

In the next chapter the researcher presents the synthesis of findings as well as the recommendations emanating from the research. The limitations of this research will also be presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this last chapter, a general overview of the investigation is given in order to show that the aims originally expressed in 1.6 have been addressed and achieved.

The theory underlying parent involvement and models of parent involvement, the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement, the context within which education takes place in the rural communities of Northern Province have been given and integrated with the experiences of teachers and parents serving on SGB's as derived from the data gained during interviews. A synthesis of the main findings is given. Recommendations for improving the roles which principals play in parent involvement are briefly set out. The researcher concludes the chapter by identifying possible areas for further research.

#### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION**

What constitutes parent involvement is often difficult to determine as the phrase is used to encompass a wide spectrum of activities. In the same vein, the managerial roles of the principal in parent involvement are complex as there are different areas to be attended to. However, central to the success of implementing parent involvement is that the principal should know the parents, understand the benefits of parent involvement, have skills for implementing parent involvement and provide options for involvement in a school's repertoire as possible.

##### **5.2.1 Parent involvement: a theoretical basis**

In order to determine the place and role of parents in education a literature study was undertaken. The emphasis throughout was on parent involvement within disadvantaged, rural communities in Northern Province.

The barriers to parent involvement in rural communities are discussed in section 2.9. The findings emphasise that the main barrier is the lack of school policy and lack of facilitation of parent involvement (4.9). This supports the literature (chapter 2) which stresses that school practice determines the involvement of parents in educational activities.

The advantages of parent involvement for learners (2.8.1), teachers and school (2.8.2), parents (2.8.3) and the community (2.8.4.), are given. Of utmost importance for rural communities of Malamulele in Northern Province is the evidence in the literature that parent involvement improves student achievement, reduces dropout rate, decreases behavioural problems and increases parents' self-esteem.

The different frameworks or models of parent involvement are discussed in 2.2. These include the functional approach (2.3), the parent empowerment approach (2.4), the cultural competence approach (2.5) and the social capital approach (2.6). Various models can be situated within the different approaches. These include Epstein's theory of parent involvement (2.3.1), the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (2.3.2), Swap's 'School-to-home' model (2.4.1), Gordon's School impact model (2.5.1) and Swap's curriculum enriched model (2.5.2). These models are recognised and applied in many schools, particularly in the United States of America.

### **5.2.2 Education provision in Northern Province**

Prior to 1994, the education system in South Africa was fragmented into different education departments, mainly based on race. In 1994, following the first democratic election, the racial division of education was replaced by a geographic division whereby education is controlled centrally by the Department of Education, while nine provincial education departments administer education on a regional level (3.1) The Northern Province is one the above mentioned provinces and still needs to do much to improve education provision particularly in rural secondary schools. This is so because many people in the province are poor, illiterate and have inherited a poorly resourced system from the previous political dispensation.

The involvement of parents in education provision in this province has been given in two time periods: prior to 1994 and after 1994 (2.9). Prior to 1994 parental participation was through non-statutory parent bodies (2.9.1). After 1994 the government acknowledged the involvement of parents through SGB's which have powers by law (2.9.2). Although extensive powers are granted to parents on school governing bodies, the government does not broaden this involvement to include all parents. Above all, this participation is only limited to decision-making and not to all the areas of parent involvement indicated in this research.

### **5.2.3 The role of the principal in parent involvement**

A background to the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement in rural secondary schools of Northern Province, specifically the Malamulele district, is given in section 2.11. This section discusses the general managerial role of the principal. These were linked to parent involvement and are as follows: the principal an effective communicator (2.11.2), leadership and decision-making (2.11.3), the principal as a planner (2.11.4), the principal as a manager (2.11.5) and ensuring academic excellence (2.11.6).

Chapter 2 also discusses the role of the principal according to the different approaches. The role of the principal in the functional approach (2.3.4), parent empowerment approach (2.4.2), cultural capital approach (2.5.3) and social capital approach (2.6.2) is given.

### **5.2.4 The research design**

In this investigation of the role of the principal in managing parent involvement in the rural communities of Northern Province, a qualitative research method (3.2) was considered appropriate. The characteristics of the qualitative research method serving as reasons for the choice of this method were discussed (3.3). Three secondary schools in the Malamulele district of Northern Province were identified. Participant observation was done in all three schools (3.5.1). In-depth interviews with the principals (3.5.2) and focus-group interviews with teachers (3.5.3) and parents (3.5.3) were also included in the data gathering. Data were organised qualitatively and organised according to emerging key themes (3.6.2). A further

synthesis of the emerging themes was undertaken whereby significant findings under 4.4, 4.5, as well as 4.6 were interlinked and arranged to form grounded theory.

### **5.3 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The themes uncovered in this qualitative investigation are synthesised here and integrated with prior research and theory as reviewed in chapters 2 and 3.

#### **5.3.1 Impact of socio-economic circumstances on parent involvement**

This investigation suggests that many families in the rural communities of the Malamulele district in Northern Province are living in poverty (4.2). Three to four people share a hut made of mud bricks. This is an unfavourable condition for children who want to study. Most families use pit-toilets but there are also families who even lack these basic facilities. Families living in such conditions are unlikely to have time or energy to assist learning at home and to play a meaningful role in the education of their children.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The school should support the family because children learn and develop in the family as well as at school. School support families by providing opportunities to strengthen parenting skills, enhance parent networks and minimise the stresses of parenting. Increasingly, principals have to deal with learners and families challenged by poverty. Such stressful circumstances can inhibit effective parenting practices and as a result have negative effects on children's development and school achievement. Swap (1992:57) states that: "Often teachers think of low income/low-status families as being 'deficient' and many dwell on family problems while ignoring family strengths." Although principals cannot be held responsible for meeting the needs of such parents directly, it is recommended that they should learn to understand the connection between poverty, family functioning and child rearing. They can also learn to support families through parent education programmes, parent centres and referrals and other community or social services. Principals should train educators to work in full-service schools

that provide families additional support services and as health and mental care, adult education and social services (Shartrand et al 1997:40). Within the South African context schools should at least be able to advise parents on where to get help with drug-related problems, abusive spouses, or moral and legal support.

### **5.3.2 Changing family structure**

Children in the rural communities of Malamulele in Northern Province are often cared for by their grandmothers, single mothers, brothers as well as sisters (4.6.3). This research confirms that in some cases, both parents work outside the home. This creates a serious problem as many caregivers lack the skills and knowledge needed to raise children in a rapidly changing world. This also has implications for schools in their quest to improve the role of the family in education.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The family is the major socialising agent in society assisting individuals as they move from adolescence and eventually adulthood. On the other hand, a substantial part of learning occurs before the child enters school. No one can adequately take over this role. Moreover, parents benefit by being alerted to different and more effective ways of creating or developing opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children by parenting programmes (Wolfendale 1992:9). However, if principals have not been adequately trained they are unlikely to be able to fulfil this task.

Many parents and caregivers are unsure about how to support the child through the different stages of development and levels of schooling. Merely intuitive parenting is insufficient. It is recommended that principals encourage and support parents by improving their parenting skills. Principals can do this by developing programmes which assist parents in coping with their parenting task. This assistance should be extended to all who are playing a significant role in the lives of the learners.

Dietz (1997:27) says that for some families securing basic needs, such as food, shelter and medical services, occupies so much time that parenting becomes a secondary priority. Parenting, according to participants in this research, is affected by the fact that parents are struggling to survive in poverty. Principals should therefore organise workshops where parents are taught how to start projects which may help them fight poverty.

The principle of assisting parents and caregivers to cope with effective ways of rearing their children is also addressed in the White Paper and Training (DE 1995a:21):

Since countless South African families are fragmented by such factors as past unjust laws, migratory labour practices and marital breakdown and handicapped by illiteracy from participating fully in the education of their children, the state has an obligation to provide advice and counselling on education services by all practicable means and render or support appropriate care and educational services for parents, especially mothers and young children within the community.

However, principals should not wait for the government to provide this advice and counselling to parents but they should provide parenting programmes which may help to address a number of parenting issues. The parent empowerment approach (2.4) can provide a solution to the problem of parents coping with the responsibility of parenthood.

### **5.3.3 Principals have little understanding of school-family-community partnership**

The responses given by principals shows that they have little knowledge of strategies to establish comprehensive parent involvement programmes which will involve the majority of parents in a variety of ways. In addition, educators in this research stated that they do not have a written policy on the school-family-community partnership. Likewise, most principals had never discussed parent involvement as a way of improving schooling. Generally principals mentioned using more conventional ways of involving parents such as parent meetings, fundraising and the like.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The responses given by rural secondary school principals in this research shows that they lack understanding of parent involvement. The absence of a policy on partnerships with families and the community and lack of understanding of ways in which parents may be involved is unfortunate as research shows that school programmes and educator practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of partnership between the school and the home (Dauber & Epstein 1993:61)

It is recommended that rural secondary schools in Northern Province, specifically the Malamulele district, be trained on parent involvement. This is consistent with the training suggested by Smith, Sparkes and Thulows (2001:9). A survey of educators in the state of Maryland in the United States of America revealed that few educators attributed their practices of parent involvement to knowledge gained in their formal training (Epstein, Sanders & Clark 1999:1). This is also true for principals within the South African context. Moreover, it was reported that although learners in undergraduate training programmes had positive attitudes about all types of involvement, most felt minimally prepared to conduct partnerships with parents and the community (Epstein et al 1999:2). Judging by the responses of principals in this research which was conducted in the rural secondary schools of the Malamulele district in Northern Province, likewise, principals need training.

Principals cannot work successfully in parent involvement if they lack knowledge of this partnership. Epstein et al (1997:21) developed a framework of content areas which principals need to master in order to work effectively with parents and communities. The problem of lack of knowledge by principals could be addressed by their following Epstein's theory of parent involvement (cf. 2.3.1). This means principals who follow Epstein's theory of parent involvement, will understand the benefits of and barriers to parents and community involvement, communicate effectively with all parents, involve parents in a variety of school-based activities, teach parents to support learning at home and support and involve parents in decision-making, advocacy and school policy development in parent involvement.

#### **5.3.4 Organisational structure tasked with parent involvement**

None of the schools visited have an organisational structure tasked with parent involvement. Moreover, all principals seem to be happy dealing with the involvement of parents alone. This resulted in only a small number of parents being involved in the educational activities of their children.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

School principals in schools visited are involving parents or groups in the community in school activities. However, one person cannot create a lasting comprehensive programme that involves all families as their children progress through school. It is therefore recommended that principals institute organisational structures to initiate, coordinate and review the parent involvement programme. According to Epstein this organisational structure is called the Action team. Epstein et al (1997:13) says: "The action team should include at least three teachers from different grade levels, three parents with children in different grade levels and at least one administrator." This diverse membership of the action team will ensure that partnership activities will consider the various needs, interests and talents of the educators, parents, learners and the community. However, principals should educate the action team on strategies to involve parents in the education of their children. Furthermore, principals should see to it that the member of the governing body responsible for parent involvement is also a member of the action team. This will ensure that parent involvement remains an integral part of the strategic planning of the school.

#### **5.3.5 Lack of school policy on parent involvement**

None of the schools visited had a written policy on parent involvement (4.5). Moreover, principals also lacked an agreed upon, unwritten policy for the role they wished parents to play in the school and the steps they are planning to accomplish this.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Lack of school policy is a barrier to effective parent involvement (2.1). In this regard Epstein (1990:109) asserts that school policies, teacher practices and family practices are the most important determinants of the continued involvement of parents in their children's education. I therefore recommend that principals, particularly those in deprived rural secondary schools, formulate a policy which will address all aspects of parent involvement. Epstein's typology of parent involvement (2.3.3) can be used by principals to guide policy making. Moreover, it is recommended that government policy on parent involvement should encourage parents to participate in all school activities, rather than decision-making only.

### **5.3.6 Communication between the school and families**

Most participants in this research indicated that they communicate with parents by means of written communication (4.6.1.3), parent meetings (4.6.1.1) and messages passed on by learners. However, limited opportunities seem to exist for parents to communicate with the school on their own initiative. Although educators assert that parents are free to contact the school if they have a problem, they do not seem willing to meet parents at a time which is convenient for both parents and educators. Most of them complain that parents are absent from the home as they are working in urban areas like Johannesburg.

Most responses given by the participants show that parents are mostly contacted about negative issues (4.6.1.2), which does not promote a good relationship between the school and the home.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research indicated that schools communicate with parents but parents do not communicate with the school on their own initiatives. Principals should train educators regarding various strategies and techniques to improve two-way communication between the home and the

school (and/or parent and teachers). This is necessary as effective communication between the home and the school can strengthen parent involvement.

It is strongly recommended that there should be an open, honest and two-way communication between the school and families. Through open and honest communication, parents and educators begin to understand one another's ideas about learning, discipline, increasing the child's self-confidence and other topics. Such communication helps parents and educators to work together to improve an individual child's performance and to contribute to school-wide policies which benefit all learners at school. Educator preparation can equip educators with skills to improve two-way communication between home and school, especially when difficult and sensitive issues have to be discussed (Shartrand et al 1997:30) .

### **5.3.7 Educators do not involve parents in homework activities**

In most cases principals and educators limited the parent's role in homework activities to that of signing learners' books (4.5.5). Good homework habits of learners and support of parents in these activities that prove beneficial to learners are lacking in the three schools visited. Educators do not seem to have a written homework policy which involves parents in homework but prevents them from doing homework for their children. Although principals and educators in this research say that they involve parents in homework, they do not seem to be giving guidelines to parents on the role they should play in homework.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Parents do not know what to do concerning their children's homework. It is recommended that principals should help educators to teach parents to play a meaningful role regarding their children's homework. This is consistent with the findings of Epstein & Dauber (1991:290) that most parents need help on how to become involved in their children's education at each grade level. The above could include the designing and organising by the school of a regular schedule of interactive homework that gives learners the responsibility for discussing important things they are learning. In this case parents will stay aware of the content of their children's

homework (Epstein 1995: 705). The emphasis should be placed on the role of the principal in assisting teachers to help parents to encourage, listen, monitor and discuss, but not teach school subjects at home.

### **5.3.8 Decision-making**

In all the three schools in the rural communities of the Malamulele district in Northern Province, principals feel that recent legislation has given the school governing body too much decision-making power (4.6.2.1). However, principals do not guide parents serving on school governing bodies on how to involve parents outside governing structures mentioned by the participants in section (4.6.2).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In general, principals feel that parents' role in decision-making should be limited to voting for or serving on, the school governing body. It is recommended that principals should allow parents to take decisions in all matters affecting them on the education of their children. Meyer (1993:18) states that involving parents in decision-making is important because the traditional top-down approach encourages dependency among disadvantaged communities and does not provide opportunities for empowerment and capacity building. This can be solved by using the parent empowerment approach discussed in section 2.4.

Although legislation extended the right of parents and communities to participate in school governing structures, home-school-community partnerships should not be limited to decision-making only. Principals should institute a comprehensive model of partnership which will provide a broader view of family, school and community relations.

### **5.3.9 Innovative volunteer programme**

Parent volunteers are seldom used in rural schools of the Malamulele district in Northern Province (4.6.3). Where parents are used as volunteers, they are never shown how to perform

their tasks. Participants reported that tasks parents are commonly asked to help with include cleaning the school and donations (4.6.3). The use of parents in the classroom as teacher helpers was not practised in any of the three schools visited.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Principals have a tendency of using volunteers in limited activities of the school. Limiting parent volunteers to cleaning the school shows that principals are not willing to work with parents as equal partners. Van Wyk (1996:93) maintains that volunteers should not be limited to fundraising or catering and parents have not been part of regular classroom conditions. Involving parents in various activities at school can make parents feel that they are part of the school. However, many parents have little time for volunteer activities and those who do have time are often not reached or they are not considered suitable as they are often the elderly or the unemployed (Diaz 1997:88). Principals should strive to include also the hard to reach parents from the community as volunteers. It is recommended that principals should also teach educators strategies for using volunteers in the classroom situation. Educators also need to be taught how to prepare parents for work in the classroom. This could include activities such as covering books, putting out materials and need not necessarily relate to teaching. The use of volunteers at school can be addressed by Gordon's School Impact model (2.5.1) as well as Swap's Curriculum enriched model (2.5.2).

### **5.3.10 Barriers to parent involvement**

Many barriers to parent involvement listed by the participants during the interviews refer to lack of knowledge on the part of parents (4.5.2), ignorance of both parents and educators (4.9.3), illiteracy (4.9.2) and the unfriendly attitude of principals (4.9.5). Other barriers to parent involvement such as uncooperative parents (4.9.6), distance travelled by parents to school (4.9.7) and previous experience (4.9.8) were mentioned.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although these barriers as mentioned by the participants are valid, parents should certainly be helped so that they can meet the challenges of providing the support their children need to succeed in life (Carrasquillo & London 1993:109). In this they need guidance from principals, educators or similarly trained people. However, most principals have focused on "fixing parents", not rethinking how they need to restructure their actions and relationships with parents and develop the relevant skill to do it (Chrispeels 1992:21).

It is also recommended that principals should always plan the involvement of parents in school activities. This is consistent with Solomon (1991:360) when he argues that: "Thoughtful coordinating planning and systematic actions must integrate parent involvement into school and classroom programmes." Principals should also teach educators the different strategies for involving parents since parent involvement does not happen by chance.

### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this study on the role of the principal in managing parent involvement in the rural communities of Northern Province suggest the following priority areas in research for further knowledge.

The following are aspects relating to the role of the principal in managing parent involvement in the rural communities of the Malamulele district in Northern Province which require more detailed research:

- The role of the principal in assisting parents to take sound decision at school.
- The ways in which principals assist parents in contributing to learning.
- Strategies to involve illiterate parents in their children's education.
- The changing family structure and its effect on parent involvement.
- Ways of adjusting parent involvement strategies to the rural communities in Northern Province.
- How principals should communicate with low-income parents in Northern Province.

- The training given to educators to work with parents or members of the community in South African schools.
- The role of the principal in preparing caregivers to deal with school issues.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study of the managerial role of the principal in parent involvement is limited to Northern Province.

The small size of the sample, typical of qualitative research (3.2) is the most obvious limitation of the study. This cannot support the general theory on parent involvement because different schools and communities will disclose different findings.

The research was also purposefully limited to rural secondary schools in Malamulele district in Northern Province. Purposeful sampling was used to select principals, teachers as well as parents on SGB's for interviews (3.4.1). The schools and participants were selected on the ground of their own willingness to take part to the research and this implies that different results might be obtained in different circumstances. The primary goal of the research was to understand the role of the principal in parent involvement from the participants' perspective. These findings were reported on in detail in chapter 4. Although no attempts are made to generalise the findings, the problems experienced by principals in managing parent involvement in these schools could hold true for schools in other rural areas.

The principal's interviews (3.5.2), focus-group with teachers (3.5.3) and focus-groups with parents (3.5.3) were conducted in each of the three participating schools. Participant observation was used to investigate and clarify the findings derived at through interviews. Following data analysis, findings were presented according to themes which emerged from the participants' account (3.6.2).

In spite of these limitations, the rich data, characteristic of qualitative methodology (3.5), gave information which may be used for further research. It also illustrated the role played by principals in the management of parent involvement in rural communities. Moreover, certain

key themes (3.6.2, 4.5, 4.6) contributed to a better understanding of the role played by principals in parent involvement and indicated areas in which further research needs to be done (5.4). In this limited sense the study may expand knowledge of the role of the principal in rural communities of Northern Province through the presentation of grounded theory (5.3) and speculative hypothesis which may form a useful basis for large scale studies of the role of the principal in the management of parent involvement.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation indicate that principals have little understanding of school-family-community partnerships, the benefits of parent involvement and of strategies which may be used to involve families and the community at school. This shows that principals receive little help in developing their skills and knowledge of collaborating with families and community.

Schools seldom offer educators any formal training on collaborating with parents or in understanding the variety of modern family structures. Thus, most educators must rely on their accumulated experience in dealing with families. This may result in principals blaming parents, particularly those in a poor socio-economic environment, for any lack of involvement.

Parents also lack the necessary training from educators on how they can be effectively involved in their children's education. Hamby (1992:16) maintains that this lack of training by educators is serious as parents are unlikely to become involved without intervention from the school. By taking cognisance of the areas of involvement set out in the frameworks discussed in chapter 2 and adapting them to the particular approach to parent involvement, effective programmes for educators can be developed to address this need. What is important is that principals should provide training for educators and that educator programmes should centre on parent involvement. This is consistent with the training suggested by Smith et al (2001:10). Teacher education can assist educators in changing the traditional image of parent involvement which limits it to fundraising or participation in school governance.

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

It is necessary for my student Mr HP Risimati, to conduct research in parent involvement in rural schools in Northern Province as part of a research project for the degree MEd (University of South Africa).

It will be necessary for him to interview the principal, a few teachers and a few members of the school governing body in selected schools. These interviews will take the form of unstructured discussions, which will be tape-recorded. Although verbatim use will be made of comments recorded during the discussion, neither the name of the school, nor the identity of the participants will be disclosed at any time. The analysis of the data will be included in the dissertation and may be used in future in articles published in professional and scientific journals.

Thanking you in anticipation for your help.

Dr JN van Wyk

Supervisor

Faculty of Education, Unisa

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PRINCIPAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Surname:

Name(s):

Date of birth:

Home language:

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of experience as teacher:

Years of experience as principal:

**INFORMATION ON SCHOOL**

Name of school:

Number of learners:

Number of teachers:

Number of classrooms:

**IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR PRINCIPAL AND STAFF**

How often are you able to attend course/workshops to improve your skills?

How often are staff able to attend such workshops/courses?

Has anyone attended a course on parent involvement?

**GENERAL INFORMATION: TEACHERS QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Surname:

Name(s):

Date of birth:

Home language:

Marital status:

Spouse's occupation:

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of teaching experience:

Standard/grade presently teaching:

Have you attended any workshops/courses on parent involvement?:

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Surname:

Name(s):

Age:

Marital status:

How many children in this school:

Are you currently employed?

Highest standard passed:

**PARTICIPATION IN SGB**

How long have you been a school governing body member?

Which position do you hold in this body?

How many SGB's meetings did you attend last year?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: PRINCIPAL****INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

1. What do you understand by the term parent involvement?
2. Do the school have a policy on parent involvement?
3. How do you communicate this policy to learners?
4. How do you communicate this policy to parents?
5. What according to you are the benefits of parent involvement?
6. Whom to you consider to be parents"?
7. In what way do you encourage parent involvement?

**THE POLICY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

1. In what way are parents involved in this school?
2. Who organises/facilitates parents' involvement?
3. In what ways has parent involvement changed since you became principal? (Or during the past five years?)
4. In what ways do you assist parents in their parenting tasks?
5. How do you communicate with parents of this school?
6. What opportunities do parents have to meet with you/your staff?
7. Do you make use of parent volunteers? In what ways?
8. How active/effective is the SGB of this school?
9. In what way do parents support learning in the home? Have they ever been taught how to do so?
10. Are other parents also involved in decision-making at the school?
11. In what way does the community (church/business) support the school?
12. What role does the school play in the community?
13. What do you consider to be the role of the principal in home-school community relations?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEACHERS****INTRODUCTORY QUESTION**

1. What do you understand by parent involvement?
2. How did you come to this understanding of parent involvement?
3. What do you think are the benefits of parent involvement?
4. In what way does the principal in this school encourage parent involvement?
5. Does the principal have a policy for parent involvement? How is this communicated to everyone?

**THE POLICY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

1. In what ways are parents involved in this school?
2. Do you assist them in their parenting task?
3. Do you show them how to support learning at home?
4. How often do you speak with parents?
5. What role does the principal play in the type/amount of parent involvement in this school?
6. What type of parent involvement take place at this school?
7. What type of parent involvement would you like to institute?
8. Why is it not happening?
9. What do you consider to be the role of the principal as regards parental involvement?
10. How would you rate your principal in this regard?
11. In what ways do teachers support parent involvement at this school?
12. What is preventing better involvement with parents?
13. How active is the involvement of the community in the school? And the involvement of the school in the community?
14. What is your opinion of the management style of the principal?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS****INTRODUCTORY QUESTION**

1. What do you understand by parent involvement?
2. How did you come to this understanding of parent involvement?
3. What do you think are the benefits of parent involvement?
4. In what way does the principal in this school encourage parent involvement?
5. Does the principal have a policy for parent involvement? How is this policy communicated to everyone?

**THE POLICY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

1. In what ways are parents involved in this school?
2. Do you assist them in their parenting tasks?
3. Do you show them how to support learning at home?
4. How often do you speak with parents?
5. What role does the principal play in the type/amount of parent involvement in this school?
6. What type of parent involvement take place at this school?
7. What type of parent involvement would like to have/institute?
8. Why is it not happening?
9. What do you consider to be the role of the principal as regards parent involvement?
10. How would you rate the principal in this regard?
11. In what ways do teachers support parent involvement at this school?
12. What is preventing better parent involvement with parents?
13. How active is the involvement of the community in this school? And the involvement of the school in the community?
14. What is your opinion of the management style of the principal?

**EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW****INTERVIEW WITH PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL C**

HPR: What do you understand by the term parent involvement?

ELT: Parent involvement implies the support that the parent gives to the school. Not necessarily interfering with the day to day running of the school but bringing them aboard the learning, teaching of their students.

HPR: How do you come to this understanding?

ELT: Long before we were school going age children, we saw our parents going to school and when we came to the work situation we also felt it very important to keep up the culture of involving parents in the education of their children. Besides it is policy by the Department of Education nationally that parents should be involved in the day to day running of the school.

HPR: Do you have a policy on parent involvement at this school?

ELT: We do have a policy. It is a national policy which states that parents should form part and parcel of the day to day running of the school.

HPR: How do you as a principal communicate this policy to all the people who are involved at this school?

ELT: We have got the representatives of parents in the school governing body. There are six parents who are part of the school governance and these parents know the policy and they hold meetings with the other parents.

HPR: Who do you consider a parent at this school?

ELT: A parent in the first instance is the biological mother or father of the child that attend school at our school. And we also take into consideration students that are orphans, students that have got wards guardians. So those are also regarded as parents.

HPT: In which ways do you involve parents at this school?

ELT: There are many ways of involving them. Parents are involved in fundraising. Parents are involved in disciplinary measures. Parents are involved in cultural activities. Parents are also involved in tours. when students go away on a tour we have a parent or two who accompany them.

HPR: Being involved in that way who facilitates their involvement?

ELT: Right, the facilitation is not solely done by the principal. Like we have indicated in the school governing body we have got three stakeholders, parents, teachers and students. So the chairperson of the SGB will facilitate the choice of parents who need to participate in certain activities at school. Committees at school also co-opt parents to assist them in their ventures.

HPR: Would you say parent involvement have changed since you became a principal or for the past five years:

ELT: There have been a change in the sense that parents today are a little bit reluctant or they are too permissive on the side of their kids. They are no longer that active in motivating kids to behave properly as it were in the past or in the five years that we gone through. But today parents are structurally involved in that they have formed bodies which empowers them to participate in the day to day running of the school.

HPR: How do you help parents to assist learners with homework at home?

ELT: We look at learners who are underachieving. And we call the parents and we inform them that this students have the potential to reach this grade of this percentage but because he might be indulging in things like alcohol, dagga smoking or excessive watching of TV. We need to tell parents to monitor these things and by so doing they also make sure that that student does his homework. Even when they are not able to read or write we ask them to make sure that when he is at home they must supervise him while he is doing his work.

HPR: How do you communicate with parents at this school?

ELT: We do verbal communication by making announcements to students. Like for example, inform all the parents that there will be a team from home affairs who will come here to make application for ID's, death certificates. Or we write letters and give them to students to give them to parents. Or we mandate the SGB to go to the Headman. The Headman have got councilors who will through a legal form or by other means run up the village and invite the parents to the school.

HPR: What other ways would you think are better for communicating with parents except the ones which you have mentioned?

ELT: The best way would be to write them letters but our problem is illiteracy is very high in our village. So the best way would be to go to the village and inform them through a megaphone that they should come to school.

HPR: When you invite them to school do they come?

ELT: Some do, some don't. I would say thirty would come when there is a burning issue, like when we are talking about school fund. But when we invite them for a farewell function where there will be catering and all that, seventy percent usually turn up. So it depend on why we call them to school. Reasons vary and they influence their attendance.

HPR: What do you think are the things which causes them to stay away from school activities?

ELT: It could be ignorance on the side of management and the department. We need to educate parents. We need to workshop them more especially those who are in the SGB that is their right to support education of children. So lack of education is the reason why parents do not or why parents stay away from meetings.

HPR: Do you give teachers opportunities to speak to parents?

ELT: Yes, whenever a child has got a problem we call the parent and the class teacher the classroom manager. Ant they usually address their problem before the parent.

HPR: Do you have parent volunteers at this school?

ELT: We do not have them all the time, but sometimes parents do volunteer to come and do minimal work like weeding out and so forth. But we don't have full time volunteers.

HPR: What do you think are things which prevent parents from volunteering in school work?

ELT: Parents do not see the school as their own. They do not own the school and this goes back many years where parents were denied the right to participate in the education of their children. They were mere rubber stamps during the time of school committees. So if we hold a meeting and we tel them why we have a school in the village, I think parents can feel they are part and parcel of the school, the school is theirs. And therefore they can participate voluntarily.

HPR: Do you have an SGB at this school?

ELT: Yes, we do have an SGB.

HPR: How effective is this SGB?

ELT: Ja, the SGB is effective in that they have come up with policies. They have come up with ideas which help us in the day to day running of the school.

HPR: Is this SGB shown to do things?

ELT: Yes, they are empowered by manuals which are sent to school by the department. Above that they also attend workshops like Kgatelopele project wherein they are trained in issues like leadership, conflict management, financial management and so forth.

HPR: As a principal do you also hold workshops with the SGB?

ELT: Yes, workshops in the form of how do we run meetings? What is the duty of the chairperson? What is the duty of the secretary? We do hold workshops where we empower our SGB's.

HPR: Parents who are not members of the SGB are they allowed to take a decision at this school?

ELT: Yes, they are allowed to take decisions because those parents who are elected to represent them go and meet them at, outside the school level and these parents do make a decision. And those who are representing the school in the SGB will come with the decision which was influenced by non-members of the SGB.

HPR: In what way does the community, referring to the church, business, support the school?

ELT: Business offers us donations. When we have a function we go to them and they will offer us a donation or buy as a soccer kit. Now in terms of the church, the church support the school in that learners from our school are affiliated of different church denominations within the community.

HPR: Can you give me more examples of things which are done by the community to this school?

ELT: Right, the parents do raise funds and we have a budget for equipment like a photocopier and a raisograph. The community has also fund raised and erected the fence. When we do repairs we do go to the parents and they offer us assistance.

HPR: In turn, what is the school doing to the community?

ELT: The school offers them classrooms for use in Adult Basic Education and Training, which we call ABET. Parents also hold meetings at school. We also borrow them chairs when there is a funeral. We also offer service during funerals. Some teachers are masters of ceremonies. Some teachers also conduct the sermon and the students also participate in all the activities which take part in the village.

HPR: What do you think is the role of the principal i managing parent involvement?

ELT: The role of the principal is to initiate this involvement because the principal must understand that he is the ex-officio. He is not a member that has been voted into the SGB for example. So the principal must be approachable. He must allow parents to come with ideas. He must not be a shield. He must allow communication between parents and teachers. So the principal must initiate. He must tell the parents that you have a right to participate in this event at school.

HPR: And what do you think can be done at this school to see to it that more parents are involved?

ELT: OK. What we can do is to empower our parents' component in the SGB. And also to go to other stakeholders within the village. Like the development forum, SANCO, traditional authority and try to ask for assistance when it comes to invitation, so that when parents come here they can be told all of them what they are supposed to do. So if they attend the meeting in numbers and they are told their role obviously the other meeting in the subsequent meetings we shall not have a problem in getting them.

HPR: Except the things ;you have mentioned earlier, do you think there are also other factors which prevent parents from being involved in school work?

ELT: Besides ignorance it could be that the school itself have an invisible barrier with the community. It might be that the parents do not like the management in terms of the principal. They might be from another village and they don't feel they need to go to that school because he is there. Like things of ethnic barrier. Those are things that prevent parents from participating in school activities.

HPR: And what do you think you can do to solve this problem so that more parents can be involved in education?

ELT: Ja. Again we need to have a strong SGB that is workshopped in terms of non-racial discrimination which is enshrined in the constitution. So that those members in the SGB become ambassadors of this message that whoever works there, is there for the interest of our kids. And moreover, for parents to be attracted to our school I think we need to work very hard. Help with results, participate in soccer, netball and bring trophies to the school. And then invite parents and show them these things. It is then that they can support us whole heartedly.

HPR: Do you assist parents with parenting tasks at home?

ELT: Ja, we do assist them because when they have domestic problems they usually bring them to school and we solve such problems. Like for example, a child may be abducted by a boy and she stays there for a night or two and then the parents come to school and find out if that is ever allowed. And then we usually come in and assist them and sometimes the matters are even reported to the police and the law takes its course.

HPR: Except the example you have given me now, do you have other examples to illustrate that you really assist them in their parenting tasks?

ELT: Yes. Unless I do not understand parenting but we do discipline the kids and not only discipline them of school regulations, even when they have problems at home. Like a child refuses to be sent by parents and they tell us. We do assist them in such roles. All these elements of delinquency are taken care of even when they occur outside the school situation. If for example a student falls pregnant and we feel it is our duty as *loco parentis*. At school we are parents who are for that moment designated that duty. We call for biological parents and we try to look at the case in question.

HPR: What more things would you like them to be done at this school so that parents are more involved?

ELT: What I would like to be done at school is to workshop the SGB and to hold a meeting with the other stakeholders. Like I indicated, the development forum, SANCO, traditional authority. These are the leasers of people the parents that we need at school and once they can understand our role as the principal, teachers and students I think these people can increase parental involvement at school.

HPR: The other stakeholders you have just mentioned, do they also assist in school work?

ELT: Ja, they do assist in that when you, say hold a meeting and you want to raise school fund. You have representatives from SANCO, development forum and the

traditional authority who will first come and want to find out whether you have a budget or you simply increase the school fund out of emotions before you come to the parental meetings. So these stakeholders are not only there to disrupt but they are also there to assist, they are checks and balances.

HPR: If more parents are involved, what more do you think the school can benefit from their involvement?

ELT: If more parents are involved the high pass rate will increase. That could translate the high pass rate in that students will no longer dodge, students will no longer stay away from school and not do their work because they know their parents have their rights to come to school and present their problems. So I think the pass rate can be increased by the involvement of parents in the education of their children.

HPR: Parents of students who are having problems, do they come personally or do they have to via SGB?

ELT: Right, parents come personally. They only go to the SGB if we did not attend to their problems properly. Professional matters are first dealt with at the school and if parents think we have bypassed them, they will tell the principal that they are taking the problem now to the SGB because it has not been handled properly.

HPR: Does the SGB have a chance of talking to parents in the community?

ELT: Yes, they do have that chance and they do that through the traditional authority, the development forum and the civic organisation.

HPR: Can you give me an example of a situation where the SGB went to the community to say something?

ELT: Yes, we have meetings with stakeholders to indicate that chairs, stackable tables will be borrowed from school only if a certain amount is paid and parents went to the community to go and inform them about that thing.

HPR: Can you give me an example of a situation where teachers were talking to parents at this school?

ELT: OK. We had a meeting with parents and parents were insisting that an amount should be paid (fifty rand) by every worker in the village to facilitate the land claim. So parents came to comfort us at school and teachers stood up and questioned the validity of the payment because some of them do not stay here and when the land is claimed they will not benefit anything. So nobody had to be their spokesperson but teachers themselves had to answer all these questions. Another example where teachers speak to parents is when we have parents' meetings and during sports. The sports master stands up and gives his report representing all the other teachers.

HPR: In turn do you give teachers a chance to say something to teachers to parents I mean to say?

ELT: Yes, like when we invite parents, besides giving reports, some parents come with problems and the teacher in question who might have a problem with the student usually addresses the parent to correct the situation. Or in the case of a student who is extremely poor some teachers would say I want to offer this student a calculator and the parent come to school and then they talk to them.

KEY: HPR: Researcher

ELT: Elton (The principal)