

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN BLACK  
URBAN COMMUNITIES IN GAUTENG**

by

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**To Pieter, Elise and Petro**

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## SUMMARY

Black urban schools in South Africa are frequently beset by problems such as inadequate facilities and resources; poor motivation among teachers and pupils; poor family relations and a high incidence of violence. Against this background and in view of evidence that effective parent involvement in education addresses many of these problems, this study explored parent involvement in black urban communities. A literature study investigated existing theories and models of parent involvement; the urbanisation of and educational provision for black people in South Africa in historical perspective and the limited involvement of black parents in schools. Furthermore, legislation concerning education and parent involvement since 1994 was reviewed. A qualitative investigation of parent involvement in three primary schools in a black urban community in Gauteng was conducted. Data gathering was done by participant observation; in-depth interviews with three principals and focus group interviews with three groups of teachers and four groups of parents. Data were analysed, discussed and synthesised. The major findings emerged: school-home relations are shaped by the context of a particular school and community; as a result of changing family structures, children are cared for by different caregivers who require advice on parenting; poverty and overcrowded living conditions adversely affect family life and thus, home-school relations; caregivers experience difficulty in adjusting to changed family circumstances; young people often display behavioural problems and a lack of discipline; poor motivation to learn; are sexually active and require parental and teachers' guidance. Conditions in urban schools were exacerbated by disruption in primary and secondary schools during the apartheid era. Parents require advice in preparing children for school and supporting them at school. Teachers need parental support to fulfil their multiple roles; guidance in implementing a school policy on parent involvement; improving communication between the school and home; involving parents in children's home learning and decision making in the school. While the current government policy to establish governing structures in schools is commendable, it is recommended that, because *comprehensive parent involvement programmes* have long-term positive effects, parent involvement should be implemented more broadly than envisaged by present policy.

## KEY TERMS

*Parent involvement:* Theories; models, advantages of; barriers to; South African legislation on; within black urban communities.

*Urbanisation:* World trends; of black people in South Africa; effects on family structure.

*Education:* In South Africa; history of provision for black people; present situation in black urban communities.

*Qualitative research:* In Education; in-depth interviews, focus group interviews; data analysis.

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND, PROBLEM FORMULATION AND AIMS

#### 1.1 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Traditionally, a dominant ideology among educators has been that a student's social background (socio-economic status, ethnicity, family structure, parent's education level, etc.) is a major predictor of the student's academic achievement. However, during the last decade a shift in our understanding has occurred. Recent studies have identified behavioural factors (parent-child interaction, family, and schooling processes) and personality factors (family attitudes and perceptions) as the dominant predictors of a student's academic achievement, given a certain minimum level of social opportunity (Clark 1993:85).

This new conceptual emphasis has focused educators' attention on questions concerning which parenting behaviours and attitudes motivate children to engage in homework activities, improve school attendance and decrease student drop-out rates. These initiatives have done much to influence professional attitudes and convince families and schools of the value of mutual cooperation (Bastiani 1993a:104).

What exactly constitutes parent involvement is, however, difficult to determine. The phrase *parent involvement* is used to encompass a broad spectrum of activities, although one common theme is that all seek to bring together, in some way, the separate domains of home or community and school. The study of parent involvement is therefore complex, given the range of activities being undertaken, the differing perspectives held by participants on the desired aims and the *ad hoc* and disparate nature of much of the work (Jowett & Babinski 1991:4). Meighan, quoted by Mkwazi (1994:24) concurs, stating that the involvement of parents in education can be seen as open to definition and redefinition as identity is created and recreated in interaction among teachers, schools, politicians and social forces, such as a changing technology.

There have been a number of attempts to classify the various roles of parents relative to their respective schools. Pugh (1989:5) refers to parent involvement as a 'working relationship' characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate. Petit, on the other hand, in Perry and Tannenbaum (1992:105), observes levels of increasing involvement, from being aware of what is happening in the school, to active participation in the classroom. Rasinski and Fredericks, also discussed by Perry and Tannenbaum (1992:105) distinguish an additional level - empowerment. At such a level there would be mutual trust and work in advising, planning, administering, as well as implementing programmes. In a similar vein, Seeley (1989:46) has discussed the paradigm shift in education from a delegation model, which limits the primary responsibilities of the citizens to paying taxes and holding office, to a collaborative model in which parent involvement is a necessity and is empowering.

However, Epstein (1988b:59) has probably established one of the best-known and most elaborate identifications of traditional parent involvement types. She has discussed: (1) basic parental obligations to make children ready for school; (2) school-to-home communications (as in conferences); (3) parental involvement and assistance at school; (4) parental involvement in home-based learning activities; and (5) parental involvement in governance and advocacy. Recently, Epstein (1995:704) added a sixth type of partnership: collaboration with the community.

Although consensus has not yet been reached, it is now becoming more widely accepted that positive parent involvement and partnership with schools is a pre-requisites of effective schooling and that cooperation between home and school can raise educational achievement (Tomlinson 1993: 131).

One of the most extensive reviews of the links between parent involvement and children's school achievement was compiled by Henderson (1981; 1987). She reviewed 36 studies in 1981 and 49 in 1987 (with some overlap). She (1987:1) concluded that "...the evidence is now beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school...." In other major studies this has also been found to be the case (Chaykin 1993:2, Bastiani 1988:38). Other benefits to children/students include:

decreased truancy; improved attitudes to their studies; improved behaviour and a decrease in the drop-out rate (Hamby 1992, Epstein 1990, Swap 1993, Haberman 1992, Rich 1987). Many studies stress that these benefits to children occur irrespective of the socio-economic class to which the family belongs. In this regard Haberman (1992:33) says that changing the school climate and involving parents "...will substantially raise not only the achievement level of low-income, at-risk children but will change their self-concept and their motivation as well." As Hamby (1992:58) argues, "Home-school collaboration is the key to unlocking the doors to future success for young people in today's complex world."

The literature also emphasises the positive effects on parents of improved home-school relations. Aspects listed include: increased confidence of the parents (Bastiani & Wolfendale 1996:74); better understanding of what is happening in school (Swap 1993:10, Rich 1987:12) and a feeling of empowerment, especially evident among those previously disempowered (Allen & Martin 1992:49). Hamby (1992:59) concurs, "Everyone gains when the school welcomes parents as partners in the educational process, treats them as teachers of their children and gives them appropriate guidance on how to work with their children."

Research indicates that teachers also benefit by increasing parent involvement in schools. "In programmes where parents and teachers work successfully together, teachers report experiencing support and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving" (Swap 1993:10).

Teachers also observe that parent involvement broadens their perspectives and increases their sensitivity to varied parent circumstances. By improving parent involvement teachers report that they are able to gain knowledge and understanding of children's homes, families and out of school activities (Bastiani 1988:38). Rich (1987:21) adds that involvement with parents helps teachers receive higher ratings from parents. In other words, teachers who work at improving or instituting parent involvement are considered better teachers than those who remain isolated from the families of the children they teach.

The above is pertinently summarised by Dauber and Epstein (1993:53):

Research conducted for nearly a quarter of a century has shown convincingly that parent involvement is important for children's learning, attitudes about schools, and aspirations. Children are more successful students at all grade levels if their parents participate at school and encourage education and learning at home, *whatever the educational background or social class of their parents.* (Italics, JNvW)

Swap (1993:1) concurs that parent involvement *across all populations* is the key to more successful children and more effective schools. Moreover, the majority of parents, *whatever their background*, are concerned about their children and when asked to help educationally, are eager to do so (Stacy (1991:76). On the other hand, certain educationists still regard ethnic minority (or disadvantaged) parents as posing problems for schools, rather than assets in the educational process (Tomlinson 1993:131). However, most research does not support this. Although, the majority of parents are fiercely concerned for their child's future and will do what they can to influence it positively, many disadvantaged parents lack confidence and do not necessarily know how to help their child(ren) (Atkinson 1994:39).

The success of any parent involvement strategy depends how well it matches up with a parent's needs. The secret is to know who a child's parents are, to understand the circumstances under which they live, and to have in a school's repertoire as many strategies for involvement as possible. Doing thus ensures a commensurate match between a parents' level of commitment on the one hand and a willingness and ability to be involved, on the other (Vandergrift & Greene 1992:58).

## 1.2 URBAN COMMUNITIES AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### 1.2.1 Contemporary urban communities

Although we all have common-sense definitions of types of settlements, such as: village, town, city, urban or rural settlements, these commonsense assumptions often confuse rather than clarify. Bash, Coulby and Jones (1985:2) suggest certain criteria which may be used to define urban, such as size of population; density of population; density of housing; economic

activity and administrative and legal or governmental criteria. On the other hand Saunders (in Coulby, Jones & Harris 1992:4) maintains that 'urban' should be used as an adjective, not indicating the geographical location, but rather suggesting a particular theoretical or research orientation. Thomas (1994:27) adds that:

...defining urban only in terms of population size and density is not sufficient. What is also needed is a specification of the particular characteristics of urban-ness that are thought to influence educational conditions or vice versa.

A related factor which influences education profoundly is that most cities are not producing the necessary industrial and economic growth to accommodate their new inhabitants. Unfavourable features of city-life are multiple: residential and educational segregation; crowded and unhealthy housing conditions; pollution; congested roads; visible unemployment and economic deprivation (Thomas 1994:37).

Unlike the situation in advanced industrialised countries, the crises caused by urbanisation in Third World countries are more pervasive throughout the entire city, thus not only affecting the 'inner city'. As more and more destitute people flock to the cities, they occupy property illegally and create environments where there is a lack of basic facilities such as water, electricity, sewerage, public transportation, and medical services. The influx of rural immigrants and the overextended and grossly inadequate services of these cities permanently impacts on the urban profile of these population clusters (Thomas 1994:37-38, McLean 1989:4). A key characteristic of the urbanisation process in developing countries is therefore the absence of concomitant transformation in the job market and urban infrastructures. With large numbers of urban residents outside the formal economy who are living in conditions of poverty and hopelessness, the utopian dream linked to urban residence is far from being realised by millions. Yet people keep moving to the cities, despite the harsh realities that will greet them because no matter how meagre the rewards, the latter will still be larger than those in the rural areas (Stromquist 1994:1).

To return to the educational arena, undoubtedly schools must work harder in urban areas than anywhere else to involve parents. The reason for this is not because of a lack of parental interest, but is caused by tensions and stress within which these families have to live; the real (not imagined) deprivation and, significantly, the esteem or lack thereof in which these parents are held by the school itself (Learmonth & Maidment 1993:192).

### 1.2.2 Black urban communities in Gauteng

Gauteng is one of the nine provinces of South Africa and occupies the area previously known as the PWV (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereniging area). Although Gauteng is the smallest of the nine provinces, it has a population of 6,9 million. In 1992/1993 there were 1,4 million school children in Gauteng (Central Statistics 1994).

Black urban areas in Gauteng defy the whole range of theoretical dispositions which have grown up around the concept and definition of the term, city. Black urban areas can neither be described as city nor suburb. They fall somewhere in between the two and are generally referred to as *townships*. The township is a familiar sight at the outer edges of white designated South African cities. It is an artificial construction with few of those facets of organic growth which characterise cities in the Third World. Townships originated as labour reservoirs for the white cities in the vicinity. Bell (1992:183) refers to one such township as an "ugly peri-urban sprawl."

Since the discovery of gold and the institution of the migrant labour system and the pass laws, black family life was eroded by forcing thousands of husbands and wives to live apart while children were raised by single parents, when in actual fact they had both. The repeal of influx laws in 1986, which had previously regulated the movement of black people, led to the influx of so many people into urban areas, that urbanisation and the provision of even elementary services has become a problem.

In 1994, following the first democratic elections in South Africa, the racial division of education was replaced by a geographical division whereby education is controlled centrally

by the Department of Education, while nine provincial education departments, of which Gauteng is one, administer education on regional level.

The new, democratically elected government in South Africa acknowledges the role of parents in education. The White Paper on Education and Training (DE 1995:21) confirms this:

Parents or guardians have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, and have the right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance.

This is a step in the right direction, but although education acts may be helpful in legislating increased parent involvement in schools, the law cannot govern parents' feelings when they enter a school, nor the genuineness of the welcome they feel (Learmonth & Maidment 1993:194). Nor do education acts take into account the circumstances of the families of school children. Parents living on a mere subsistence level have little energy left for self-fulfilment or for meeting their children's emotional and educational needs (Berger 1991:117). This is substantiated by research done in schools in Soweto, where principals listed social circumstances, educational levels and attitudes of parents as the main obstacles to parent involvement (Mkwanazi 1994:29).

The present government is committed to providing equal education for all children in the country and wiping out past deficits in black education. But no matter how effective a new government is in meeting the supply deficit; however dramatic the improvement in provision; whatever democratic changes made in administration and the curriculum, township schools will still remain in the townships. Neither the government, the school nor the family by itself can improve education in black urban communities in South Africa. They need to form a partnership to address the multiplicity of needs of children in township schools. Swap's comment (1993:1) endorses this, "When our focus is on improving the achievement of children at academic risk, partnership with parents is not only useful - it is crucial."

### 1.3 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

#### 1.3.1 Family and parent

*Parent* is a term usually defined in relation to the family. In other words, by discussing what constitutes a family, we also indicate what is meant by the term, parent. The regular family is commonly perceived to consist of two adults of opposite sex and 2 children. However, this perception is invalid, yet educators might still measure families against this assumed norm (Siraj-Blatchford 1994:14). Promoting or advocating an unrealistic model of the family renders all families that differ, by definition, as abnormal or deviant. Hence the danger exists of characterising the majority of families as pathological. There is simply no normative definition of the family. When teachers are not conditioned by preconceived assumptions, they can work more effectively to establish the person(s) who cares for a child and what relationship that person(s) has with the child. Consequently, teacher and caregiver can work together more effectively to the mutual benefit of the child.

In this study, the term *parent* is used generically, thus not only denoting the dictionary definition of a parent, that is "one who brings forth or produces" (Collins 1986), but also the broader sense of a parent as the person(s) who has care, custody and control over and concern for the child (Wolfendale 1992:20, Squelch 1994:1). This understanding includes any combination of adult caretakers. Thus, parent does not adhere to a stereotype nuclear family - for contemporary realities are very different and infinitely more complex regarding what constitutes a family (Duncán 1992:10).

#### 1.3.2 Black South African parents

Whilst recognising the proclivity to avoid the discredited notion of *race*, the use of the descriptor, *black parent* is used in this research since its purview is limited to that section of the population in Gauteng. The inevitable reason for the use of a racially discriminatory term in a post-apartheid South Africa is rooted in the country's history of education.

Since the National Party came into power in South Africa in 1948, the education system has been one of the principal instruments through which the apartheid system was sustained and perpetuated (Graham-Brown 1991:155). In terms of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, black children were to receive an education which was different to that of white children (Pillay & Samuel 1990:18). In practice, this meant the maintenance of separate schools, giving white and black people two different types of education, with substantial differences in quality and access (Graham-Brown 1991:155). Grossly disproportionate amounts of money per pupil allocated to each system reinforced these differences.

In view of the fragmented nature of education under apartheid, manifested in separate education departments, it is therefore not possible to generalise when talking about the practice and construct of parent involvement in South Africa (or Gauteng).

Since the history of education for black pupils in South Africa will be dealt with extensively in Chapter 3, it is sufficient to point out that, although the racial division of education was replaced by a geographical division in 1994, the legacy of the apartheid era will take long to erase. The most salient reason is that the children who were previously disadvantaged are still being taught in schools in the townships, the residential area for the vast majority of urban black people living in Gauteng. Although restrictions on place of residence is no longer applicable, the majority of people will not be able to move to the more affluent white suburbs in the near future. This implies that the majority of black urban children will still be taught by poorly qualified teachers in ill-equipped, overcrowded schools, for some time. Of all the groups in the country, this group is most in need of measures to improve schooling, and therefore constitutes the focus of this study.

### **1.3.3 Parent involvement/participation/partnership**

In the above discussion the concepts: parent involvement, participation, collaboration and partnership have been used interchangeably. They do all, however, express different shades of meaning regarding the parent's role in the school. This is because concepts are usually determined by the context in which they are used and therefore do not have neutral content.

Reams have been written about *involvement* versus *participation* versus *partnership*. Various writers attempt different definitions of these terms. Pugh (1989:5) for example, defines partnership as a "...working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate." This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision making and accountability. In contrast Hegarty (1993: 117-118) refers to the "procrustean bed of partnership":

...if parents relate to schools in many different ways, it becomes difficult to see in what sense they are all partners... Presumably not everything counts: if partnership is used to mean anything from acting as school governor to receiving adult literacy tuition, the concept becomes so encompassing as to be vacuous.

*Parent participation* can also be identified as occurring when parents influence, or attempt to influence, decision making in areas of substantial impact, such as personnel, programmes and budget (Le Blanc 1992:132). Dekker (1994:5) concurs, defining parent participation as the exercise of joint responsibility for education, "...in the interest of the child, the school and education through authoritative joint decision making (or participation) in formal structures created for that purpose...."

*Parent involvement*, on the other hand, also refers to the realisation of a parent's joint responsibility for education, but in a more undefined manner and taking place in various areas and at various levels, without necessarily sharing in decision-making. Vandergrift and Greene (1992:57) describe the concept 'involvement' as misleading, pointing out that two key elements repeatedly emerge: (1) Parents are supportive. They encourage their children and show a high level of commitment to their children and their education. (2) Parents are active. What they do is observable.

Wolfendale (1992:15) refers to the full extent of participation and partnership as "uncharted territory", adding that some practitioners prefer the more modest aim of encouraging as much parent involvement in school life as possible, regarding partnership as an ideal and therefore unattainable.

In the light of the limited home-school relationship found particularly among black people in South Africa, it is felt that the term *parent involvement* best suits this study.

#### 1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

An inadequately skilled labour force will be unable to utilise the complex technologies of the twenty first century, forcing large sections of the population to live in Third World poverty and deprivation. It is therefore imperative to find more effective ways of educating children, especially those within the black communities where the deficiencies of the previous education system need to be addressed. Research has indicated that a most promising and effective strategy is increased parent involvement in education.

Against the above background, a need exists to investigate parent involvement in black urban communities in Gauteng, with a view to addressing some of the problems found in education within this group. The following questions facilitate the demarcation of the problem more clearly:

- What models of parent involvement can be identified in the literature? What strategies are particularly effective in implementing parent involvement in minority communities in other countries?
- What are the prevailing conditions in black urban schools in South Africa, in the light of the legacy of the apartheid era?
- How do teachers and parents experience parent involvement in black urban schools, with special reference to Gauteng?
- How can these findings contribute to the implementation of effective parent involvement programmes for teachers in black urban communities in Gauteng?

## 1.5 AIMS OF RESEARCH

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

- The present investigation aims at providing a thorough background to the role and place of parents in education in general and within disadvantaged communities in particular, by studying models and practices of parent involvement in education as it is presently manifested in various urban areas in the world.
- The investigation aims at examining educational provision and parent involvement in black urban communities in South Africa. Both a historical perspective, as well as the current state of affairs is to be included. In addition the investigation will endeavour to include external factors which impinge on effective educational provision for this group.
- Since research has shown that parent involvement world-wide has profound benefits for learners, teachers and parents, it is intended to investigate the state of affairs regarding parent involvement in black urban communities by means of a qualitative study. In this way, data is gathered which can be used: to extend the body of knowledge concerning parent involvement in black urban communities; to formulate grounded theory of parent involvement; and to make recommendations with a view to improving schooling through more effective home-school relations.

## 1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to determine the place and role of parents in education, a **literature study** of local as well as overseas sources is undertaken. The focus of this phase of the research is on deprived communities, minority groupings, disadvantaged communities, et cetera. The sources targeted here describe situations which, although not identical, correlate to prevailing conditions within the black urban communities in South Africa. This overview has been supplemented by an exploratory fact finding visit to the **United States of America** (May-June

1996) to observe parent involvement programmes and to interview academics, policy makers and practitioners.

Furthermore, a **literature study** of a wide array of monographs, journals, educational legislation and official documents concerning South African education in general, and within the black communities in particular, is undertaken. Brief attention is given to the liberation struggle as a factor which at least partially created the present situation in education. This overview forms the background to the study and is necessary to place the qualitative research in context. An additional facet is the findings of a **pilot study** conducted in 1994 which made use of questionnaires administered in a black urban community in order to identify both the attitudes as well as the problems of the role players regarding parent involvement.

A **qualitative approach** is used employing data gathering techniques, such as observation and in-depth interviews to investigate parent involvement in black urban communities. Although the relatively small sample characteristic of qualitative methodology cannot be said to be representative of the entire black urban population of South Africa, this kind of research yields *rich descriptive data* (cf 1.7). In conclusion, the use of multiple methods and data sources serve to enhance the validity of the research findings. Data analysis is done according to techniques described in the literature.

## 1.7 THE USE OF A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO RESEARCH

While a more detailed explication of the methodology, the rationale for choice of methodology and the research design are fully presented in Chapter 4, a preliminary overview is given here. The principal method of investigation is a qualitative exploration of parent involvement in black urban communities.

In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1990:17), qualitative research is broadly defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. The basic premise of qualitative research is the concept *verstehen* (as coined by Max Weber) or contextual understanding, in other words a subjective interpretation of the social phenomena in question. The qualitative researcher therefore strives

to understand the motives and beliefs behind people's actions on a personal level (in Taylor & Bogdan 1984:2). This process of *verstehen* involves the need to "live through," or recreate, the experience of others within oneself (Smith 1983:7).

Qualitative enquiry plays an important role in educational research by "...assisting us in raising new questions, by leading us to question assumptions, by cultivating an appreciation for complexity, and finally by expanding our frames of reference" (Sherman & Webb 1988:45). In addition, qualitative research is also hypothesis-generating and contributes by indicating areas where further research can be undertaken. Rather than testing preconceived hypotheses, qualitative research aims to **generate hypotheses** and theories from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous and possibly inappropriate frame of reference on the subjects of the research (Vulliamy, Lewin & Stephens 1990:11). Researchers can, therefore, formulate and reformulate their work and may be less committed to perspectives which may have been misconceptualised at the beginning of a project (Burgess 1985:8). A qualitative study will also provide parents and teachers the opportunity to define their own problems, reducing the risk of the researcher "exporting ready-made solutions to other people's problems" (quoted by Lemmer 1992:294). By using qualitative research, the outside world of the formalised education system is related to the inside world of the participants and the complexities of situations, processes, actions and interactions that are not shown by large scale statistical surveys or macro studies of problems within teaching (Lemmer 1992:294).

Qualitative research requires a plan for choosing sites and participants and for beginning data collection (Schumacher & Mc Millan 1993:372). In the first place an area or group needs to be identified which is in "some important way like the many" (Wolcott 1995:174). In other words we do not presume to identify the most typical township, but only one which is, "in some important way", like the many. In this study, Mamelodi, a township to the East of Pretoria is chosen since Mamelodi can be said to be a township like others in Gauteng. It has: permanent residents, squatters, a mix of black ethnic groups, a number of affluent families, while the majority of inhabitants fall within the low-income or impoverished socio-economic groups. Research is conducted in three primary schools, because parent involvement is more likely to take place in a primary school. As Wolfendale (1992:58)

maintains: "... the organisation thereof is more conducive to parent-teacher contact than that in the secondary school."

The selection of both parents and teachers as interviewees is done by means of network sampling (or snowball sampling), which Goetz and LeCompte (1984:79) describe as a "...strategy [in] which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual." Network sampling is frequently used for in-depth interview studies (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:381).

In this study the interviews are preceded by a period of participant observation in the chosen township schools, in order for the researcher to gain a degree of entry into the conceptual world of the participants. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982:3) remark, "In participant observation the researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to be known and trusted by them".

The period of participant observation also fulfils the function of identifying teachers who could possibly be participants during further investigations.

Following the period of participant observation, unstructured interviews are utilised to elicit data from the principals of the three chosen schools. Focus group interviews with teachers and with parents conclude the research. The sample size is dynamic and ad hoc, and depends on the availability of the participants and saturation of the data, rather than aiming at representativeness to generalise to a larger population. In the case of this study three focus group interviews with teachers and three with parents are conducted. Interviews are recorded on audiotape and the tapes are later transcribed for closer examination. In this kind of inquiry, analysis and interpretation of the findings take place simultaneously, that is during and not only after data collection (Lemmer 1989:14). As a result, later interviews are modified to include new questions as suggested by those informants who were interviewed previously. The data is finally analysed by a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials accumulated by the researcher to increase his/her understanding of them and to enable the researcher to present that which was discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:145).

In addition to the above, grounded theory may be generated in the course of the research. Such grounded theory emerges from the bottom up, from many different pieces of collected evidence that are integrated. In this context, theory is regarded as a developing entity which is generated and developed from data, rather than a perfected product which precedes substantive work (Stanley & Wise 1979:359). Thus grounded theory offers a systematic method by which to study the richness and diversity of human experience and to generate relevant plausible theory which can be used to understand the contextual reality of social behaviour (Hutchinson 1988:127).

This research is designed to be exploratory and descriptive and thus no attempts are made to establish cause and effect relationships under experimental conditions. The primary aim of the enquiry is to *understand and describe* how the parents and teachers interviewed experience parent involvement in their communities, from their *own frame of reference*.

## 1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

The study can be divided into five distinguishable components:

- (1) In Chapter 2 prevailing theories and studies of parent involvement in urban areas are examined. Emphasis is placed on parent involvement mainly within deprived communities, as this is considered more relevant to the present study. A report of informal discussions held with experts in the field of parent involvement in the United States of America, is included in this chapter.
- (2) As parent involvement is directly related to the education system in a given community, education in black communities in South Africa is discussed in Chapter 3. This includes a brief exposition of the history of education in South Africa, particularly the provision of education according to racial grouping as it was practised in the previous dispensation. Results of a pilot study of parent involvement in a black urban community is included.

- (3) Chapter 4 provides a further discussion of the methodology (cf 1.7) used to investigate parent involvement in an urban community. Both technical and epistemological considerations as well as the rationale for the choice of a qualitative methodology are included. The second part of the chapter deals with the data collection strategies used in the study.
- (4) In Chapter 5 an exposition of data analysis is given. The analysis of the data collected is described and the results regarding parent involvement in black communities are set out.
- (5) The final chapter (Chapter 6) includes a synopsis of the findings of this study as well as recommendations arising from the study.

## 1.9 SUMMARY

Economic competition and social stability require that the current high levels of academic and social failure among poor children in urban schools today has to be reduced drastically. There is a great danger in continuing a two-tiered society in South Africa - one affluent, generally well educated, and optimistic; the other poor, increasingly isolated, badly educated and despairing. The schools cannot address this problem alone; neither can low income and disadvantaged families. Schools and families need each other, and need to devise ways of working together for the benefit of children. To build such a partnership effectively, it is necessary for all parties to truly understand each other. This is becoming increasingly difficult. Family-school relations, like all major areas of education and social policy, is characterised by competing viewpoints and ideologies, widely differing experiences and contradictory arguments and evidence. This also applies to differences on the topic among professionals and parents.

Involving families in the education of their children has become a major goal of professionals, particularly those working with at-risk students. However, systematic collaboration between the home, the school and the community remains a distant reality. If education is to foster learning, it should be an uninterrupted experience that actively involves

the learner and his or her surroundings. Consequently continuous support from the home, community and the school are necessary prerequisites for academic success.

This study is motivated by the need to improve schooling for children living in black urban areas in Gauteng. One proven method of obtaining better schools is to increase or implement parent involvement in the school. Finally, this study was designed to address the lack of research in parent involvement in black urban communities in Gauteng. For once we understand the conflicts, the barriers and our limitations with regard to parent involvement, we can also acknowledge our strengths and all that we can offer each other. Then we can work together for the child and for children (Stacy 1991:1).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN CONTEXT

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Progress in research on parent involvement in education has been made across academic disciplines. Researchers in sociology, psychology, anthropology, education, social work and other fields are conducting studies, building on each others' work, and contributing new perspectives, which are, in turn, assisting policy and practice (Epstein 1996:213). This is particularly true of research undertaken in the United States of America. This chapter reflects this - supplemented by a field trip of this researcher to the USA during May-June 1996, during which certain prominent writers reflected in this chapter were consulted, and parent involvement programmes were observed. This research not only demonstrated the obvious benefits of effective parent involvement programmes, but also accentuated the complexity of matching these programmes to the specific needs of urban communities.

Parents and schools within urban areas presently face a challenge to work together to provide the necessary education and support for children currently living in troubled times. Strong parent-teacher collaboration has become imperative to ensure continuity in care and education, and support for children of all income levels and ethnic backgrounds (Berger 1991:217). Cuban (1989:29) rates the future of urban schools as the primary issue facing the United State's education system, adding that if the system is left as it is, the social and individual costs of inadequate schooling is in danger of severely corroding the social fabric of the nation. He (1989:29) observes that, "...real school improvement has yet to penetrate most urban schools. The truth is that recent state reforms have largely bypassed millions of students in urban schools across the nation."

Moreover, because the needs of contemporary students have become so complex that they are outstripping the services of the agencies and schools that were created to serve them, collaborative partnerships must be established that involve schools, families, businesses,

social service agencies, and other groups in an effort to coordinate resources, solve problems and provide more chances for student success (Chapman 1991:355).

The emerging alliance between homes and schools comes from the recognition that not only are schools important to parents and families, but that schools also need the support of parents in order to achieve optimal success (Berger 1991:209). To obtain this Thornburg, Hoffman and Remeika (1991:207) suggest that: "Revisiting the research of many scholars and the successful practises (sic) of establishing home-school-community programmes is a first step to be taken in the consideration of changing roles and responsibilities for schools across the nation."

## 2.2 THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF URBAN SCHOOLING

### 2.2.1 Urban perspectives

At the broadest possible level of generality urban perspectives can be categorised as *consensus* or *conflict* (Bash, Coulby & Jones 1985:40). *Consensus perspectives* tend to be those that view the city as a **functional entity**, as both a harmonious albeit competitive community, and as exhibiting a specific culture - urbanism. In terms of schooling one variant of this type of perspective suggests that there has been a breakdown of moral ties and social solidarity. The crisis of urban schools is seen as a reflection of this break-up, with the most serious consequence being the undermining of order, hierarchy, teacher and pupil roles (Bash et al 1985:40). The related responses emphasise a reassertion of a traditional mode of schooling, including social control, strong leadership, 'good' teaching, high standards, and received culture.

Another variant of the *consensus* type of perspective tends to stress the **functional inefficiency** of schools and the deficiencies of technical expertise on the part of teachers. The maladies of city schools therefore reflect a technical breakdown in the urban system. The response suggested is that of better management, curriculum change and 'community' schools. Although according to this vision, parents may have a role to play in education, the extent thereof is not stipulated. In this case there is also the recognition that, though there

is a need to re-establish consensus, it may well require that the urban school system become more adaptive (Bash et al 1985:41).

The *ecological/functionalist* approach, which is also placed within the *consensus* category, provides a view of urban in which the structure of schooling in cities is seen as the consequence of a 'natural' process (ibid). The different characters of different schools each relates to a different section of the urban community. This implies that schools within so-called slum areas will reflect the poverty of the community. According to Emmons, Comer and Haynes (1996:36) context influences behaviour, which means that remedial programmes for children in such schools must include the community to be successful.

The *conflict perspective*, by contrast, indicates a view of the city as an **arena for struggle** - either on the part of individuals, groups, or both (Bash et al 1985:41). Sometimes such conflict is viewed as endemic to cities in advanced industrial societies. Schools are seen as essentially custodial and authoritarian. Comer (1988:28) warns that schools with hierarchial and authoritarian structures cannot give underdeveloped or differently developed students the skills and experiences that will enable them to fulfil expectations at school.

The Marxist variant of the *conflict perspective* suggests that since the city is the location of class struggle and of the dominance of industrial capital, schools will inevitably be seen as agencies for the reproduction of the social relations of capitalist production (Bash et al 1985:42). Both teachers and pupils in urban schools are perceived as victims of the system (either in economic terms or in terms of ideological domination), and the consequent response must be seen as the creation of a movement of resistance, of critical awareness, and of the advocacy of radical social change. Bash et al (1985:42) conclude that the endemic conflict of the city results in a multiplicity of groups with differential power and status in relation to access to urban resources. In this regard the development of a *housing class* system, has clear implications for access to schooling.

The above perspectives in urban theory, highlight some of the ways according to which the functioning of social institutions, including urban schools, can be viewed.

### 2.2.2 Urban education

The conceptualisation of urban education as a category to delineate a whole cluster of educational issues arose in the 1960's as a result of an increased concern over the seeming disintegration of certain key urban education systems in the USA (Bash, Coulby & Jones 1985:44). The reasons for this are complex and include: desegregation of the schooling system; the whole civil rights movement; the beginning of the capital flight, white flight and economic decline of many major industrial cities which led to a growth in concern for the education of children within the inner-city schools. As the white inhabitants in the cities moved out, black people, and later Hispanics, moved in. Most were poor; those who did become more affluent followed their white predecessors in the flight to the suburbs.

Following the riots in the 1960's, urban education as a demarcated area of study flourished (Bash et al 1985:45). Its conceptual base was weak, namely that urban education was concerned with the issues raised by education in urban areas. Principal among these issues were underachievement and school desegregation. Compensatory programmes in which parents played a role, such as *Head Start*, were introduced in an effort to address underachievement (Gordon 1977:71). From the debate on underachievement, a theoretical division emerged, namely *deficit* and *difference* models of children (Bash et al 1985:45). In examining underachievement, much of the earlier theory located the issues of deficiency in either children and/or in their home and cultural background. The educational solution was to remedy the deficiency by means of compensatory programmes, such as improving the English proficiency of some learners. Bernstein, as discussed by Stacey (1991:6), highlights the differences between social classes and the way language is used. He distinguishes between the *restricted* code of working-class children and the *elaborate* code of middle-class children, thus drawing attention to the working-class child's inability to communicate in the middle-class setting of the school (also see Heath 1983:2). Although Bernstein argues that he was emphasising the differences between groups, the *deficit model* pervaded, with resultant emphasis on compensatory programmes (Stacey 1991:7). The *Follow Through* programme of Gordon (cf 2.5.2) and Swap's School-to-Home Transmission model (cf 2.5.3.2 below) are examples of parent involvement programmes falling within the *deficit model*. Regarding this model, Bash et al (1985:46) observes, "In the main, by focusing attention on deficiencies,

real or imagined, in the child and his/her background, US writers on urban education allowed schools to continue holding the view that their practice was basically satisfactory."

The *difference* models, in contrast, argued that it was a matter of difference between the world of the school and the world of many urban children which caused the lack of achievement (Bash et al 1985:46). Comer (1988:25) agrees and warns that the failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school may lie at the root of the poor academic performance of many inner city children.

If one works from the assumption that a child is the product of his or her human network, then it is important to understand the behaviours, perceptions, and relationships of the adults who relate to the child and to each other (Leitch & Tangri 1988:70). With regard to parent involvement, these authors state, "It is also important that we recognise that not all differences - family type, level of education, economic condition - are inherent barriers to parent-teacher collaboration."

### 2.2.3 Characteristics of the urban context

A common characteristic of contemporary society is the increasing concentration of population in cities (Stromquist 1994:29). According to the World Bank Report of 1991 (as quoted by Stromquist 1994:29) most cities are not producing the necessary industrial and economic growth to accommodate their new inhabitants, resulting in an estimated 25 percent of the urban population living in poverty. Most cities are, furthermore, characterised by significant internal differentiation. For the wealthy, many advantages accrue: access to public services; access to diverse and new forms of art and modern technologies and comfort. For the poor, access to jobs and public facilities is difficult, and the bigger the city, the greater the difficulties. Stromquist (1994:31) therefore states that the city provides advantages, but more so for the wealthy, adding: "Often the city's wealth does not heal the wounds of its poor but only salts them." On the whole, however, cities are better off than the rural areas in terms of proximity to social services. But this convenience comes at a high cost. For example, urban people are more vulnerable to unemployment, since they depend on their wages to survive. It has been found that urban households have worse nutritional status than

rural households, and that there is a significant disadvantage regarding women in aspects such as nutrition, health care and mortality (Stromquist 1994:31).

In the cities the proximity between the rich and the poor quickly develops an awareness of the gap between them. Stromquist (1994:31) captures this effectively when he states that "...cities have always been condensations of their civilisations. If their density distorts, so it also reveals." This gap sometimes creates social and racial tensions; most often it leads to segregated residential patterns and thus to differentiated access to social services, including education (Stromquist 1994:31-32). Most teachers and other staff commute to their schools and leave at the end of the day with no sense of attachment to, or investment in the life of the community, and thus no commitment to the lives of children and families after school, or beyond the school building (Haynes & Comer 1993:171). Thus in many cases two worlds exist for the child and his or her family: the life of getting along in school and maybe doing well, and the life that is real, that matters most, which is living day to day under stress and trying to survive. American minority youth may, therefore, find themselves being educated in schools orientated toward white middle-class values, taught in contexts not adaptable to minority styles of learning, and evaluated by teachers whose appreciation of their abilities may be constrained by stereotyping (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbusch 1993:108). Likewise, graduates of teacher education programmes, mostly coming from middle-class backgrounds themselves, report feeling inadequately prepared to work in inner-city schools (Aaronsohn, Carter & Howell 1995:5). Swap (1993:16) warns that children who are racially, linguistically or culturally different from their teachers may experience discontinuities in values between home and school or may lose self-esteem as they see little of their own history and culture taught in the curriculum. Sometimes students' learning is disrupted by these discontinuities, yet teachers are not aware of the role their expectation, values or methods play in the student's failure (Swap 1993:16).

Further characteristics of urban society includes teen pregnancies, drug abuse, a high student drop-out rate and emotional problems of both the young and old (Thornburg, Hoffman & Remeika 1991:200). It would be easy to point an accusing finger at the home and place sole blame, with its resultant guilt, on the family members who must live with these realities. To

do that, however, removes responsibility from the society that has contributed to the very conditions in which the children and youth are struggling to survive.

Although all schools need to work to improve their programmes and increase their students' chances for success, it is clear that educational reform in urban school districts has to take different forms because of the size, complexity, demography and other characteristics of urban centres (Chapman 1991:356). For example, in some city schools the student population consists primarily of children of long time residents; in other cases it consists mainly of immigrants; and in other cases it reflects a combination of the two. This student diversity creates a difficult task for the schools, since they have to acculturate some students to familiar modern ways while trying at the same time to acculturate and *modernise* others. It becomes difficult for the school to face this diversity without boring or alienating any one of these groups (Stromquist 1994:39-41).

Another change within the urban community which schools need to consider is the increasing number of non-traditional families. Wanat (1992:43) states that if present trends continue, sixty percent of today's children in the USA will spend some time in single parent homes before their eighteenth birthdays. Most of these children will spend as many as six years in homes with only one parent. These children have needs that affect school programmes. Their academic achievement may lag since they have trouble concentrating, they worry about their family situation and suffer from poor self-concept. Children who have trouble adjusting to single parent homes, may also behave inappropriately at school. Moreover, schools, like many social institutions have geared their policies to the traditional family and are often unprepared or reluctant to respond effectively to the non-traditional family structures created by separation and divorce. Epstein, as quoted by Wanat (1994:632-633) agrees, "Unless researchers examine both family and school structure and practices, we will continue to receive contradictory and often false messages about the capabilities of single parents, poor or minority parents, and other hard-to-reach families."

Another problem associated with poverty and inner-city schools is a high drop-out rate. Hamby (1992:55), however, states that factors predicting drop-out rate usually relate to issues over which a child has little or no control, such as low socioeconomic level; minority

status; parents or siblings who dropped out of school; unstable home environment; physical problems; limited English proficiency and low intellectual level. Even factors such as frequent school absences; emotional problems; poor grades and low achievement test scores; grade retention and discipline problems are not simply characteristic of a student or his/her behaviour. Rather, they are products of countless interactions among a variety of individuals and events in the child's life (Hamby 1992:55). For the child concerned, the consequences are severe. Society expects work in return for monetary compensation, opportunities for and access to resources. This social contract demands physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy and educated youth (Thornburg, Hoffman & Remeika 1991:201). *At-risk* means just the opposite: being in danger of not succeeding; becoming dependent instead of productive; having values that conflict with those of the dominant society; and of being unable to make positive contributions to, and share in, society's resources.

The dilemma of needing more school contact within urban communities yet receiving less becomes more complicated when parents themselves have extensive personal problems with employment, health, housing and mere survival. In large cities, these difficulties may be further complicated for parents who are recent immigrants or lacking proficiency in English or the skills needed for employment in an advanced technological economy (Jackson & Cooper 1992:31). The pressures of living in crowded quarters, in neighbourhoods where drugs may be a way of life, where temptations for children are everywhere, make it increasingly difficult for parents to get involved in schools and convince their children that there is hope for the future through education (Cooper & Jackson 1992:31).

Moreover, state education agencies have mainly offered symbolic and verbal support for the importance of parent involvement, but little financial support for staff and programmes needed to improve parent understanding, teacher practices and family and school connections (Epstein 1988a:4).

### **2.3 BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN AREAS**

Involving families in schools has become a major goal of education professionals, particularly those working with at-risk students (Bermudez 1993:1760). In most cases, however,

collaboration between the home, school and the community remains a distant reality. Factors limiting or impeding parent involvement include the following:

### **2.3.1 Limited knowledge and experience of parent involvement**

A reason for a lack of parent involvement is the limited skills and knowledge of both educators and parents for interacting effectively (Moles 1993:31). Parents from minority groups often lack knowledge about school protocol, have had negative past experiences with schools and feel unwelcome at a middle-class institution (Chavkin 1993:5, Davies 1993:208). Moreover, for many disadvantaged parents, a serious handicap in supporting their children's education is their own limited education or lack of proficiency in English (Jackson & Cooper 1992:31). This impedes effective interaction with teachers, understanding of school work and ability to assist children academically at home (Moles 1993:31). In addition, the complex verbal constructions that come naturally to many educators further impede communication with disadvantaged parents. Although teachers speak of wanting parents to demonstrate a commitment to learning, yet they frequently fail to give parents the information they need to act. It would seem, then, that the *language of the school* all too often remains exclusive to the professional (Coleman, Collinge & Tabin 1993:108). In short, teachers must share responsibility with parents, and this means demystifying knowledge about the school.

Teachers get little help in developing their skills and knowledge for collaborating with parents. Few receive training in parent involvement in the course of their college preparation (Moles 1993:32, Leitch & Tangri 1988:73). This lack of initial training is not compensated for by in-service training except for the rare school district, thus most teachers must rely on their accumulated experience in dealing with parents. Hamby (1992:61) agrees, adding that this lack of training on the part of the teachers is serious as parents are not likely to become involved without intervention from the school.

### **2.3.2 Time constraints**

In many instances parent and teachers must also contend with other demands on their time as well as with organisational policies and practices that restrict their ability to communicate

and collaborate (Moles 1993:32). In many families, both parents work outside the home, making it difficult if not impossible to attend school conferences and meetings scheduled during the day. Single parents may find it extremely difficult to find the opportunity to meet with educators (Duncan 1992:12). On the other hand, evening meetings can be a serious burden and concern for personal safety after dark in low-income areas makes both staff and parents reluctant to attend evening meetings. Moreover, even the most convenient meeting times may still mean that families need care for young children or transportation to the school. In this connection, Jackson & Cooper (1992:31) remark, "Time and circumstances may prevent even interested, concerned parents from participating in traditional parent organisations."

Some schools hold weekend meetings to attract more parents. However, none of these adaptations suffice, unless parents are notified about the meetings well in advance. This is a serious complaint in many low-income areas (Leitch & Tangri 1988:72). It should, however, also be noted that although parents who work are significantly less likely to participate in activities at the school building, they are just as likely to be involved with their children's education at home than non-working parents (Dauber & Epstein 1993:60). Schools must, however, understand that lack of participation by parents does not mean they are neglecting their responsibilities. They simply may not have the time, resources or know-how to help out (Wanat 1992:47). In their research Jackson & Cooper (1992:36) found that parents may be concerned and interested. Yet problems of survival may demand primary attention. Establishing self-help support groups seem to address these personal needs.

### **2.3.3 An uninviting atmosphere**

Barriers to parent involvement in urban schools can also include an uninviting atmosphere such as locked doors and notices to check in immediately at the school's office. School staff need to help parents quickly and courteously to offset these signs of mistrust (Moles 1993:33). In many city schools, parents do not always feel as if they belong or that the teachers care. Most of these feelings have been transferred from their own parents and later confirmed by the attitudes they met from teachers in the schools they themselves attended. This cycle is not very easily broken. As Learmonth and Maidment (1993:194) explain, "The

various Education Acts may have been helpful in legislating for increased parental involvement in schools, but the law cannot govern parents' feelings when they enter a school or the genuineness of the welcome they feel."

The limited education and difficulties which disadvantaged parents themselves have experienced while students at school cause many parents to fear and mistrust schools, not expecting them to help their children to succeed (Moles 1993:34). In addition, schools tend to communicate with parents mainly when their children are in some kind of trouble. What communication there is between school and the family is therefore mostly of a negative nature (Davies 1993:207). The frequent educational difficulties of disadvantaged children and predominance of bad news from schools only reinforce parents' anxiety and defensiveness when dealing with the schools.

#### **2.3.4 Psychological barriers**

Disadvantaged parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement, such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation and distrust (Moles 1993:33). Many teachers and school officials express a standardised view of the proper role of parents in schooling and a conventional middle-class model of what constitutes 'good' families and 'proper' child rearing (Davies 1993:208). Contrary to the expectations of educators, Davies (1993:209) found that most parents express strong interest in their children's education. Many parents talk about the importance of schools and how they would like to be involved in helping their child (Wanat 1994:632). According to Dixon (1992:15), the barrier to more parent involvement is not parent apathy but lack of support from educators. Leitch and Tangri (1988:70) agree with this observation, commenting, "There is considerable evidence that a major impediment to home/school collaboration results from teachers' and parents' stereotypes, misperceptions, and lack of understanding of mutual needs."

On the contrary, the operation of stereotypes can be seen in a National Education Association survey (1979) undertaken in the US inquiring from teachers who is to blame when children do poorly at school. Teachers put the blame on children's home life more often (81%) than

the children (14%) or the school (4%) or the teachers (2%) (Moles 1993:35). Teachers tend to see disadvantaged parents as overwhelmed with problems and they have little faith in these parents' ability to follow instructions and take action on problems. As one teacher, quoted by Leitch and Tangri (1988:72) explains, "Parents are caught in a vicious circle where they trust no one, including the school; many are barely surviving out there."

Davies (1993: 208) adds that most educators interviewed, felt that many parents were hard to reach, and contributed this to the parents themselves or to their communities and cultures. Many believe that the parents do not have the time, interest or competence to be involved and that many simply do not care about school or the value of education. Chrispeels (1991:368) also maintained that in many instances, administrators and teachers' low expectations for and negative attitudes toward low-income, non-English-speaking children and their parents prevented the development and implementation of well-designed programmes.

### **2.3.5 Cultural and social barriers**

Teachers and parents may both be victims of cultural barriers caused by differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definition of appropriate roles. Many teachers express a deficit view (cf 2.2.2) of low-income families and their communities. During interviews they may dwell on family and community conditions such as crime, alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, poor housing conditions, and promiscuity but they seldom remark on the strengths that the families or the communities may have (Davies 1993:208-209). Suspicion and misunderstanding may affect both parents and school staff. The staff may periodically feel overwhelmed by a sense of futility regarding the limitations of disadvantaged parents; the parents, in turn, are resentful of schools depriving their children of a quality education. Furthermore, educators believe that children from families with certain dysfunctional characteristics are unable and unmotivated to learn and cannot succeed in school. These beliefs are particularly strong about single parent families and those from minority backgrounds (Hamby 1992:60). Educators further assume that poor, less-educated, and culturally different parents are neither able nor willing to become involved in their children's education. On the other hand, upwardly mobile minority parents are often maligned as pushy, demanding and unrealistically ambitious for their children (Ritter, Mont-

Reynaud & Dornbusch 1993:108). Regardless of ethnicity, low-income parents, in general, have been condemned as unresponsive.

Indeed, although parents and schools share many common goals, yet the family culture of minorities has often been considered by teachers as dissonant with the culture of the school (Ritter, Mont Reynaud & Dornbush 1993:108). Toomey (1993:131) adds that people who work with families know that they differ enormously, yet the failure of the schooling system to deal adequately with this variation has meant that it has missed opportunities to help those families most in need of support.

### **2.3.6 Differing perspectives on the child**

Moles (1993:34) warns that certain tensions regarding psychological barriers, should be considered. The parents' focus is on their own child, while teachers must attend to the needs of many children. A teacher would typically focus on growth in children's development of academic and socialisation skills, guided by objective national or local standards, while a parent is more concerned about a child's inner feelings and self-esteem (Swap 1993:19). This innate difference in perspective is compounded for disadvantaged parents, who are likely to feel threatened by the authority of the teacher, perceived socioeconomic differences and their own lack of formal knowledge.

### **2.3.7 Racial differences**

Racial differences may also impose barriers between disadvantaged parents and schools (Moles 1993:35). Racism in schools appears in both verbal expressions and more subtle forms such as paternalism and lowered expectations of minority students. Linguistic differences between speakers of English and other languages or between dialects can lead to devaluing parents who speak another dialect or language. Cultural and social groups may also have different views on the best approaches to teaching and value patterns regarding academic achievement. Epstein and Dauber (1991:298) warn that when teachers differ culturally and educationally from their students, or when they teach greater number of students, they are less likely to know the students' parents and, therefore, more likely to

believe that parents are disinterested or uninvolved. On the other hand, the high staff turnover witnessed by parents and children in city schools, contributes to the community's feeling that the teacher does not care. When parents and students are faced with the reality of a transient staff population, they will understandably be sceptical about teachers' long term commitment (Learmonth & Maidment 1993:197).

In many countries, education decisions are made by a ministry of education with virtually no input from parents. Parents are not expected to question the work of educators, and often feel inadequate to contribute to school matters, especially if their own education is limited and they do not understand what is being taught in the schools (Moles 1993:35).

### 2.3.8 Phases of schooling

Dauber and Epstein (1993:60) report that the level of schooling of the child correlates strongly with all measures of involvement of parents. Parents of children in the elementary grades are more involved than parents in the middle grades. (Gotts & Purnell 1987:216; Jackson & Cooper 1992:30). According to the parents' reports, elementary school teachers do more and are better at involving parents: in their children's education at school; at home assisting with homework; in reading activities, and all other types of involvement. As children mature, parents are, however, excluded from the life of the school (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbush 1993:108). In addition, minority parents, like majority parents, may distance themselves from their adolescent youth's school affairs in response to the child's bid for autonomy. This parental behaviour may be misconstrued, particularly when the child's academic performance is poor (Ritter et al 1993:108). Jackson and Cooper (1992:37) concur that working with parents of high school students, may require more active strategies, since such families may be less accessible. They are, however, of the opinion that it is worth the effort.

Independent of children's age, all analyses show that parents were more involved in their children's education if the children were better students (Dauber & Epstein 1993:60). Parents whose children are doing well or who are doing better in school are more likely to do more to ensure their children's continued success.

### 2.3.9 Differing understanding of parent involvement

In many cases it appears that parents and teachers have a different understanding of what constitutes parent involvement. Henderson '(1987:2) reports that parents are eager to play all roles at school - from tutor to classroom assistant to decision maker. However, professional educators tend to consider only the most traditional roles, such as supporter of school programmes or audience at school functions. This means that educators tend to relegate parents to the less substantial and insignificant *bake-sale roles*, leaving parents feeling frustrated, belittled and left out. Chrispeels (1991:368) notes that the California State Department of Education and several local districts have adopted policies that provide a clearer definition of parent involvement. This development is significant because one of the biggest barriers to the development of successful programmes is that groups that ought to work together understand the concept differently.

### 2.3.10 Lack of school policy and practice of parent involvement

Dauber and Epstein (1993:61) report that **school programmes and teachers' practices** are the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home. This means that regardless of parent education, family size, student ability, or school level, parents are more likely to become partners in their children's education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices to involve parents at school, and at home on homework and reading activities. Schools' practices, not just family characteristics, make a difference in whether parents become involved in and feel informed about their children's education. In a study undertaken by Wanat (1994:644) it was found that differences in parent involvement in schools are explained not by family structure, but by school practices. Schools often use traditional methods to involve parents including open house days, conferences, volunteer programmes, fund raisers and parent-teacher organisations. Many parents, especially single and dual-income parents, do not participate in these activities, yet they want to help their children succeed in school. Parents want the school to suggest activities they can pursue at home in the limited time they have together. Chrispeels (1991:371) sums up, "Most of the efforts have been directed at 'fixing' parents rather than at altering school structures and practices."

## 2.4 ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Necessity*

The discussion of the situation within urban schools clearly illustrates a dire need for greater collaboration between the home and the school in addressing some of the problems the youth have to contend with. On the other hand, the task of overcoming the barriers to parent involvement, as previously discussed, seems almost overwhelming. The question to be answered is whether the effects of improved parent involvement is worth the effort. For nearly two decades social science research on school and family environments has documented the importance for student development and achievement of family conditions and practices of parent involvement in school (Coleman 1987; Gordon 1977; Comer 1987; Henderson 1987; Clark 1988 and Swap 1993). Epstein (1991:262) sums up the results of this research:

There is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement even after the students' ability and family socioeconomic status is taken into account.

Review of the literature also indicates that parent involvement programmes benefit all role-players: parents, teachers, schools and the community as a whole.

### 2.4.1 Advantages for students

There is widespread understanding of both the crucial and continuing role that parents play as educators in the education, welfare and development of their children (Bastiani 1993b:141). Research underscores that children are more successful students at all grade levels if their parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home, regardless of the educational background or social class of their parents (Dauber & Epstein 1993:53; Duncan 1992:12; Dixon 1992:16 and Wanat 1994:632). Loucks (1992:19) makes the same observation, "Research on parent/family involvement leaves little room for debate: Students who are academically successful tend to receive consistent support from their parents and other adults in the home."

Moreover, Becher (in Henderson 1987:17) found that parent involvement programmes, particularly those training low-income parents to work with their children, are effective in improving children's language skills, how they perform in tests and behave in school.

In another major review of research on parent involvement and school achievement in the USA, Sattes (as reviewed in Swap 1993:3) cites positive effects on the achievement of children in grades K-12, either when parents are trained as tutors, or when they are simply informed about, and support their children's learning. She also reviews several studies that link parent involvement with increased student self-esteem, fewer behavioural problems and better school attendance.

Student's attitudes about themselves and their control over the environment are critical to achievement, whereas school inputs such as class size or teacher education have little effect. These attitudes are formed at home and are the product of myriad interactions between parents, children and the surrounding community. In other words, when parents show an interest in their children's education and have high expectations for their performance, they promote attitudes that are the keys to achievement (Henderson 1987:4). Haberman (1992:33) agrees:

There is substantial evidence that changing the school climate *and* involving parents..., will substantially raise not only the achievement of low-income, at-risk children but will change their self-concept and motivation as well.

The fact that students have more positive attitudes toward school; better homework habits; higher attendance; lower drop-out rates and improved behaviour is supported by well documented research (Hamby 1992; Henderson 1987; Epstein 1991 and Swap 1993). In one project, for example, fifth grade students were surveyed for their reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement and their parents' help at home. Students whose teachers and parents used frequent parent involvement practices reported more positive attitudes toward school; more regular homework habits; greater concurrence between the school and family practices; more familiarity between the teacher and their parents; and more homework completed on weekends (Epstein 1990:111). All these factors obviously contribute to

improved student achievement. Moreover, Hamby (1992:59) has found that increased achievement is sustained across grade levels for low-income students as well as for middle-income ones.

There are, however, limits to the extent of the advantages. Henderson (1987:7) points out that although meaningful parent involvement is consistently effective in raising children's achievement scores, in poor districts parental support may encounter a ceiling effect. That is, parent involvement raises their children's achievement scores, but not the national average. In addition, research in elementary and secondary schools often focus on time-limited programmes, where gains are recorded for the period of the innovation, but long-term structured modifications to maintain those gains for subsequent students are not made. Swap (1993:9), however, says that these barriers can be overcome most convincingly when parent involvement programmes are integrated with a comprehensive plan for school improvement.

Research indicates that there are subject-specific links between the involvement of families and increases in achievement by students (Epstein 1996:217). Generally, teachers' practices to involve parents in learning activities at home, are mainly limited to reading, English language studies, or related activities. The results consistently indicate improved reading scores (Epstein 1991:261-276). These results suggest that specific practices of partnership may help to boost student achievement in particular subjects. Research is needed to clarify whether family involvement with a child in one school subject transfers the benefits to other subjects over time (Epstein 1991:276).

Davies (1993:205) likens the complex setting in which children live to an ecosystem - what happens in one part will affect the other parts. The interests of a child will, therefore, be best served when there are good connections in all parts of the ecosystem, that is, when the school, the parents and the community collaborate in the education of the child.

#### 2.4.2 Advantages for parents

When teachers make parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interaction with their children at home, and feel more positive about their own abilities to help their children (Epstein & Dauber 1991; Hamby 1992).

Parents benefit by being alerted to different and more effective ways of creating or developing learning opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children by parenting programmes (Wolfendale 1992:9). However, most parents *need help* to know how to be productively involved in their children's education at each grade level (Truby 1987:206, Epstein & Dauber 1991: 290, Hyde 1992:42)

Davies (1993:206) also lists many benefits for parents when they become involved in the education of their children, including greater appreciation of their own important roles; strengthened social networks; access to information and materials; personal efficacy and motivation to continue their own education. The contact with other parents experiencing comparable problems often has very positive results. Moreover, by understanding their adolescents better, parents are in a position to work with the school in resolving other school related issues. Jackson and Cooper (1992:35) include the remarks of a parent volunteer, "I personally got to meet some wonderful people, to share my frustrations with others who have similar problems."

Becher (in Henderson 1987:17-18) adds that parents actively involved in their children's education, develop more positive attitudes about school and school personnel; help gather support in the community for parent involvement programmes; become more active in community affairs and develop increased self-confidence. Most parents report the pleasure of getting to know teachers as people and they find a new appreciation for the commitment and skill of teachers as well as an increase in their own parenting abilities.

Projects to improve parent/school partnerships also help to improve communication between parent and child, and between parent, child and school (Jackson & Cooper 1992:36). One

parent reported, "I believe that my son really knows how much we care about him. He sees us attending meetings each week."

Collaboration between parents and children reduces the characteristic isolation of their roles. It is very reassuring for parents to know that teachers share their concerns about their children. In turn it is comforting for teachers to know that a parent recognises the complexity of their role in the classroom (Swap 1993:11). However, dialogue between parents and teachers also reveals *differences*, as well as unrealistic expectations on both sides (Jackson & Cooper 1992:36). These differences can be resolved before possible conflict situations arise. Where inefficiencies are apparent on the side of the teachers, parents are in a position to criticise ideas and practice, because of their increased understanding of what should be happening in schools (Brito & Waller 1993:162). In this way parents are able to play a meaningful role in their children's education.

Where legislation to this effect exists, parents can also participate in school decision-making by being part of parent teacher associations, management councils or other advisory committees. Although the number of volunteers and other participants on decision making bodies can be increased by better recruitment, training and deployment of parents, Epstein (1990:108) warns that the vast number of parents want to be involved with their own children at home more frequently and more effectively.

#### 2.4.3 Advantages for teachers and schools

Increased parent and community involvement can also bring multiple benefits to teachers and schools: the teachers' work can be made more manageable; parents who are involved have more positive views of the teacher and the school, and the parents and others who participate are likely to be more supportive of the schools (Davies 1993:206). This view is shared by Epstein and Dauber (1991:289) when they remark that parents rate teachers higher overall, when they are involved with the school in any way. Moreover, teachers come to know and understand parents better (Hamby 1992:59). This obviously increases teachers' understanding of the children in the family and provides information which may be of value in the handling of specific children.

Teachers also report more positive feelings about teaching and about their school when there is more parent involvement at the school (Leitch & Tangri 1988:72). Moreover, teachers who frequently involve parents in their children's education rate all parents - including less-educated and single parents - as helpful (Epstein 1990:112). Teachers are impressed by the mutuality of interests and find that collaboration both broadens their perspective as well as increases their sensitivity to varied parent circumstances (Swap 1993:10). In other words, working with parents raises teachers' expectations and appreciation of parents as partners. This is illustrated by a teacher's remark, quoted by Leitch and Tangri (1988:73): "All the parents care; their response depends on how you approach them...parents say they know I care because of the way I talk to them."

This is corroborated by the observation of Becher (in Henderson 1987:17-18) that teachers become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, experiment more frequently, and develop a more student-orientated approach. In programmes where parents and teachers work successfully together, teachers experience support and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving (Swap 1993:10).

Collaboration between the school and parents also increases the resources available to the school, for example, parents may contribute to schools as volunteers or paid aides, thus helping to individualise and enrich student work. Parents' expertise may help a school in the development or maintenance of the school buildings and grounds. Parents may also provide linkages to partnerships with businesses, agencies, cultural institutions, or other resources in the community. Moreover, parents can be a political asset when they argue for the interests of children and schools at board meetings or in legislative sessions (Swap 1993:11).

#### **2.4.4 Advantages for the community**

Increased linkages between school and community have been shown to have multiple positive results: increased access to school resources and facilities; cost saving and improved services through collaboration; increased capacity to solve community problems; and community pride (Davies 1993:206). An organised parent leadership group can also bring additional resources

into the schools; pressure other governmental bodies to improve the schools' physical environment, and support extra-curricular activities (Jackson & Cooper 1992:33). This is especially true if a sense of ownership is also instilled.

Parent and citizen participation in the schools can also contribute to advancing the prospects of a more democratic and equitable society (Davies 1993:206). For example, increased opportunities for participation in school decision making contribute to skills of individual and collective empowerment, important ingredients for effective citizen action in all areas of civic life. Dimmock, O'Donoghue and Robb (1996:12-13) warn, however, that parents who are involved in decision making bodies rarely communicate with the parents they supposedly represent to solicit ideas or to report committee actions or plans. Also, some doubts may be raised about the supposed benefits of participative decision making or even better quality decisions.

#### **2.4.5 In summary**

The above literature indicates decisively that parent involvement increases student achievement, improves their self-esteem, school attendance and behaviour. Parent involvement programmes also benefit adults. Collaboration generally results in increased individual support for teachers and parents, as well as a feeling of satisfaction at contributing to important changes in children and in the school. Parent involvement also increases the resources available to children, teachers, parents, and the school, and often leads to collaboration with business of agencies within the community (Swap 1993:12).

## **2.5 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical stance of the role players towards home-school relations is a modifying factor influencing the outcome of these relations. 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. Christenson, Rounds and Franklin (1992:35) suggest that the work of Coleman (1987), Epstein (1987b) and Swap (1992) are the most notable of the current theories of parent involvement. Both Gordon (1977) and Comer (1987) can be added to this list. Many of these individuals are still in the process of researching their proposed theories and are careful to caution that no single empirically based theory or model exists, and that much data are still needed.

### 2.5.1 The Coleman theory of parent involvement

Coleman (1987:32) asserts that throughout earlier history, children grew up in the context of the family and the neighbourhood and that all the activities and facilities for training took place within the household or in close proximity thereof. This changed when the economic productive activities shifted from the home to the factories or the office. This also necessitated education moving from the home to mass, formal educational institutions. Another extensive change has been the movement of women's work from inside the household to outside. All this has led to a weakening of family structures and an inability to fulfil some of the tasks previously ascribed to it, for example, the socialisation of the child. Although Scott-Jones (1988:66) agrees that the family structure has been weakened, she feels that incorrect assumptions have been made regarding different types of family structure. In this regard she cites research showing that mother's employment outside the home is not associated with low achievement; in fact, for low-income black families, children whose mothers are gainfully employed have a higher achievement rate than comparable children whose mothers do not work outside the home.

Coleman (1987:35) proposed that home and school provide different inputs for the socialisation process of children. One category of inputs, *opportunities, demands and rewards* comes from schools. The second category of inputs comes only from the child's closer more intimate, and more persistent environment. These inputs can be loosely described as *attitudes, effort, and conception of self*, which is instilled mainly by the social environment of the household. This means that the child's attitudes toward and expectations of education is rooted in the home, as well as one's own effort, the effort one should be willing to put

into the attainment of scholastic and other gains (Scott-Jones 1988:67). In other words, children's ideas and attitudes about the importance of education and learning begin with the expectations and beliefs of their parents (Warner 1991:373). The self-concept is defined as "...the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence" (Borton, Preston & Bippert 1996:3). The latter is also shaped in the home. Educational outcomes, therefore, result from the reciprocal **interaction between the qualities** that the child brings from home and the qualities of the school.

Schools can reward, demand and provide opportunities for children to learn. Coleman (1987:36) notes that families provide the building blocks that make learning possible. Greenwood and Hickman (1991:279) concur, citing research, claiming that one half to two-thirds of the students' achievement was accounted for by home variables, rather than school variables. Where the variables from the home are absent problems are likely to occur. Coleman (1987:35) concludes:

... the division of labor that leads a household to concentrate in careers and income, while leaving to the school the task of socialization, merely results in an increase in one set of inputs, the opportunities, demands, and rewards, while ignoring those which interact with them, the attitudes, effort and conception of self.

Coleman (1987:36) argues that families provide the *social capital* needed by schools to optimise learners' outcomes. He (1987:36) sees *social capital* as the "...norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up". Schleicher (1992:26) adds that it is well known that family socialisation has a greater influence on the child's attitude, learning ability, and even on his or her competence in school subjects than the school does. The failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school may lie at the root of the poor academic performance of many poor minority children (Comer 1988:25). Epstein (1987a:121) explains:

Parents lay the groundwork for student's success in school by building their children's self-confidence, self-concept, and self-reliance. If these aspects of home training are not completed by the time the child starts school, they become a mutual concern and shared responsibility of the family and the school.

It was found that Coleman's *linguistic and social capital* generally coincided with the parenting qualities that were found to influence variations in school achievement among cohorts of fourth-graders and twelfth-graders in Clark's study (1988:93). Moreover, research on family environment has consistently corroborated the importance of parent involvement at all grade levels (Epstein 1987a:120).

The social capital of homes is declining, as reflected by the absence of parents in the home, and a decrease of exchange between parents and children about academic, social, economic, and personal matters (Coleman 1987:37). However, social capital also exists outside the family; in the community (Davies 1991:378). Nevertheless, the religious, political, economic and social institutions that organised and stabilised their communities have also suffered severe discontinuity and destruction (Comer 1988:27). Once again the research of Coleman (1987:37) substantiates this:

Altogether, the social capital in family and neighbourhood available for raising children has declined precipitously. The cost will, of course, be born by the next generation, and borne by the disadvantaged of the next generation - for the loss of social capital in the community hurts most the children with least human and social capital in their families.

Thus, Coleman does not support the United States Government's decision to ban all religious instruction in public schools, as the church (a very important community agent) traditionally plays a significant role, particularly in the lives of the poor Afro-American. Coleman and Hoffer (discussed in Solomon 1991:360) found that students in Catholic and other private high schools perform better than comparable students in public schools, at least partly because of the relationship between the schools and the families and communities they serve.

It does not automatically follow that the economically disadvantaged are doomed to failure. Schleicher (1992:28) notes that although the learning process and success of children depend more on the home than on the school, it correlates more with the parents psychological support for their children than with the socioeconomic status of the family, and is also strongly related to parental cooperation with the school.

According to Clark (1988:93) evidence indicates that well-prepared achieving students receive more linguistic and social capital by exposure to the following factors: parental standards, norms, rules, allowances, and sanctions that encourage the child to participate constructively in a balance of deliberate learning activities, including homework and study. Also included is adult or expert instruction, feedback, guidance, and support actions that teach the child language usage, skills, attitudes, and social behaviour during a wide variety of home and neighbourhood activities. Clark (1988:94) also includes parental awards, respect, appreciation and regard for the child as a 'winner'.

As the social capital in home and neighbourhood shrinks, school achievement and other growth will not be increased if these resources are simply replaced by more 'school-like' resources - those that produce opportunities, demands, and rewards. Rather, academic and developmental outcomes for children need to be maintained or increased by involving the family and community to a greater extent, thereby inducing the kinds of attitudes, effort and conception of self that children and youth need to succeed in school and as adults. Clark (1988:95) suggests that parent's sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear increases as the child progresses in school since they feel unable to respond to their child's linguistic and social capital needs. This anxiety is more profound among the parents in the low socioeconomic strata. When school fails to provide these parents with factual, empowering information and strategies for supporting their child's learning, the parents are even more likely to feel inadequate educators. To help parents, schools need to include ways for teachers to share information that empowers parents to function as effective mentors in the family. Clark (1988:95) suggests that:

Inexpensive, carefully designed parent information workshops and newsletters could address this need by helping parents decide when to change their method

of helping their developing child acquire the linguistic and social capital needed for school success.

In summary: although Coleman did not suggest a specific model of parent involvement, his theory underlies many of the models which will be discussed subsequently.

### 2.5.2 The Gordon model of parent involvement

Gordon advanced a useful model for articulating qualitative differences between schools regarding the nature of parent involvement (Frisby 1992:134). The form, content, and goals of any school's parent education efforts are inevitably influenced by these qualitative differences.

Gordon (1977:71) sees parent involvement in the USA as deriving from the two directions which parent education and parent involvement took during the twentieth century. The first essentially involved *middle-class and well-educated people*, and was linked to the Progressive Education Movement and Deweyian thought. Examples can be found in the child study movement and the development of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), mental health associations, and parent cooperative nursery schools, all dating from the 1920's to 1930's. These efforts often used group approaches to both parent education and involvement. The aims were not simply to learn about rearing one's own children, but also, in keeping with Dewey's doctrine, to influence the shape of broader society (Gordon 1977:71). Materials with regard to this approach either stressed descriptive norms of development, or parent behaviour in order to raise socially acceptable and academically successful children. Later on the *middle-class parent education approach* changed to an approach more psychotherapeutic by nature, especially therapy as represented by the ideas of Carl Rogers and his associates (Gordon 1977:72).

The second direction parent involvement took is referred to by Gordon (1977:71) as *mainstreaming* and called for utilising parent education and home visitations to integrate the flow of immigrants into the mainstream. This emphasis later shifted from a concern for integration of immigrants from Europe to the awareness of groups in the American

population *outside* the mainstream. This included the American indigent, the immigrant waves from the farm to the cities represented by the movement of southern blacks; the immigration of Puerto Ricans to New York and other urban centres; the Chicano in the Southwestern United States, and the Appalachian poor (Gordon 1977:72). According to the *mainstreaming approach*, professionals hoped that parent education would help parents learn about proper ways to rear their children; modify their attitudes toward children; improve their personal adjustment and help them to understand the functions and purposes of education (Berger 1991:214). Government programmes falling within this approach are *Head Start*, *Parent and Child Centres*, *Parent and Child Development Centres*, and *Follow Through* programmes (Gordon 1977:71). The family support movement has several well-known advocates at major university research centres, including Yale, Harvard and Cornell (Davies 1991:377). Family support programmes, aimed at strengthening all aspects of the child's development, stress parent education at home and help parents connect with natural support systems. Many of the programmes have links with school systems of early education programmes. Davies (1991:377) maintains that all these efforts are, in part, responses to changes that have left today's parents with less access to help and advice than parents of earlier generations had through extended families and close knit communities. Chrispeels (1991:368) adds that since the mid-1960s educators and policy makers have tried, by means of various federal and state legislative mandates, to replicate the conditions of middle-class parent involvement in schools serving largely low-income students.

Gordon (1977:72) considers three themes central to both the middle-class and *mainstreaming* approaches to parent involvement and education: (1) the home is important and basic for human development; (2) parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development and (3) the early years of life are important for lifelong development. *Three models of parent involvement* are proposed: The Parent Impact model, the School (Agency) Impact model, and the Community Impact model Gordon (1977:75).

#### 2.5.2.1 *The Family Impact model*

In the *Parent or Family Impact model*, the school reaches out to the home through home visits or other communication techniques (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:280). This model

assumes that parent educators or agencies can influence roles and relationships within the family. Underlying this model are the assumptions that there is a body of information (derived from books or experts) that is essential for effective living, which is known and taught by teachers, and should be learnt and applied by parents. The family impact model was designed to work with family members to enable them to cope with the social and education systems. This approach is supported by research which shows that the creation of a positive learning environment at home has a powerful impact on student achievement (Henderson 1987:6). This approach also assumes that the family wants to participate in the system but does not know how to socialise and help its children acquire the necessary prerequisites for success, so parent education is offered (Berger 1991:216). Issues and concerns that arise from this model pertain to questions of how to reconcile differing opinions of experts; doubts as to whether or not alien values are being imposed on parents, and whether or not education efforts address superficial rather than root problems (Frisby 1992:135). This model is therefore closely linked to mainstreaming, as discussed above.

An example of a *Family Impact model* is the *Parent Education Follow Through* programme, designed by Gordon, to serve low-income children and their families in grades K-3 (Swap 1993:5). Binford and Newell (1991:233) describe Gordon's approach in this programme as a *hands-up* approach in that it emphasises assisting parents in being teachers of their children. In the *Follow Through* programme, parents are helped by a parent educator, that is, an individual who typically lives in the same neighbourhood as the mothers she visits. Although the programme falls within the parent impact model in the sense that parents are trained to assist their children in coping with the first years of schooling, it also contains elements of the School Impact model by giving parents various opportunities to give inputs thereby influencing the programme and the agencies that provide it.

#### 2.5.2.2 *The School Impact model*

In the *School (Agency) Impact model* most of the influence goes from the home to the school (Gordon 1977:76). In this model parents are involved in the school as **volunteers** or in **parent advisory committees**, in an effort to change the school so that it is more responsive to the needs of the home (Greenwood & Hickman 1991:281). The assumption is that if educators

and other agency workers become more attuned to the family and the culture of the home, then a better working relationship with parents will lead to greater effectiveness in educating children. The School Impact model defined by Gordon (1977:77) is one based on teachers learning from parents, as well as parents learning from teachers. He (1977:77) explains, "Teachers and school administrators, or any other professional...need to learn new attitudes toward parents, new skills in communication, and group processes and sharing."

Many programmes aimed at low-income families also require parents to serve on policy councils, committees and boards, enabling them to learn skills in decision making and dealing with school/agency power structures. Moreover, parents develop more positive attitudes about school and staff, help gather additional support from the community, and seek more education for themselves when they are thus involved. The School Impact model has led to changes in the way parents and professional educators see each other and, in some situations, to legislation and local district change (Gordon 1977:77).

### 2.5.2.3 *The Community Impact model*

The *Community Impact model* is usually represented as a so-called *comprehensive service* model, in which the resources (i.e. medical, psychological) of the larger community are focused on facilitating a community-home-school partnership (Gordon 1977:77). In this model the influence goes to and from the home, school and the broader community respectively. This model works on the assumption that factors in the home, school, and community are all interrelated. The primary advantage of the Community Impact model is that parent education efforts are not piecemeal and sporadic, but are placed within a broader social systems context (Frisby 1992:135). The primary disadvantage of this model is that the resources necessary to carry out a community impact model may well seem overwhelming. Berger (1991:216) argues that although the community impact model is the most comprehensive, it is the one that the powerless are the least able to initiate or implement. Gordon (1977:77), however, feels that the prospects are improving and that a community impact model can be developed and used as well as continuing and strengthening the other two more micro models.

Within the above model of parent involvement, Breivogel and Gordon (1976:6-9) identify five types of parent involvement: (1) parents as audience, which entails informing parents about school activities or asking them to visit the school as bystanders or observers; (2) the parent is involved as an active teacher of his or her own child; (3) parents are involved in active roles in the school as aids and volunteers; (4) the parent may be involved as a paid worker in the school; and (5) the parent may be involved in decision making. Swap (1993:5) includes the parent as adult learner as a sixth aspect. The types of involvement are depicted as the spokes of a wheel, implying that all types of involvement should be activated in order for the wheel to turn. It is suggested that this parent involvement programme will influence not only parents' behaviour and children's work, but also the quality of the schools and communities with which the families interact (Solomon 1991:360).

### 2.5.3 Swap's models of parent involvement

Swap (1992:57) proposes that parent involvement programmes are be organised according to three different philosophies, namely: the *school-to-home transmission philosophy*; the *interactive philosophy*; and a *philosophy of partnership for school success*. She (1993:28) adds a fourth model which she calls the *protective model*, which includes minimal parent involvement.

#### 2.5.3.1 *The Protective model*

This is the most dominant model for home-school relationships (Swap 1993:28). The goal of the Protective model is to reduce conflict between parents and educators, primarily through the separation of parents and educators' functions. Swap refers to this model as the Protective model because its aim is to *protect* the school from interference by parents. This model is driven by the following three assumptions (Swap 1993:28):

- Parents delegate to school the responsibility of educating their children.
- Parents hold school personnel responsible for the results.
- Educators accept this delegation of responsibility.

According to this model, parent involvement in decision making or collaborative problem solving is seen as inappropriate and as an interference with the educator's job. According to Swap (1993:29), many teachers share this attitude, as illustrated by a teacher's comment, "Parents should be actively involved with students at home. The responsibility of parents ends at home. Teachers are responsible for teaching."

The disadvantages of this model include: ignoring the potential of home-school collaboration for improving student achievement; exacerbating many conflicts between home and school by not providing structures or opportunities for preventive problem solving; and losing out on the wealth of resources for enrichment and school support available from families and other members of the community (Swap 1993:29).

#### 2.5.3.2 *The School-to-Home Transmission model*

In the *School-to-Home Transmission model* educators specify what parents should do to support their children's learning at home (Swap 1992:58). In this model teachers envisage the participation of parents in two ways. The primary expectation is that parents will aid their children's learning by endorsing the importance of schooling and making sure that the child meets the minimum academic and behavioural requirements. In line with this expectation educators, for example, expect parents to make sure that children complete their homework. Or, if children are getting into trouble at school, educators hope that the parents will work with them to reinforce expectations of good behaviour and create conditions at home that support a change of behaviour.

A secondary expectation (or hope) is that parents will spend enough time with their children to transfer *cultural capital* to them. The latter comprises the ways of being, knowing, writing, talking, and thinking which characterise those who are successful within the dominant culture (Swap 1992:58). Delpit (1988:285) argues that some children come to school with aspects of the culture of power in place (or cultural capital) while others do not. Such children do not have the discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society. Schools hope that parents can in some way contribute to the cultural capital of the child. A minimum version of this

hope/expectation is that parents will read to their children and listen to their children reading to them. Parents might also contribute to their children's cultural capital through such activities as helping their child with a science project or visiting a museum. Epstein (1987a:120) underscores the effectiveness of parent involvement programmes based on a philosophy of school-to-home transmission, in which parents of children at risk are asked to reinforce at home those behaviours, values, and attitudes which educators believe will lead to school achievement.

The importance of parents supporting the growth of children's social skills is endorsed by Comer (1980:192):

Children whose parents feel that they can and should be a part of the social mainstream have the best chance to acquire the social skills that will lead to school and life success. Children whose parents are not part of the social mainstream can acquire such skills if they are taught in school and there is parental support for their acquisition and use. Regardless of the social background of the parents, the climate and the operation of a school must be reasonably good to constructively enhance children's social skills.

The values and behaviours which are hypothesised to undergird school success are, however, not necessarily confined to parents of a particular class, racial, or ethnic background. Swap (1992:59) explains that middle-class parents may, for example, not support the mainstream values of hard work, self-discipline, self-motivation, and respectful manners; yet poor families may teach those skills very successfully.

Although schools rely on parents to support the school, it is the school personnel who define goals and programmes (Swap 1993:30). Two-way communication is not sought because the goal is for parents to understand and support the school's objectives. Swap (1992:59) explains that "parent programmes based on the school-to-home transmission often contain components that reflect an unwillingness to consider parents as equal partners having important strengths."

In addition, parent education programmes are often explicitly developed to help parents to be more effective parents and to instruct them in the values and skills to do so (Swap 1992:60). Each of these strategies suggest an unequal distribution of power and a conviction that school personnel know more about what parents should do to support their children than the parents do. A teacher interviewed by Swap (1993:31) explains, "Parents should be trained to parent, talk to their kids more - interact with children and take them places."

Although research shows that parental support of children's academic and social competence can have significant positive effects on the achievement of educationally disadvantaged students, Swap (1992:60-61) lists four limitations to the *School-to-Home model* of parent involvement. In the first place parents may not be able to devote sufficient time and energy to parent involvement activities, mainly due to real not imaginary problems. This means that if success for all children depends on parent involvement, then many children without this support will continue to fail. Secondly, there is the possibility that the promise of equal opportunities through education and hard work could be false. In other words, it is possible that despite success at school, young adults from impoverished or non-mainstream backgrounds may not be able to find employment and economic success. Parent involvement, though critical, may not always be sufficiently powerful to counteract the complex factors that lead to poverty and family dislocation. To counter this the support of a network of individuals, agencies, and business within the community is recommended to secure for families the resources and skills to break the cycle of disadvantage (Swap 1992:60). A third disadvantage of the *School-to-Home Transmission model* is that it may be difficult to draw clear boundaries between the roles of school and home in formal education. In its most exaggerated form, parents would be asked to teach whatever skills or values the child was not acquiring, regardless of the financial or emotional cost to the family (Swap 1992:61). A fourth limitation is the danger of demeaning the value or importance of the child's culture in the effort to transmit the values and goals of the social mainstream.

Although Swap's *School-to-Home model* of parent involvement is similar to Gordon's *Home Impact model*, it broadens the philosophical basis and explores the advantages and limitations extensively.

### 2.5.3.3 *The Curriculum Enrichment model*

A philosophy of *interactive learning* undergirds the curriculum enrichment model (Swap 1992:61). The model is built on an explicit premise of mutual respect between parents and educators, and stresses mutual learning and mutually developed objectives (Swap 1993:38). Within this model there are two valued outcomes that justify parent involvement: students' successful achievement in the mainstream and the valuing of the goals and beliefs of the non-mainstream culture (Swap 1992:61). The Curriculum Enrichment model is different from the other models of parent involvement, because its assumptions do not necessarily permeate all aspects of the school culture and structure. Its focus is on curriculum and instruction (Swap 1993:39).

One aspect of the Curriculum Enrichment model, is the recognition by parents and/or educators of the importance of continuity between the home and school. Lightfoot quoted by Swap (1992:62) articulates the importance of a home-to-school connection:

If one recognizes the initial social and cultural task assumed by *all* families and their primary education function, then it becomes clear that in order for schools to be productive and comfortable environments for children, they will have to meaningfully incorporate the familial and cultural skills and values learned in homes and communities.

One solution to the discontinuity between home and school is to recruit more teachers into the school who reflect and value the child's culture. Another solution is to bring more parents into the school. When parents and teachers get to know each other through frequent informal communication; through shared projects; or through volunteering in the classroom, children's behaviour and learning problems tend to diminish (Swap 1992:62). A third solution is for parents or teachers to learn the differences between their cultures and to provide a lexicon for the children that would allow the children to become fluent in and appreciative of both cultures. The school must ensure that "...each classroom incorporate strategies appropriate for all the children in its confines" (Delpit 1988:286).

Despite its attractiveness as a way of enhancing school success for more children at risk, the *curriculum enrichment model* presents problems when used as the underpinning of parent involvement programmes (Swap 1992:63). In the first place it must be acknowledged that it is very difficult to decipher the important elements of another person's culture. Moreover, where classrooms are filled with children from different backgrounds, teachers may need to be responsive to children and families from several different cultures and traditions. Without consultation and widespread staff commitment, attempts to respond to this diversity may result in fragmentation of teachers and the instructional programme. There may also be those who feel that is unrealistic and ultimately unethical for cultural differences to be maintained and celebrated.

#### 2.5.3.4 *The Partnership model*

Schools prescribing to this philosophy view parent-school partnership as a fundamental component of children's success, and educators welcome parents as *assets and resources* in the search for strategies that will achieve success for all children (Swap 1992, 1993). Swap (1993:49) highlights the differences between this model and the ones previously discussed:

The partnership philosophy differs from the School-to-Home Transmission model in its emphasis on two-way communication, parental strengths, and problem solving with parents. It differs from the Curriculum Enrichment model in promoting a single unifying mission that suffuses the entire culture and galvanizes all aspects of the school.

Although curriculum revision is seen as an essential tool in achieving the mission, the emphasis also extends to other areas. In the Partnership model, parent involvement is seen not as an addendum, but as an indispensable component of school reform (Swap 1993:50). The most important precepts of this model are described below.

In the first place there is *clarity and consensus* about goals, which means that the school, parents, and the community must have a shared sense of mission about creating success for all children (Levin 1987:20). One of the key ingredients is developing a shared mission of

success for all children and agreement on the standards by which success will be measured. Cuban (1989:30) speaks of adults and children sharing "...common values about respect, intellectual achievement, and caring for one another." Such commitment represents a significant change in how school failure is conceptualised. This can be viewed as a paradigm shift in which blaming families and children for failure is replaced by an expectation of success for *all* children (Seeley 1989:47).

In the second place a *revised curriculum* is suggested (Swap 1992:65). This means that a remedial approach to educating at-risk students is replaced by an *accelerated approach*. A comprehensive, intensive curriculum is used which assesses children's progress frequently, and provides individual support through peer or teacher instruction. Moreover, the implementation of successful educational programmes to address the needs of educationally disadvantaged students requires the involvement of parents and the extensive participation of teachers. Levin (1987:20) argues that such an approach would create learning activities characterised by high expectations and a learning environment characterised by high status for the participant.

In the third place *local autonomy and control* is required (Swap 1992:65). This is necessary so that teachers and principals have the flexibility to respond to changing needs within the school. Moreover, control over major decisions about budget, incentives, resources, curriculum, schedule, and teacher assignments builds commitment ownership, and professionalism among the staff (Swap 1992:65).

Fourthly, Swap (1992:65) maintains *partnership among educators, parents and community members*. Schorr (1988:257) underscores this, stating: "Successful programmes see the child in the context of family and the family in the context of its surroundings."

Recognition of the necessity of *collaboration* among educators, parents and community representatives in meeting the goal of success for all children is an essential part of the paradigm shift, as articulated by Seeley (1989:47). This collaboration was achieved in an algebra project implemented by Moses, Kamii, Swap and Howard (1989:428). The work of Comer (1980, 1987, 1988) attests to the success of such an approach. Swap (1992:65)

explains further, "Successful schools draw on parents for help and advise; they seek from parents confirmation of the schools' high expectations for the children; they clarify how parents can help support their children's achievement."

Effective programmes also draw from other resources within the community, such as business agencies and medical partnerships so that services can be offered to children in a non-bureaucratic way and needed funding and materials can be obtained.

To illustrate the Partnership model, Swap (1993:47-59) discusses the Comer approach, Levin's accelerated schools model, and Epstein's typology of parent involvement as examples of a more comprehensive approach.

#### 2.5.4 The Comer approach to parent involvement

The Comer model holds that if you empower parents and teachers to work in partnership with schools, and if the developmental needs of the whole child are addressed in the process, then children will succeed in school. The programme, developed by Comer to improve schooling particularly within lower socioeconomic groupings, has been in place since the 1970's and is currently being implemented in 563 schools in more than 80 districts in 21 states in the USA (Emmons, Comer & Haynes 1996:21).

According to Comer (1987:13-14) educators responded to postwar conditions by raising credential standards and improving course content and teaching methods, but paid little attention to the quality of relationships between teachers and students, among school staff, and between staff and community, particularly parents. In contrast Comer's *School Development Programme* promotes development and learning by "...building supportive bonds that draw together children, parents and school" (Comer 1988:24).

The School Development Programme (SDP), can best be conceived as a systemic process that targets the entire school for change. It includes *nine basic components* (three *mechanisms*, three *operations*, three *guidelines*) to ensure that all school decisions are made in the best interest of students (Borton, Preston & Bippert 1996:1; Comer & Haynes 1991:272). The

three mechanisms comprise: the School Planning and Management Team, the Parent Team, and the Student and Staff Support Team (Comer, Haynes & Joyner 1996:9). In his earlier publications the Student and Staff Support Team was known as the Mental Health Team (Comer and Haynes 1991:272).

#### 2.5.4.1 *The three mechanisms of the School Development Programme*

The three mechanisms of the School Development Programme (SDP) are explained as follows.

- (a) *The School Planning and Management Team* is the central organising body in the school and includes the principal, teachers, parents, and support staff representatives (Comer et al 1996:11). Among others, the School Planning and Management Team develops a comprehensive school plan; plans staff development activities; and assesses and modifies the school plan in order to improve student achievement (Borton & Preston 1996:1; Comer 1987:15).
- (b) *The Parent Team* involves parents in every facet of school life, including active daily participation in school endeavours, policy and management issues and general school support (Haynes & Comer 1993:168). Moreover, parent collaborators contribute mainly in the area of school climate, thereby helping to eliminate harmful stereotypes that staff members may harbour about the community served by their school (Perry and Tannenbaum 1992:107). The Parent Team also bridges the gap between the school and the home, and is actively involved in developing workshops for themselves and the children (Flaxman & Inger 1992:17). One such programme, implemented with great success, is the *Social Skills Curriculum for Inner-City Children* (Comer & Haynes 1991:275). According to Comer the need for parent participation is greatest in low-income and minority communities or wherever parents feel a sense of exclusion, low self-esteem and/or hopelessness. Haynes, Bon-Avie, Squires, Howley, Negron & Corbin (1996:52) agree. They include the following words of a parent volunteer, "It was for me the opportunity of a lifetime to work with a group of people

who genuinely cared enough to take the time to encourage me and give me the boost in my self-confidence I needed."

- (c) The *Student and Staff Support Team* includes staff with child development and mental health knowledge and experience, such as the school psychologist, guidance councillor, school nurse, special education teacher, attendance officer, pupil personnel worker, and any other appropriate staff member (Comer et al 1996:12). The Student and Staff Support Team work mostly preventively and prescriptively and share child development and behaviour knowledge, skills and sensitivity with parents, teachers, and administrators (Comer 1987:15).

The *three mechanisms* (the School Planning and Management Team, the Parent Team, and the Student and Staff Support Team) as described above are driven by the following *three operations*.

#### 2.5.4.2 *The three operations of the School Development Programme*

The three operations are: (1) a comprehensive school plan that delineates the social and academic goals and activities of the school; (2) staff development activities designed to address the goals and activities of the school; and (3) monitoring and assessment that generate useful data on programme processes and outcomes and recycles information back to inform programme modification where necessary and establish new goals and objectives (Haynes & Comer 1993:168).

#### 2.5.4.3 *The three guiding principles of the School Development Programme*

In order to sustain a learning and caring community in which all adults feel respected and where all children feel valued and motivated to learn and achieve, the work of the team is driven by *three guiding principles*: consensus decision making, genuine collaboration, and a *no-fault* approach to problem solving (Borton, Preston & Bippert 1996:1). *Consensus* allows for brainstorming, in-depth discussions, cross-fertilisation of ideas, and a plan for trying different solutions in some sequence. *Collaboration* requires all concerned to respect

the other persons point of view and to demonstrate a willingness to work as part of a team (Comer et al 1996:10). A *no-fault* philosophy puts the emphasis on problem solving rather than fault finding, ensuring that everyone accepts equal responsibility for change. Haynes et al (1996:57) explain: "Accountability is accepted by the team, but time and energy are not wasted in acts of blaming."

#### 2.5.4.4 *The theoretical basis of the Comer approach*

The theoretical perspective that undergirds the School Development Programme maintains that there are several developmental pathways along which all children must develop well. These pathways are: speech and language, physical, social, psychological/emotional, moral, and the cognitive/academic (Haynes & Comer 1993:166). In other words, the well functioning SDP school is a social system in which the developmental needs of students can be addressed in the school curriculum, pedagogy, and social activities. Moreover, the school reinforces the positive factors of the children's homes and social networks, thereby also helping everyone connected to children. As Comer et al (1996:24) argue:

In this holistic approach the centrality of the family in the child's self-definition and development needs to be recognised and parents and guardians need to be involved in meaningful ways in children's school experiences.

Comer's *School Development Programme* is a unique outgrowth from previous social theories, including social psychology theory, ecological system theory, the population adjustment model, and the social action model (Emmons, Comer & Haynes 1996:27).

In *social psychology theory*, behaviour is driven not by the individual as an isolated entity but by the interaction of the individual with the psychological environment. Moreover, everything an individual feels, perceives, and experiences, occurs in subjective reality, at a particular time, in a particular situation (Emmons et al 1996:33). To understand and influence someone's behaviour, one has to understand that person's life space, including the range of behaviour available to that individual. Applied to the School Development Programme this implies that school reformers must stress the importance of understanding child and adolescent development along critical pathways, so that they can arrange the school

environment to enhance the life space of all students. School reformers should also learn about the child's family and community, and anything that influences the child's life space. They must try to understand the child's behaviour before proposing any intervention. Enhancing all social, and psychological development is a prerequisite to increasing behavioral options (Emmons et al 1996:33). The child-centred focus of Comer's theory of school reform therefore demands an understanding of the child through a study of what is known about child development in general, about children in a given situation in the family, school, community and society at large .

The *human ecological system theory* is the study of the individual in the context of his/her environment. It describes behaviour as the interaction of human beings with the physical, social, and psychological environment and views behaviour as adaptive, rather than sick or well (Emmons et al 1996:36). Because the context influences behaviour, treating individuals and returning them to the same environment will almost guarantee a return to the previous pathological behaviour. For this reason the community, not just the individual, should be the client (Haynes & Comer 1993:172). This means that although the focus of school reform is the individual child, the SDP views the child as part of a family unit and neighbourhood, as well as part of the school community. Intervention is therefore made at the school level rather than at the individual child level. Because the emphasis is on changing the social structures and building local capacity and expertise, the governance of the school is placed under the auspices of a School Planning and Management Team, that is composed of all the stakeholders, including parents. It also follows that if the social situation is changed, the type of interaction that the individual has with the social environment must necessarily change. The SDP, therefore, emphasises improving school climate as a means of changing behaviour (Emmons et al 1996:37).

In the *population adjustment model*, preventative intervention is stressed. The aim is therefore to identify populations at risk for developing mental illness or behaviour pathology. People less skilled in handling stressful situations need a greater amount of social and environmental support "...in order to continue to function effectively" (Emmons et al 1996:38). When populations at risk of developing mental illness and behaviour pathology are identified, two interventions are implemented to prevent the manifestation of pathology: The

environment is modified to promote mental health and members of the population are provided with coping skills to improve their chances of adjustment (Emmons et al 1996:38). Because feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth contribute to pathology, clients should be involved in the planning of their mental health services. Parent participation at every level of school activity is illustrative of the assumption that the client for whom a service is being provided should be involved in the design and implementation of the service (Emmons et al 1996:38). This involvement becomes a vehicle for empowering both parents and staff.

The *social action model* is based on the theory that environmental conditions influence human behaviour, sometimes pathologically. Therefore, to change behaviour, one has to modify the environment or social system (Emmons et al 1996:39-40). In describing his social action model, Reiff (1966:542) raises two interrelated concerns: sensitivity to the needs and perceptions of low-income people and delivery of services that change the environmental conditions that foster mental illness. He also states that the focus should change from the individual, to the group, and to the social system (Reiff 1966:543).

In Comer's school reform theory, the school is a social system, which needs to be changed if it is not working well (Emmons et al 1996:40). To achieve this the change agent must work with the local people, school staff, parents, community members, and where appropriate, students. That is why the SDP is not prescriptive. It provides a framework within which professionals and clients (school personnel, parents, and community members) can collaborate.

In summary, the School Development Programme is a different way of conceptualising and working in schools and completely replaces traditional organisation and management. As Haynes (1996:xvii) remarks:

...effective schooling cannot be a unidimensional enterprise. It must be grounded in a holistic educational philosophy and must incorporate sensitive practices of authentic teaching and learning that are implemented according to sound principles of cooperation and empowerment and that are undergirded by a respect for the dignity of all children.

### 2.5.5 The Epstein theory of parent involvement

In the 1980's, Epstein developed a theoretical model to explain parent involvement (Epstein 1996:214). Underlying this, Epstein (1996:121) identified three perspectives which guide researchers and practitioners in their thinking about family and school relations.

#### 2.5.5.1 *The three perspectives*

Epstein (1987b:121) enumerates three guiding perspectives for researchers and practitioners in their thinking about family and school relations:

- Separate responsibilities of families and schools;
- Shared responsibilities of families and schools;
- Sequential responsibilities of families and schools.

Assumptions based on the *separate* responsibilities of institutions emphasise the inherent incompatibility, competition and conflict between families and schools. It assumes that school bureaucracies and family organisations are directed by educators and parents respectively, who can best fulfil their different goals, roles and responsibilities independently (Epstein 1987b:121). In other words, the distinct goal of parents and teachers can best be achieved when teachers keep a professional distance from and equal standards for children in their classrooms, in contrast with parents who develop personal relationships with and individual expectations for their children at home (Christenson, Rounds & Franklin 1992:36).

The opposing assumptions based on *shared* responsibilities of the school and home, emphasises the coordination, cooperation and complementarity of schools and families, and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions (Epstein 1987b:121). It assumes that schools and families share responsibilities for the socialisation of the child. Teachers and parents are believed to share common goals for children that are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work together. This perspective is based on models of inter-institutional interactions and ecological designs that emphasise the natural and necessary connections between individuals and their groups and organisations. In this

perspective an overlap of responsibilities between parents and teachers is expected (Christenson et al 1992:36).

Although teachers may combine these perspectives, they tend to emphasise the precepts of one theory when organising their teaching practice.

Finally, in the third perspective, the *sequential* perspective, the critical stages of parents' and teachers' contribution to child development is emphasised (Epstein 1987b:121). Parents teach needed skills to children until the time of their formal education around the ages of five or six. At that time, teachers assume the primary responsibility for children's education. These major theoretical perspectives on home-school relations have a profound effect and either encourage or discourage parent involvement in the schools. Epstein (1987b:122-123) points out that "The three main theories explain the basic differences in philosophies and approaches of teachers and parents and produce more or fewer, shallow or deep family-school connections."

The perspectives on family-school relations do, however, not explain motivations to reinforce or remove boundaries between schools and families, nor the changing patterns in home-school relations. They also fail to explain the influence families and schools have on each other or take cognisance of student development and the effect thereof on home-school relations. To address all the variables, Epstein (1987b:126) proposes an *integrated theory* of family-school relations characterised by a set of *overlapping spheres of influence*.

#### 2.5.5.2 *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 the need for a social organisational perspective that posits that the most effective families and schools have overlapping, shared goals and missions concerning children, and conducted some work collaboratively.

The model of overlapping spheres of influence includes both external and internal structures. The external structure can, by condition or design, be pushed together or pulled apart by three main forces (Epstein 1996:214). These forces created conditions, space, and opportunities for more or fewer shared activities of schools, families, and communities. The forces are (a) time - to account for changes in the ages and grade levels of students and the influence of historic period, (b) the philosophies, policies, and practices of the family, and (c) the philosophies, policies, and practices of the school (Epstein 1990:103). These forces determine how much and what kinds of overlap occur at any given time, and affect the interactions among the members of these institutions.

The internal structure represents the patterns of interaction of the participants within context at the institutional and individual levels (Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap & Epstein 1995:499). Institutional level interactions involve all members or groups within schools, families, and communities; individual interactions involve one student, parent, or community member (Epstein 1996:215). Combinations of these interactions may also occur within the areas of overlap.

Epstein's model of overlapping spheres assumes that there are mutual interests and influence of families and schools that can be more or less successfully promoted by the policies and programmes of the organisations and the action and attitudes of the individuals in the organisations (Epstein 1987b:130).

The model recognises that although some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, other practices reflect the shared responsibilities of parents and educators for the children's learning and development. When teachers and administrators adhere to the perspective of separate responsibilities of families and schools, they emphasise the specialisation of skills required by teachers for school training and by parents for home training. With specialisation comes division of labour that pulls the spheres of school and family influences apart, decrease overlap and restrict interaction between parent and teachers (Epstein 1990:104). According to Epstein (1987b:131) when teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required by teachers and by 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*. A *family-like school* recognises each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Such schools welcome all families and not just those that are easy to reach (Epstein 1995:702). A *school-like family* recognises that each child is also a student and reinforce the importance of school, homework, and the activities that build student skills and feelings of success (Epstein 1992:502). In later publications, Epstein mentions research on the community as a third sphere of influence (Epstein 1992:503). This means that communities, 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 neighbourhoods and other families. Schools and communities talk about programmes and services that are family-friendly. This means that they take into account the needs and realities of family life in the 1990's; are feasible to conduct; and are equitable toward all families. When all these concepts combine, children experience learning communities or caring communities.

Across the grades as children, families, and schools change, the nature and extent of overlap in practices and the interpersonal relationships among partners also change. For example efforts to involve parents typically start to drop as early as grade 2 or 3 (Epstein 1987a:129). According to Epstein (1992:502), the task of research is to identify practices that are appropriate at each grade level or level of schooling and to study the effects of school and family connections on students, parents, teaching practice, and school climate. The task of practice is to consider, select, adapt, and implement practices of partnership that will help schools reach specific goals they set.

The Epstein model illustrates that at any time, in any school, and in any family, parent involvement is a variable that can be increased or decreased by the practices of teachers, parents, administrators, and children (Christenson et al 1992:36). Moreover, the overlapping spheres of influence recognises the multiple contexts and interpersonal relations of all participants.

Because it is assumed that the child is the reason for the connections between home and school, the model focuses on the key role of the *child as student* in interactions between families and schools, parents and teachers, or other influential participants (Hidalgo et al 1995:499). The students are key to successful school and family partnerships. Epstein (1995:702) explains that "The unarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school."

Schools, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide and motivate students to produce their own successes. According to Epstein (1995:702) the assumption is that if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best academically, and to remain in school.

Initially, a framework of five major types of involvement that fall within the areas of overlap in the spheres of the influence model were identified (Davies 1991:377). These include: Basic obligations of families, communication from the school, volunteers, learning activities at home, and decision making (Epstein 1992:503). When guided by schools, practices of all types help all families participate as knowledgeable partners in their children's education. A sixth type of school and family partnership has now been added to this list: collaborating with the community (Epstein 1995:704). Chapman (1991:355-356) supports this notion:

Because the needs of today's students have become so complex that they are outstripping the services of the agencies and schools that were created to serve them, collaborative partnerships must be established that involve schools, families, businesses, social service agencies, and other groups in an effort to coordinate resources, solve problems, and provide more chances for student success.

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

According to Epstein (1996:215) there will be more or less overlap and shared responsibility depending on whether many or few practices of the six types of involvement are working;

and each practice that is implemented opens opportunities for varied interaction of teachers, parents, students, and others across contexts. Epstein (1996:215-216) briefly describes the six types as follows:

Type 1 - Parenting: Assist families with parenting and childrearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each stage and grade level.

Type 2 - Communication: Communicate with families about school programmes and student progress with school-to-home and home-to- school communication.

Type 3 - Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programmes.

Type 4 - Learning at home: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, and other curricular-linked activities and decisions.

Type 5 - Decision making: Include parents as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through PTA, committees, councils, and other parent organisations.

Type 6 - Collaborating with the community: Coordinate the work and resources of community, businesses, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programmes, family practices and student learning and development.

Each of the six types of involvement poses specific challenges for its successful design and implementation, and each type leads to some different results or outcomes for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein 1996:216). Moreover, research on parent involvement can be successfully located within this framework.

Epstein (1996:16) argues that good programmes to implement or improve parent involvement will look different in each site, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the needs and interests, time and talents, ages and grade levels of students and their families. There are, however, some commonalities across successful programmes at all grade levels. These include a recognition of the overlapping spheres of influence on student development; attention to various types of involvement that promote a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together; and an *action team* for school, family and community partnerships to coordinate each school's work and progress (Epstein 1995b:704).

### 2.5.6 In conclusion

Each of the scholars and projects mentioned above is distinctive. Most have their own orthodoxies, and some have become the equivalent of brandnames. But the commonalities outweigh the differences and add up to a new definition of what has usually been called parent involvement. Davies (1991:377) lists three common themes of central importance:

- Providing success for all children: This means that no children should be labelled as likely failures because of the 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 also 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 and overlapping 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.

## 2.6 SUMMARY

In large cities in the USA as many as 50 per cent of minority children drop out of school (Comer 1988:24). The failure to educate these children makes the task of rectifying economic and social inequities even more difficult. Job opportunities increasingly reside in services and technological industries, but the poor are the least likely to have the social and academic skills these jobs demand. Unless schools can find a way to educate them and bring them into the mainstream, all the problems associated with unemployment and alienation will escalate. Meaningful parent involvement in schools has been shown to improve student achievement, decrease drop-out rate, and improve behaviour regardless of the socio-economic class of the family. Translating the rhetoric of increased parent involvement into action, however, has proved difficult. Solomon (1991:360) points out that:

Parent involvement that boosts student learning doesn't just happen. Thoughtful, coordinated planning and systematic actions must integrate parent involvement into school and classroom programmes. Such coordination starts with leadership at the state level.

However, for whatever reason, state-level administrators have played a limited leadership role in the parent involvement movement. In actual practice, they do not seem to have advanced much beyond the concept of 'bake sale' parent involvement (Nardine & Morris 1991:366).

Legal requirements which regulate a school's dealings with its parents are, however, not sufficient, in themselves, to form the basis for either a school's philosophy and planning in this area or for the practical action it takes (Bastiani 1993b:141). Parents whose participation in traditional parent involvement activities are impeded by a lack of energy, time, self-confidence and/or English proficiency, as well as those who are fearful of schools because of past experiences, need concerted efforts on the part of the school before they will become involved (Davies 1991:378). In most schools, activities that fit the old definition of parent involvement engage only a relatively small number of parents. The latter are generally those who are aware of the advantages of such involvement to themselves and their own children.

In conclusion it appears as if parents are an available but untapped resource that teachers can mobilise to help children master and maintain needed skills for school. But this requires teachers' leadership in organising, evaluating, and continually building their parent involvement practices (Epstein 1990:274).

## CHAPTER 3

### EDUCATION AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN BLACK URBAN TOWNSHIPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION: A FRAGMENTED EDUCATION SYSTEM

South Africa was largely a rural, agrarian society until the previous century when diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) were discovered (Claassen 1995:452). This led to large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation which affected both the social fabric of the nation as well as educational provision. As Smit and Le Roux (1993:31) explain: "Education cannot be isolated from societal influences. The upbringing of the child as it occurs in the...family and school, is enacted against a social background."

At the beginning of the century South Africa was transformed politically as well as economically. The unification of the four provinces, Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and Cape, in 1910 led to greater central control, although the provinces retained control of their education (Claassen 1995:456). Missionaries remained primarily responsible for African/black education (Molteno 1990:57).

This changed after the National Party came into power in 1948, introducing apartheid education by which each group was to have a virtually separate education system (Claassen 1995:456). So-called Bantu education became the responsibility of the Department of Native Affairs in terms of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, thus ending the long era of missionary responsibility of black education (Claassen 1995:456). Educational departments for Indians and Coloureds (people of mixed race) were also created. The homeland policy of the National Party led to the formation of six self-governing territories and four nominally independent homelands (Claassen 1995:454), each with their own education departments. The education system under apartheid rule was eventually fragmented into eighteen education departments. The duplication was mainly as a result of the 1983 constitution which made provision for both 'own affairs' and 'general affairs' in state administration (Claassen 1995:468).

In his opening address in Parliament on February 2, 1990 the State President, F W de Klerk, heralded a fundamental new policy direction in the country which was to lead to negotiations for a new constitutional dispensation (Dlamini 1995:107). Announcements made at the time included: the unbanning of all banned political organisations, the release of political prisoners, including Mr Nelson Mandela, and the acceptance that the new constitution would contain a justiciable bill of rights. Thus De Klerk formally committed the White South African Parliament and population to a process of dismantling apartheid and officially renounced racism as a legitimate basis for social life (Mkwanazi 1993:57). By liberalising the political scenario, the way was paved for the first democratic elections in South Africa, in April 1994.

The above cursory survey of history indicates that it is well-nigh impossible to generalise when talking about education, or about the practice and construct of parent involvement. On account of the fragmented nature of education under apartheid, manifested in different education departments.

Nor is it possible, within the constraints of time and space, to trace the provision of education for black South Africans in any great detail.

However, it is imperative to point out that the development of the present education system and the prevailing condition regarding parent involvement in urban townships is, however, intertwined with the urbanisation of black people as well as with apartheid education, and as such, needs to be discussed in this chapter.

In accordance with Claassen (1995:449) the terms *democratic* and *pre-democratic* era are used to indicate the *post-election* and *pre-election* eras respectively.

## 3.2 URBANISATION AND THE BLACK PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA

### 3.2.1 Historical overview of urbanisation in South Africa

For a brief portrayal of this history, one may rely on the description of Chinkanda and others. Before the discovery of gold and the development of the mining industry, both blacks and whites lived on the land as subsistence farmers (Chinkanda 1994:176). Families were large and close-knit and performed most functions together in order to meet basic needs. In addition to being taught respect for adults and property, children occupied an important place in society and were highly prized. These rural communities played a central role in subsistence society and generally provided material and non-material support for its members. However, changes in this mode of existence became inevitable when population growth led to land shortage, and subsistence communities began using commodities which had to be paid for in hard cash. Moreover, the government introduced *hut tax*, which also had to be paid for in cash (Chinkanda 1994:177).

The discovery of gold on the so-called Reef in 1886, had a profound effect on the lives of many farmers, with many leaving the land to work on the mines (Claassen 1995:452). Soon the migrant labour system was introduced, whereby miners had to live in mining compounds and visit their families once per year. Later the pass laws were introduced which prohibited permanent residence of mine workers in cities and also precluded them from bringing their families to live with them (Chinkanda 1994:178).

The migrant labour system and the pass laws eroded black family life and forced thousands of husbands and wives to live apart, while children were raised by *single* parents when, in actual fact, they had both. Cross (1992:200) contends that the migrant labour system spawned *loose family unions*; family disintegration; a high illegitimacy rate, and the breakdown of family and community socialisation and disciplinary agencies.

While the migrant labour system is not peculiar to South Africa, what makes it have such a significant influence in the history of this country is the fact that, as Wilson and Ramphela

(1989:199) point out that: "...there is no country where such a system existed so long and has trapped so large a proportion of the labour force in a dehumanising structure."

The introduction of the Land Act of 1913 destroyed any hopes that blacks might still have had, of being able *to farm* for a living (Chinkanda 1994:179). This, indirectly, culminated in the emergence of a black labour force, as black people began to realise that they had to engage in a struggle for better wages to support their families.

Those blacks working in the industries adjacent to the mines initially brought their families to live with them. The black townships that we know today developed in the passage of time. However, there was no freedom of movement since the pass laws were still strictly applied.

The rights of black workers to live in *white* South Africa were circumscribed by the provisions of Section 10(1) of the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act 25, of 1945 (Chinkanda 1994:179). In terms of this Act, no black person was allowed to remain in a *proclaimed or prescribed white* area for longer than 72 hours, without proof that he or she:

- had resided there continuously since birth;
- had worked there continuously for one employer for ten years;
- was a close dependant relative of, and ordinarily co-resident with, an African who qualified under the above condition, providing that he or she had not initially entered the area unlawfully, or
- had been granted special permission to be in the area.

In addition to the movement of labourers and entrepreneurs to the gold and diamond fields, many blacks in South Africa were *resettled or relocated*, particularly after 1948. The terms describe the policy and process involved in the massive, state-funded migration of black people from one area to another and which characterised the apartheid system (Van Greunen 1993:88-89). Platzky and Walker (in Van Greunen 1993:89), estimate that, for the period 1960-1983, close to 3,5 million blacks were forced to move. Of these approximately 112 000 (excluding figures for the Cape) settled informally or squatted, mostly illegally, on any open land.

In 1986 the repeal of influx laws, which had regulated the movement of blacks in urban areas, led to the influx of so many blacks to urban areas that urbanisation became a problem (Chinkanda 1994:179). McLean (1989:4) explains this as a universal phenomenon:

Third World cities traditionally have been national centres of relative wealth and privilege. It is this wealth that has attracted poor immigrants. But the wealth is not sufficient to support reasonable social conditions for the rapidly growing poor populations in shanty towns even if it were to be redistributed equally.

### 3.2.2 Effects of urbanisation on black family structure and tradition

Anthropologists maintain that change from non-specialised to modern urban and industrial society has had a significant influence on kinship. South Africa is no exception. The influence of industrialisation and associated urbanisation on the family has been profound. The extended family, consisting of parents, their children and these children's spouses and children, is typical of the non-specialised societies previously common in South Africa (Department of Anthropology 1995:14). Families constituted a cohesive residential and economic unit, with children frequently working close to their parents on land belonging to the family. Chinkanda (1994:174) points out that the extended family was able to provide for both the physical and the psychosocial needs of its members.

Accommodation problems in urban areas, the size of the dwellings and low wages, have forced extended families to disintegrate and set up separate households. Where families can afford it the extended family remains together in a two-bedroomed *council house*. The effects of all these factors on black family life leads to the following scenarios.

#### 3.2.2.1 *Changing family types*

The current prevailing types of black family units in urban townships include the 'pre-industrial' extended family, as well as those of nuclear, female-headed, and multi-generational families (Taylor 1995:3).

**(a) The nuclear family and kinship relations**

Urban life is characterised by small dwellings and a subsistent way of life for the entire family (Chinkanda 1994:173). Thus modernisation and urbanisation has impacted on the traditional or extended family and has, in many cases, caused it to disintegrate. This breakdown of traditional culture, has not been replaced by adequate social support structures (Smit & Le Roux 1993:40).

The prevalence of the nuclear family, together with urbanisation, has led to increased importance being attributed to the marriage or the conjugal bond. This implies that the bond between husband and wife becomes more important than the kin group (Department of Anthropology 1995:15). Basham (1978:98) lists the following reasons:

- Industrialisation has lessened the intensity of contact between urban dwellers and close kin elsewhere in spite of forms of communication such as letter writing and telephoning.
- People in urban areas tend to succeed in different ways and have different ways of life and preferences that distinguish them from their rural kin.
- Urbanisation encourages achieved rather than ascribed positions and people no longer feel the need to submit to the requirements of their close kin groups.
- Because people can obtain specialised occupation in urban areas, it is less likely that they will be able to provide their kin with employment as is often the case in rural communities within the kin group.

While the traditional idea that marriage is an agreement between kinship groups has lost its importance in most urban areas, in some places it is still retained or albeit in an adapted form. For example, the *lobolo* system that underlies marriage as an agreement between two groups is still relevant, even in urban areas.

On the other hand some anthropological studies on kinship in the cities have found that instead of kinship ties breaking down within the urban environment, they have tended to persist or have been adapted to meet the circumstances of an urban environment (Department of Anthropology 1995:16). However, in the absence of a large number of kin in the city, the total network of kinship relations cannot be activated and people turn to non-kin for the support usually provided by kin. In the city, kinship relations do not impose many obligations upon individuals, resulting in greater freedom of choice regarding the kin or non-kin with whom he/she wishes to associate. This suggests that kin may provide the urban dweller with emotional support, but their significance decreases when the individual's priorities are to attain occupational and social status (Department of Anthropology 1995:16).

**(b) The multi-generational family**

In addition to the nuclear family, extended or joint family ties have remained important, often determined by available housing and income. Joint families consisting of more than one nuclear family are not uncommon in urban areas. For example, two brothers, their wives and children may be found living together. Alternatively, different families related through siblings may be found living close together and cooperating in social and economic activities as extended families. Typical composition of urban families could include persons such as: a wife's mother; husband's brother; or husband's brother's child, who have become members through widowhood or divorce, which creates homeless individuals. Family members, in particular the grandparents, play an important role in the socialisation of children, either as substitutes for absent parents or by complementing the role of parents (Chinkanda 1994:185).

Urban black households may also include individuals who have migrated to cities to live with relatives for economic or educational purposes. Some of these family groupings may be temporary, but often they are of a permanent nature with co-residence becoming a way of life (Department of Anthropology 1995:14).

(c) The female-headed household

There is a trend in urban areas towards the phenomenon known as matrifocality (Department of Anthropology 1995:17). In other words a family structure focused upon the mother. In rural areas the phenomenon of matrifocality is related to the sporadic or permanent absence of a father figure from the household, chiefly as a result of migrant labour practises. In urban areas female headed households may be viewed as a 'survival strategy' used for coping with poverty as elsewhere in the world, and should not necessarily be viewed as a symptom of *disorganisation* (De Haas 1992:79). While the majority of such households are poor, divorced or unmarried, professional women may also elect to head their own households.

Mair (1984:38-39) makes the point that legal marriage and legal fatherhood are important where there are property and positions to be inherited, and where claim to these is based on legitimate descent. However, when persons move in the lowest social stratum, and have neither property nor much opportunity to rise socially above the level of unskilled labour, there is no benefit in insistence on legal marriage. Sometimes common-law unions are entered into, but not much security lies in these either. There is consequently no alternative for unmarried mothers but to manage on their own. During interviews with 2 661 matriculants, Kotze, Mouton, Hackman and Gouws (1994:325) established that 40 percent of the informants were living in female headed households.

Campbell (1992:68) argues that female heads of families are doubly disadvantaged: within a patriarchal society they are not accorded the respect and authority that males have; and they are often unable to control their (especially male) children, and so face gender discrimination even at the hearth. This is compounded by the fact that they are away from the house during daylight hours, trying to earn a living. Moreover, they are economically discriminated against in the workplace, which aggravates the process of survival.

### *3.2.2.2 Inter-generational relations in township families*

Black parents have traditionally played an important role in maintaining the family and helping their children to develop an inner core of survival (Chinkanda 1994:185). Many factors have, however, impacted on this function of the family.

Apartheid sought to displace traditional African culture with one characterised by subservience, domestication and obsequiousness. It attempted to accomplish this by subverting the two most crucial social agents of acculturation, namely, the school and the home (Taylor 1995:5).

The traditional African home, already beleaguered by Western norms and values, had its structure further impoverished by apartheid. Firstly there was the effective breakup of the home through the physical removal of the head of the house through economic and legal necessities of migrant labour, job reservation and influx control (Campbell 1992:60). Secondly this was compounded by the systematic disempowerment of the authority of the head of the house through the removal of his ability to adequately defend or provide for the home (Taylor 1995:7; De Haas 1992:80). Moreover, the assertiveness of township youth, mainly as a result of large-scale politicisation during the liberation struggle, have also impinged on the authority of adults; particularly on male authority (Campbell 1992:62). One male interviewee explains:

It is a very sad situation because one even loses the respect of one's own family when one is not capable of managing the family affairs - to the extent that you get embarrassed whenever you are approached for help which you cannot offer (Campbell 1992:64-65).

Moreover, social change has occurred so rapidly from one generation to the next, that parents often lack the skills and experience to advise their offsprings with regard to dealing with a range of day-to-day situations (Campbell 1992:70). One mother (quoted in Campbell 1992:72) expressed the sense of powerlessness of township people in the face of their children's changing perceptions: "When children claim that we (the black people) are the

same as white people, I feel confused, because I do not know how we can be equal to people who are our bosses."

In addition, some parents, acutely aware of their own lack of education, feel inferior to their children and are consequently reluctant to advise them, or to take a strong stand against them in conflicting situations (Campbell 1992:71).

In a pilot research study undertaken by this researcher, in Mamelodi in 1995, the attitude of youth was found to be more positive regarding their parents or guardians than that reported by Campbell, in research undertaken in Natal (1992). In the Mamelodi study 79 students in two secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire and/or write a paragraph on parent involvement in schools. All the respondents were in Form IV (Standard 9) and ranged from 15 to 24 in age. The respondents were all overwhelmingly in favour of more parent involvement in their schools, as illustrated by these comments:

- If there is a problem our parents should be there to find solutions with teachers.
- I'll like much to be a child who is having support from my parents in my education, because I'll achieve my goals in future.

It could be argued that the youth, in the above study, were not as politicised as in the study by Campbell. It must also be admitted that the research was preliminary and superficial. In spite of this, it does raise the possibility that even in late adolescence, the youth still need adult support. De Haas (1992:82) supports this view: "...research reveals that there is still widespread respect for older family members and adults in general."

The impression is that the quality of parenting, which may not necessarily be carried out exclusively or even at all by the biological mother and father, is *still* a crucial variable in so far as the behaviour of the younger generation is concerned (De Haas 1992:82; Franks & Glass 1994:273).

### 3.2.3 Life in an urban township

Third world urban space manifests itself in positive and negative ways. On the positive side, life in the city means proximity to the nation's political and economic power; greater exposure to racial and ethnic diversity; greater access to education and other social services, and more frequent exposure to the media and other forms of knowledge diffusion (Thomas 1994:37). On the negative side, one finds higher levels of disorganised growth, which poses a threat to close-knit communities, tensions in the relationship between family life and urban work/survival, and constant ethnic tension and incidents.

Overcrowding is an inevitable feature that typifies life in a South African township. In Soweto, for example, houses are usually occupied by between seven and fourteen people. Moreover, in 1993, only 25 per cent of the houses were equipped with running water, 15 per cent with electricity; 7 per cent with a bath or shower; and 3 per cent with hot water (Smit & Le Roux 1993:38). Wilson and Ramphela (1989:126) describe a township thus:

The squalor, chronic housing shortage, and overcrowding are both frightening and depressing - the result of systematic neglect of the area by local authorities over many years.

The demands that urbanisation and modernisation have made on the black family called for radical changes in family roles. In the first place, economic realities demanded that both parents leave home to earn a living, thereby leaving children to their own devices (Chinkanda 1994:180). Secondly, parents have to travel long distances between their homes and their places of employment, leaving home early and returning late. Under such circumstances, parents hardly ever see their children. This means that a large number of young black children in South Africa are likely to grow up in an environment which lacks adequate care. Given the economic conditions prevailing in the community, they are also likely to face the prospect of undernourishment, and they most probably will not receive adequate medical attention or monitoring (Smit & Le Roux 1993:32).

Once these children reach school-going age, the cycle of poverty and under-provision is likely to be extended by inadequate schools staffed by hard-pressed teachers who are both under-qualified and faced with larger classes than in more privileged sectors. De Haas (1992:80) points out that "[e]nvironmental factors such as the inadequate provision of basic requirements for accommodation, recreation and health, constrain the lifestyle of urban black children in townships."

Many children growing up in townships have been subject to a general atmosphere of terror and intimidation. Far from being protected on account of their youth, children were targets for political struggle, thereby being denied the opportunity of growing up in an adequate environment (Smit & Le Roux 1993:40). Atmore (1993:123) adds that the crime rate in black urban communities is among the highest in the world, theft, rape and murder being common. For example, in research involving 600 youth aged 16-20 living in the Durban area, nearly 66 per cent of the respondents had seen a corpse, over 40 per cent had lost a friend through violence, and over 80 per cent reported having been affected by one or other act of violence (Kvalsig, Pillay & Krige 1994:337).

Social problems that are directly related to the absence of infrastructure, facilities and services include: family breakdown; teenage pregnancies; child neglect and abandonment; ill-treatment; alcoholism, and truancy (Atmore 1993:123). Chinkanda (1994:180) argues that children who are raised in such circumstances are bound to grow up with negative character traits. They cannot learn to develop trust, neither can they relate positively to authority because there is no-one to teach them appropriate societal values. All the above factors also contribute to the high level of gang activity found in townships. Biko (as quoted in Cross 1992:200) remarks that "[t]ownship life makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood".

Unlike the situation in the advanced industrialised countries, the crisis of urbanisation in Third World countries does not affect only the *inner city*. As more and more destitute people come to the city, they occupy lands illegally and create environments where there is a lack of basic facilities such as water, electricity, sewerage, public transportation, and medical

services (Thomas 1994:37-38). Such squatter camps are now a common sight around virtually all urban townships in South Africa.

According to Van Greunen (1993:91), the worst aspect of squatting, is the inadequacy of housing, which may lead families to live in anything from tin shacks, cardboard boxes, to empty oil drums. In these conditions family life is non-existent. The family in the shanty town has no life space, very little privacy and no opportunity of living together as a family. In most cases, the father is absent, as a result of which children have no one to effect discipline, and no one with whom to identify. In view of the appalling state of family life, the harsh living conditions, the general unavailability of proper educational facilities and a general mood of depression, one can safely state that functional education rarely occurs in squatter areas (Van Greunen 1993:105).

For virtually all children, the culture that they assimilate from their parents and from the community in which they live will exercise a dominant influence upon their actions, attitudes and values in later life. Many of the fundamental beliefs, attitudes and ways of thinking, which a child carries with him through school and into the broader community are inculcated long before he goes to school (Davey 1994:129). Much of this early learning is so highly internalised that the child may remain impervious to, and be scarcely affected by later experiences or later contact with other social groups. This becomes particularly problematic when the attitudes and values that are prevalent in the community run counter to those which the school has been charged with developing.

### **3.3 EDUCATION FOR BLACK ETHNIC GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The South African population is one of the most heterogenous in the world, and the accommodation of this cultural diversity has long been a central issue in educational provision (Claassen 1995:449). This resulted in the establishment of different departments of control and separate schools to accommodate the different racial groups. In spite of the *separate but equal* proviso, an outstanding feature of black education according to Pillay (1990:30), is the "...differential pattern of educational development of the different groups". The standard of education for the whites can be compared to that of other modern education

systems, while black education is characterised by poorly qualified teachers, inadequate physical resources, overcrowded classrooms, high attrition rates, and poor examination results (Squelch 1993:176).

It is important that past aspects of educational provision for black people be studied in order to understand prevailing conditions in black urban schools and appreciate the magnitude of the problem.

### **3.3.1 The pre-democratic era**

#### *3.3.1.1 The period prior to 1948*

Although sporadic attempts at educating the black people was made during the rule of the Dutch East Indian Company, it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that a more concerted effort was embarked upon resulting in the establishment of a network of missionary stations and schools (Behr 1984:173).

Compulsory education for whites up to the age of 14 was introduced in the four provinces between 1905 and 1908 (Christie & Gordon 1992:402). By contrast, schooling for blacks was neither free nor compulsory. It remained in the hands of the missionaries; was poorly funded; sparsely provided and of varying quality (Behr 1984:177, Christie & Gordon 1992:402).

The South Africa Act (1909), laid down in the constitution of the Union of South Africa, placed the control of all matters affecting blacks, except education, in the hands of the then Minister of Native Affairs (Behr 1984:175-176).

The need for a better educated African workforce to supply the needs of industry became evident in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Various reports on education released in the 1930's and 1940's recommended extended state control of education; a better link between education and the needs of industry, and increased state funding of education (Cross 1992:110).

On the whole it can be said that structural pluralism or separatism has always been a significant feature of South African education. However, it became more formalised through legislation and was vigorously implemented after the National Party's accession to power in 1948 (Squelch 1993:176).

### 3.3.1.2 *The period 1948-1976*

In 1949 the Eiselen Commission was set up to produce a blueprint for the *Education for Natives as a Separate Race*. This was published in 1951 (Lodge 1990:267). The *guiding principles* included the restructuring and adaption to modern requirements of Bantu culture, the centralisation of control, increased use of African languages and personnel, increased community involvement in education through parent committees, efficient use of funds, and an increased expenditure on mass education. Centrally dictated syllabi for black pupils would ensure the production of skills appropriate to a subordinate role in the economy. Moreover, black social expectations were to be oriented to the reserves (Lodge 1990:267). State policy on black schooling from 1953-1976 was to be based on these proposals.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 incorporated the suggestions of the Eiselen Commission (Samuel 1990:17). The then Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, was of the opinion that black children required schooling which was different from that of white children. He saw missionary education as providing a base of confidence for political demands and as such unacceptable to the government (Maree 1990:148). Dr Verwoerd made it clear that his intentions were ideological and that his aim was to preserve the status quo. The passing of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 realised Verwoerd's ideals. Wolpe and Unterhalter (1991:4) argue that this Act was used firstly to shape education in order to meet the labour requirements of whites, and secondly to restructure content to inculcate the values of Christian National Education, thereby socialising blacks to accept their subordinate position in society.

Superficially, the new order had some features which may have appeared attractive to some black parents. Access to education was to become a little easier and school boards and

communities provided an illusion of local accountability (Lodge 1990:268). However, the reality led to disillusion and resentment.

According to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the *control of black schools* was to be taken away from the missionary bodies and placed under Native Affairs (Christie & Collins 1990:160). Of the 7 000 schools for blacks at the time, over 5 000 had been mission run prior to Bantu Education. By 1959, virtually all black schools except 700 Catholic schools had been brought under the control of the Native Affairs Department (Christie & Collins 1990:162). The Bantu Education Act stipulated that all educational appointments, syllabi, examinations and school buildings were to be controlled exclusively by the state (Christie & Collins 1990:171).

A crucial facet of the state's education policy was its focus on developing a schooling system that would ensure that the majority of black children had some contact with Bantu Education. This emphasis resulted in a *massive increase of children in the primary schools*. In the period 1955-1975 the number of black pupils in primary school increased approximately seven times (Samuel 1990:18).

Given the shortage of teachers and classrooms, schools were forced to resort to double sessions in 43 per cent of all black schools in 1975; that year more than 976 000 pupils were involved in double sessions (Mncwabe 1992:59). In addition, the school day was shortened by approximately one-third (Christie & Collins 1990:177). All these factors contributed to a high drop-out rate, especially in the lower standards. In 1976 it was calculated that in black schools "...more than half the children leave with less than four years of schooling and so revert to illiteracy" (quoted in Samuel 1990:20). The situation worsened on account of the government's insistence on primary school children learning the fundamentals of both official languages, making it less easy to acquire proficiency in English, which was seen as the key to white-collar employment (Lodge 1990:268).

In order to *increase the number of teachers* available for primary schools, a three year post-Form 1 (Standard 6) and a three year post-Form 3 (Standard 8) were introduced (Christie &

Collins 1990:178). This would have severe implications for the standard of education in black schools for many years.

The government also sought to *limit the number of black children entering secondary school*. Of the 9 108 black schools which existed in 1970, only 415 taught at a secondary level (Samuel 1990:19). Samuel (1990:18) adds that "The deliberate lack of state funding for secondary schools combined with pervasive poverty, ensured that a massive drop-out rate characterised black schooling."

Out of 200 000 black pupils in Grade 1 in 1950, only 894 reached matric twelve years later; of these 59,8 per cent failed. Moreover, there was a move to concentrate secondary schools as far as possible in the reserves. This would remove blacks who were in secondary schools from urban areas and locate them in the area where the state wished them to be. Similarly, the provision in the Bantu education system for separation of schools along tribal lines, and the language teaching provision further bolstered the retribalisation which was part of the homeland policy (Christie & Collins 1990:174, Samuel 1990:19).

From 1970 onwards there appears to have been a shift in state policy and a further 439 secondary schools were built. By the end of 1976 there were 844 black secondary schools (DBE 1976:55). The vast majority of these, namely 604, were situated in the homelands (DBE 1975:54). The limited number of secondary schools ensured that thousands of black children were forced into the labour market prematurely, especially in the urban areas (Samuel 1990:20).

Less apparent at the inception of the Bantu Education Act was that the system was going to impose *increasing financial obligations* on African communities (Lodge 1990:268). Parents were, for example, responsible for purchasing uniforms, all stationary and a number of textbooks for their school-going children (Samuel 1990:20).

Opposition to Bantu education, though widespread, only developed into open political rebellion in a few areas in the 1950s (Lodge 1990:284). For example in May 1954 the ANC

announced the launching of a *Resist Apartheid Campaign* including the Bantu Education Act amongst its six issues (Lodge 1990:274).

In 1974 a circular was issued stating that Afrikaans be made a medium of instruction in half the number of high school subjects (Samuel 1990:21). This evoked an angry response from teachers and students and ultimately led to a march by students to the Orlando Stadium, on June 16, 1976. This event triggered off riots, violence and unrest which spread throughout South Africa in the months that followed. The unrest persisted for some eight months. By then 575 people had been killed, at least 3 900 were injured, and incalculable damage had been caused to state and private property (Behr 1984:195).

### 3.3.1.3 *The period 1976 - 1993*

The re-evaluation of education after the 1976 uprisings took some time to be worked through, and in the immediate aftermath of the uprising only faltering attempts at educational change were made. The state's overriding aim until 1977 was to batten down the hatches on continuing student protest which reached its post-Soweto peak in October 1977 when the number of black pupils absent from school for political reasons reached 196 000 (Davies 1990:350).

State repression took the form of expulsions, school closures, arrests of students and teachers, and finally, the banning of eighteen black consciousness groups including the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of South Africa, the South African Student Movement (SASM) and the South African Student's Organisation (SASO) (Davies 1990:351). These actions brought the resistance to Bantu Education to a temporary halt, although the majority of secondary schools in Soweto remained closed throughout 1978.

The Education and Training Act (Act 90 of 1979) replaced the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the Bantu Special Education Act of 1964 (Behr 1984:200). The Act sought to do away with some of the worse aspects of previous legislation. It dropped the designation *Bantu* and replaced it with *black*. It declared that compulsory education would be a central aim of policy. It also pledged itself to the active involvement of the parents and communities in the

education system (Mncwabe 1992:59). Moreover, teachers were no longer to be hired by school boards. Their appointment and dismissal became the domain of the Department. Another important aspect of the Act was the provision that the home language would be used as medium of instruction up to Standard 2. The introduction of compulsory education in certain areas was also suggested, providing the parents wanted it and cooperated with the Department in the matter (Davies 1990:351).

In response to the Bill, some black education groups, such as the African Teachers' Association (ATASA) and the Transvaal United Teachers' Association (TUATA), expressed cautious approval of certain provisions, but all black organisations rejected the continuing categorisation of education on a racial basis and the retention of a separate department of black education (Davies 1990:352). In 1981 an official announcement promised compulsory education in 38 selected urban school districts applicable to pupils entering the first year of schooling. This step was welcomed by opposition leaders, but many blacks perceived a more sinister purpose behind this new dispensation; that of a political tool to be used against school boycotts, since trouble-free areas could be given preference over troublesome localities. Furthermore, as penalties were to be imposed for non-attendance at school, the onus for getting children to school, and thereby containing student unrest, was being shifted from the authorities to the parents (Davies 1990:357). Both teachers and students felt that the Act did not go nearly far enough, and the school boycotts continued (Samuel 1990:25). However, this time students started to relate the educational issues to the broader political struggle of black communities.

In 1980, four years after the Soweto uprising, and in the midst of school boycotts throughout the country, the state appointed a Human Science Research Council (HSRC) Commission of Inquiry into Education, which produced what is commonly known as the De Lange report, named after the chairperson of the commission (HSRC Report 0-1 1981:8). Through De Lange new forms of educational control and provision were explored and a full-blown attempt made to renegotiate the racial component of state ideology in education (Chisholm 1990:386).

Nasson (1990:50), argues that this investigation was not representative as the views of progressive educationist and academics, trade unionists, community groups and church organisations and, above all, democratic committees and councils of parents and students, received no recognition in the Report.

The final report of the De Lange Commission was tabled in Parliament in October 1981 (Davies 1990:360). Among the great number of findings, the two most important which pervaded all other findings were arguably the following:

- (i) The provision of education to the various population groups on a separate basis had resulted in great irregularities in education provision.
- (ii) An 'excessive distortion' had developed in the RSA with academically oriented education being emphasised at the expense of equally formative career education (HSRC Report 0-1, 1981:138).

The commission agreed that this was especially true of learners catered for by the Department of Education and Training.

As expected, the commission suggested a single ministry of education at the national level. At the second level regional education authorities with specifically devolved functions aimed at providing education within a defined area were recommended. Strong emphasis was also placed on the need for *general formative preparatory career education* and it was recommended that it should be extended considerably at levels 10, 11 and 12 (HSRC, Report 0-1, 1981:120).

In response to the recommendations of the De Lange Report, the government released the *White Paper on the Provision of Education in the Republic of South Africa* in November 1983 (Samuel 1990:26). The White Paper determined that education, like other matters, should be administered as *general affairs* and *own affairs* in line with the new constitution of 1983.

*Own affairs* was defined as matters affecting a national group with regard to the retention of its identity and the upholding and advancement of its way of life, culture, traditions, and practices (Van Schalkwyk 1988:47). As such all educational matters which related to a specific group were deemed *own affairs* of the group concerned. Aspects of education which affected all groups, such as financial standards, salaries and conditions of employment for staff, would be handled by a new Ministry of Education and were considered 'general affairs' (Samuel 1990:26). The government once more reiterated the desirability of different curricula for different racial groups, declaring that each education department had the right to develop syllabi in accordance with the world view and within the cultural framework of the population group it serves (Samuel 1990:26).

As regards career and vocational education the White Paper accepted all the HSRC's recommendations. The problem came with the implementation thereof. The world economy had moved into a recession in the years following 1980 which badly affected South Africa, and many proposals could not be afforded. The response of black educationist to the White Paper was almost uniformly negative (Samuels 1990:26).

During the 1980's the anti-apartheid movement proposed People's Education, an ideological strategy embodying, *inter alia*, a form of democratic schooling run by the community (Claassen 1995:457). The primary objective of the People's Education Movement centred on the development of an education system which, in both structure and curricula, reflected the principles of non-racism, non-sexism, and democracy (Essop 1992:3). However, in the mid-1980s the energies and activities of the liberation movement in general, and the students in particular were directed toward the seizure of state power with little or no focus on the development of alternative policies and structures to replace the institutional structure of apartheid education. The slogan *Liberation before education* exhorted the youth to obtain freedom first, and educational institutions became hotbeds of political activity. The government responded by launching reform initiatives such as: providing more educational opportunities for Africans; phasing out disparities in financing; reforming the curriculum, and training more African teachers (Claassen 1995:457). All these reforms were, however, still based on the philosophy of *separate but equal* and were primarily aimed at transforming apartheid education. This gradual shift in apartheid policy was sceptically viewed by some

as a sophisticated attempt to offer a range of privileges to some middle class blacks, while asserting more stringent control over the majority (Kallaway 1990:34).

In 1984 and 1985 the crisis in education intensified, and in 1984 alone well over 500 000 students had been involved in the protest against the education system (Samuel 1990:27). The turning point in the events of 1985 was the declaration of a state of emergency in 36 magisterial districts on July 21, 1985 (Samuel 1990:27). Black schooling became punctuated by waves of boycotts, school takeovers and vandalism, as well as by persistent police harassment, detention, and killings (Murphy 1992:370). In the first twelve months of the state of emergency more than 700 persons involved in education were detained (Hartshorne 1990:169).

In an attempt at resolving the crisis in black education, the Soweto Parent Crisis Committee (later to become the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC)) convened a conference at the end of December 1985 (Hartshorne 1995:174). At this meeting it was resolved that students would go back to school at the beginning of the 1986 academic year, provided that certain demands were met. These included that the government reschedule examination dates to a time agreed on by students, parents, and teachers; lift the state of emergency in all areas; withdraw the army from all townships; unban COSAS; reinstate all dismissed teachers and release all detained students; and allow democratic student representative councils to be established (Samuel 1990:28). Although the government did hold talks with the NECC, they were often viewed with suspicion and in the period 1986-1988 almost all the leaders of the NECC were detained at one stage or another (Hartshorne 1990:170).

While township schools seemed quieter on the whole in 1991, with many children responding to the *back-to-school* campaign of political leaders, eruptions still continued. For instance, in the black township of Mamelodi, near Pretoria, students ejected 48 principals from their schools, demanding more textbooks and teachers before the principals could return (Murphy 1992:370). However, the extent of the violence which also affected education is best illustrated by statistics released by the South African Police Service which indicate that there were roughly 105 000 incidents of 'political unrest' in the period 1984-1994. More than 16

000 individuals lost their lives and an additional 28 600 were injured. Significant numbers of children and young people were exposed to protracted violence and societal instability that became a daily feature of life in many communities in South Africa (Van Zyl Slabbert, Malan, Marais, Olivier & Riordan 1994:150). The violence and political conflict had a negative effect on schooling and on the relationships between the older and younger generations. In particular, these events resulted in the reshaping of adult/youth, parent/child and pupil/teacher relationships. Youth created street political cultures and took over the political leadership from the elders. Young people, more politically active and often better educated, ran civil and political institutions, and the generation gap widened. This resulted in

- profound confusion in the older generation;
- the relegation of schooling to a comparatively unimportant, dispensable role. Learning lost its value and classroom discipline was abandoned (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:151).

The DET annual report of 1992 showed that 700 000 secondary school pupils each lost up to 20 days teaching. In flashpoint areas like the PWV (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereniging) regions, wasted time was more like two or three months per pupil. The damage caused by these losses in the school year showed in the final matric results, with an average pass rate of 45,9 per cent (Motala & Tikly 1993:7). The poor results were repeated in the 1993 matric examinations.

One significant conflict in 1993 which had wide ramification for the entire education sector took place amongst the teachers in black schools. The South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) strike in the last two weeks of August highlighted the inadequacy of dispute mechanisms for public sector workers (Motala & Tikly 1993:15). The criticism of the strike by political parties, community leaders and student bodies also revealed the strong commitment among all parties to restore a culture of learning. The role of parents and the lack of appropriate structures via which parents' voices could be heard also received much public attention.

### 3.3.1.4 Government and non-governmental reports on education prior to the 1994 elections

The De Klerk announcement on February 2, 1990 liberalised the political scenario and paved the way for the dismantling of apartheid (Mkwanazi 1993:57). In 1991 De Klerk repealed the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act and the Land Act. The Internal Security Act which provided for the suppression of political opposition to the government's policy of apartheid was drastically overhauled (Dlamini 1995:109). The way was therefore cleared for, among others the negotiation of a new educational dispensation for the peoples of South Africa. Both government and oppositional parties responded to the challenge.

#### (a) The Education Renewal Strategy

In May 1990 the Minister of National Education announced an investigation into education. Several factors gave rise to the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) initiative, such as the crisis in funding education, the rapid growth in the number of learners, the low pass rates, the quality of teachers, the breakdown of a culture of learning, the medium of instruction, et cetera (DNE 1992:8).

Against this background the ERS tried to find solutions for an affordable educational dispensation acceptable to the majority of South Africans. The ERS suggested greater cost effectiveness in education provision, without compromising standards (ERS 1992:xi). The ERS also proposed a *central education authority* and *regional education authorities* that would have their own powers and decision-making autonomy in line with the new constitutional dispensation. It was felt that this would promote national unity while allowing for particular needs in respect of religion, language and culture. Greater *management autonomy for educational institutions* was suggested. Community involvement and the acceptance of greater responsibility for school education was also emphasised. Moreover, at least nine years of compulsory education financed by the state at approximately 95 per cent was proposed.

**(b) The Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa**

The government also released proposals for a curriculum model for education in 1991. Objectives listed include:

- The development of learners into individuals with a developed intellect, sound moral character and the ability to think critically;
- The development of the inherent potential of the learner;
- Providing learners with the necessary basis for occupational competence;
- The education of learners towards responsible citizenship (CHED 1991:12).

In outlining the principles and procedures of curriculum development the document recommends the "involvement of all interest groups from within and from outside education" and inputs at "grassroots level" (CHED 1991:20). This acknowledgement by the state of the existence of interest groups at grassroots level is a notable shift on the part of a government that had been characterised by a top-down management style and an authoritarian approach to educational change.

**(c) The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)**

The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), launched in December 1990, was a project of the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC). The NECC described itself as: "a national body representing teachers, parents, and students, mainly from educationally disadvantaged black communities" (NEPI 1993:1). The NEPI Report was released just after that of the ERS report, in 1993.

The NEPI decided on *five guiding principles* for the NEPI enterprise, namely: non-racism, non-sexism, democracy, a unitary system and redress. These principles were to have two functions. First, they were to orient the research groups towards asking their research questions in a particular way. Secondly, they were to be used for assessing the implications of the policies which were the object of the research (NEPI 1993:6-7).

NEPI indicators include the proposal that a *differentiated funding formula* be introduced, and that the shedding some of the financial and administrative load to the relatively affluent community be investigated. The funds thus saved could help to finance the equity budget.

In line with ERS report, nine years of compulsory schooling is envisaged. In this respect, the policy point of departure is that curriculum and institutional differentiation are kept to the minimum. This means a firm commitment to a common curriculum, with a possible exception being the specific medium of instruction (NEPI 1993:29).

In contrast with the ERS proposal which puts forward proposals to attain *equal opportunities* for all, the NEPI indicators emphasise *equity and redress*, which implies *compensatory public funding* where backlogs exist.

#### 3.3.1.5 The ANC Policy Framework for Education

Emanating from the core principles of the NEPI report, the ANC document, the Policy Framework for Education (ANC 1994) proposes *inter alia* the following goals and principles: the development of human potential; the realisation of democracy; the reconciliation of liberty, equality and justice, so that citizens' freedom of choice is exercised within a social and national context of equality of opportunity and the redress of imbalances; the central responsibility of the state in providing education; and the development of a national democratic culture, with respect for the value of people's diverse cultural and linguistic traditions.

Claassen (1995:468) says that a disconcerting feature of the proposed objectives of both the government and the liberation movements is the fact that *vocational competence* is seldom a specific objective. Claassen (1995:468) voices his apprehension in the following remark:

Given the existing mismatch between education and the world of work in South Africa, more prominence should be given to vocational preparation as an explicit educational objective.

He (1995:456) does, however, acknowledge that a reason for this neglect may be that the ideological struggle of the past necessitates a set of 'feel good' objectives such as equality, liberty and national reconciliation in the initial stages of the democratic era.

### 3.3.2 The post-democratic era

#### 3.3.2.1 *The 1993 Constitution of the RSA*

Although the Interim Constitution relates to many aspects and is not specifically directed at education, the Constitution does provide the basis on which the national and provincial governments can act in the field of education.

In the first place the Constitution includes a Bill of Rights, which addresses such issues as equality, the right to education and freedom of conscience, as it relates to religion, belief and opinion (RSA 1993:Section 33).

The 1993 constitution also provides for centralised education administration, as well as regional or provincial administrations. A national Department of Education and nine provincial education departments, each headed by a minister, is proposed. Thus, in respect of administration and control, the education system changed from racial differentiation to geographical differentiation, eliminating some duplication of the past administration (Claassen 1995:470). Although centralised control is exercised by the national Department of Education, a fair amount of autonomy has been granted to provincial governments.

#### 3.3.2.2 *The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)*

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was drawn up by the ANC-led alliance, in consultation with other mass organisations, prior to the 1994 elections. The Government of National Unity also accepted the basic philosophy of the RDP and is committed to the implementation thereof. The *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* (RDP 1994:9-11) refers to *five* key programmes which need to be implemented in order to give substance to the ideology underpinning the RDP:

- meeting basic needs;
- developing our human resources;
- building the economy;
- democratising the state and society;
- implementing the RDP.

Education is related mostly to the development of the country's human resources. This is most certainly necessary. A disquieting statistic is the number of black youth who drop out of school. Each year 330 000 black pupils drop out before completing Standard 4, another 225 000 leave during the rest of their schooling, and 125 000 Standard 10 students fail to obtain secondary school-leaving certificates (Lawrence 1994:341-342). Moreover, from the mid-seventies to the present time, of every 100 black children starting school, only about 7 graduate. It is not surprising then that, according to the 1991 census, only 0,37 per cent of all black South Africans had risen to managerial level (Leadership 1994:54). This will seriously impede the growth of South Africa, if not addressed.

Four RDP projects (RDP 1994:46-47) relating to education have been established:

- national literacy programme;
- the culture of learning project;
- the primary school nutrition project .
- capacity building

Although substantial amounts (approximately R800 million) has been allocated to the Department of Education to finance these projects, all funds were not utilised by the provinces in the financial year 1994/1995 since problems with transition, such as appointment of staff had not been completed (D.E. 1996b:47).

### *3.3.2.3 The White Paper on Education and Training, 1995*

In March 1995 the *White Paper on Education and Training*, was released. The Paper is titled *Education and training in a democratic South Africa. First steps to develop a new system.*

The message from the Minister of Education, Professor Bengu, included in the document (D.E. 1995a:50) includes these words:

South Africa has never had a truly national system of education and training, and it does not have one yet. This policy document describes the process of transformation in education and training which will bring into being a system serving all our people, our new democracy, and our Reconstruction and Development Programme.

The principles on which the South African education policy is to be based is set out in the White Paper (1995a:21-23). Principles listed include:

- Education and training are basic human rights. The state has the obligation to protect and advance these rights, so that all citizens irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age, have the opportunities to develop their capacities and potential, and make their full contribution to society.
- Parents have an inalienable right to choose the form of education which is best for their children, particularly in the early years of schooling. The parents' right to choose includes choice of the language, cultural or religious basis of the child's education, with due regard for the rights of others and the rights of choice of the growing child.
- The over-arching goal of policy must be to enable all individuals to value, have access to, and succeed in lifelong education and training of good quality.
- There must be special emphasis on the redress of educational inequalities among those sections of the population who have suffered particular disadvantage, or who are especially vulnerable.

- The state's resources must be developed according to the principle of equity, so that they are used to provide essentially the same quality of learning opportunities for all citizens.
- The rehabilitation of schools and colleges must go hand in hand with the restoration of the ownership of these institutions to their communities through the establishment and empowerment of legitimate, representative governance bodies.

In September 1995, the *National Education Policy Bill* was passed in Parliament. It provides a statutory basis for implementing the vision contained in the White Paper (D.E. 1996b:21).

#### 3.3.2.4 *The Education White Paper 2, 1996*

The second White Paper on Education entitled: *The organisation, governance and funding of schools*, was published in February 1996, and follows on the recommendations set out in the Hunter Report (cf 3.5.3.2).

The Education White Paper no. 2 (D.E. 1996a:10) proposes the following:

The new structure of school organisation should create the conditions for developing a coherent, integrated, flexible national system which advances redress, the equitable use of public resources, an improvement in educational quality across the system, democratic governance, and school-based decision-making within provincial guidelines.

In order to achieve this just two broad categories of schools are proposed: public schools and private schools (D.E. 1996a:13). Furthermore, all public schools are to have representative governing bodies with significant responsibilities (D.E. 1996a:14). (To be discussed in 3.5.3.3 below).

School operating costs are to be funded partly by subsidy, and partly by income-related school fees which would be obligatory for all parents who could afford them. Poor parents

will not pay school fees, and no child can be refused admission to a school. This system is to be reviewed after five years. In August 1996 the South African School Bill based on the recommendations of the White Paper on Education 2, was introduced in Parliament (Notice 1202 of 1996).

### **3.4 PROBLEMS RELATING TO EDUCATION IN BLACK URBAN SCHOOLS**

In August 1995, it was alleged that the government's education policy had run aground (Financial Mail 1995:20). In research undertaken by the Financial Mail, it was found that neither the national Department of Education, nor any of the other nine provincial departments of education had yet filled their staff complements. This means that the previous departments of education continue largely to run things on a contractual basis, while new provincial departments are forming. Moreover, the legacy of the past has resulted in severe backlogs in provision of education especially in black communities. With numbers in education increasing beyond the economic growth rate, an unofficial South African Reserve Bank estimate of unemployment at 46 percent, and approximately 66 percent of the population either illiterate or literate only to primary school level, it is clear that enormous problems lie ahead for education in South Africa (Du Toit 1994:19), a few of which will now be mentioned.

#### **3.4.1 Insufficient funds**

Reconstruction of education will have to take place within a number of constraints. One such crucial constraint is that government spending on education - 20,8 percent of the total budget in 1995/1996- may have reached its upper limit (D.E. 1996b:52). At present education is the largest single function undertaken by government. In the school and college sector alone there are more than 12 million learners and about 360 000 educators who account for 38 percent of the state's total salary bill (D.E. 1996b:15). With numbers in education increasing beyond the economic growth rate, it is clear that there is a need for a new education and training system, and that enormous problems lie in the way of its achievement.

In addition many provinces are not able to provide sufficient educational services due to a lack of funds. For example, James Maseko, Superintendent-general of Education for Gauteng, was unable to provide new classrooms, or even undertake major renovations (Financial Mail 1995:25). This will obviously have a detrimental effect on effective educational provision.

In order to ensure greater equity between schools within provinces, an optimum pupil-teacher ratio of 40:1 in primary schools and 35:1 in secondary schools has been arrived at (Chisholm & Vally 1996:18). This is also seen as a way in which the province can save on salaries. The implication of the *right-sizing* policy is that teachers in schools with a pupil-teacher ratio below the norm, will be moved to schools with a ratio above the norm. The uncertainty of their future has a demoralising effect on many teachers (cf 5.5.4.4 below).

### 3.4.2 High population growth rate

The population growth rate for the different population groups in the period 1980-1990 are: Africans, 2,7 per cent; Coloureds, 1,9 per cent; Indians 1,8 per cent; and whites, 1,1 per cent (Claassen 1995:453). The average annual population growth rate is about 2,1 per cent which is high compared to international standards. In numerical terms it implies that the population increases by almost a million people every year and that a similar number of school opportunities must eventually be made available (Claassen 1995:453).

According to Berkhout (1993:110) population growth rates can be considered the most significant factor determining the demand for education. It is also accepted as one of the factors detrimental to the equitable provision of education in developing countries where population growth rates are generally high, with a concomitant rise in the demand for education. Moreover, in South Africa black youth are preponderant in their societies - the average age of South Africa's black population is 17 years, over against 31 years for the white population (Lawrence 1994:342). This means that massive numbers of children are entering township schools, where a severe backlog already exists.

The high population growth rate is one of the reasons why 1,8 million children of school-going age are presently **not** at school (Van Rensburg 1996a:12). The Department of Education, disputes this figure, saying that there are 800 000 children between the ages of 6 and 16 not at school. Moreover there is a shortage of 50 000 - 65 000 classrooms in South Africa at present (D.E. 1996b:52). One of the results being overcrowded classrooms, especially in black communities. Moreover, no new teaching posts could be created. Maseko (Financial Mail 1995:25) describes the situation where "there are still kids sitting in schools without teachers, and thousands in schools without toilet facilities, let alone electricity."

### 3.4.3 High drop-out rate and poor academic results

The progress and outcomes of black students throughout school and tertiary phases point to substantial racially based inequalities between institutions which have serious financial implications (Motala & Tikly 1993:2-3). For example only 50 - 62 per cent of African enrolments will reach Standard 6 (Grade 8) in twelve years, in contrast to 96 per cent of white children in eight years. Moreover, in the 1993 matric examinations the DET pass rate was 38.3 percent (Greenstein & Mkwanazi 1994:2). Most recent estimates also show that the general failure rate of African students at predominantly white technikons and universities has been approximately twice that of white students. This will have a negative effect on the economy of the country. For example, in South Africa 10,4 members of the population per thousand have a university degree. In order to satisfy the high-level manpower needs of a modern economy, this number should be raised to 16,5 per thousand. This is going to be difficult to achieve as only 22 per cent of black pupils survive the school system, as opposed to 78 per cent of white pupils (Landman 1992:37). Of the black pupils who do survive the system and sit for the matric exam, not even half pass; and to add to this, poor subject choices lead to the obtaining of matric certificates which are unmarketable in the labour market (Landman 1992:38).

The result of the poor retention rate in black schools is a society teeming with people who are insufficiently schooled and trained. At the same time, many students have remained within the school system. This has resulted in the fact that during 1990 there were 40 000

black secondary school pupils older than 21 years, and 11 000 primary school pupils older than 18 years (Landman 1992:39).

Moreover, the rapid growth in pupil enrolments which overtaxes resources; the undisciplined and educationally unjustifiable promotion of pupils at lower levels; and the collapse of the learning and teaching cultures contribute to poor exam results (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:109).

#### 3.4.4 Under-qualified teachers

In 1990 all white teachers were matriculated and 97 per cent of them had a professional teaching qualification, of which 34,3 percent also had a university degree (Pillay 1990:39). Approximately 7 per cent of black teachers had university degrees (Pillay 1990:40). Moreover 19 per cent of teachers do not have a matriculation certificate and 10 per cent have no teacher qualification (Landman 1992:42). In addition these poorly qualified or under-qualified teachers have to cope with a high teacher-pupil ratio.

From 1988 to 1992 there was a concerted effort to reduce the number of un/under-qualified teachers and the percentage was reduced from 50 to 38,4 per cent (Greenstein & Mkwanzazi 1994:7). Recently agreement was reached in the Education Labour Relations Council to delink salaries from qualifications and link it instead with performance assessment (Chisholm & Vally 1996:35). Whether this will have any effect on teachers' commitment to upgrade their qualifications is yet to be seen. Moreover, Chisholm and Vally (1996:35) warn that linking salaries with performance assessment may prove to be unworkable, not having enjoyed great success in other countries.

#### 3.4.5 Language policy

Black pupils in township schools are instructed through the medium of mother tongue during the lower primary phase. From Standard 3 there is a sudden and abrupt transition to English as the medium of instruction for the entire primary curriculum, which concurrently broadens into ten subjects (Lemmer 1993:149). This transition causes serious cognitive and linguistic

difficulties for the children, who can often barely read and write English (Stein 1993:7). This was confirmed in English reading laboratory tests conducted with Standard 6 black pupils in Natal which show that 80 per cent of these pupils, aged between 13 and 14 have reading ages between six and a half and seven and a half years when compared with English mother tongue readers. They also showed a speaking ability below that of 6 year old school beginners who were mother tongue speakers (Hosking & Hosking 1994:313). Moreover, many black teachers are not sufficiently proficient in English to be able to teach it as a second language to pupils. Tests conducted on black student teachers showed that their English language competence was weak by Standard 7 norms for English as first language (Hosking & Hosking 1994:313-314).

In research undertaken in Soweto, Stein (1993:8) found that teachers relied heavily on the prescribed grammar textbooks, which left little opportunity for the development of communicative language usage. Teachers insisted that students produce grammatically correct sentences whenever they spoke English. The idea that errors made by children might be evidence that language learning was taking place was considered foreign. As a result, students are afraid of speaking English for fear of making mistakes.

There are those who might argue that the June 1991 amendment to the 1979 Education and Training Act allows speakers of African languages the same choice as that enjoyed by English and Afrikaans speakers (Desai 1994:25). The amendment transfers to parents the right to decide, in consultation with the Minister, which language should be used as medium of instruction for their children and at what level. Desai (1994:25) disputes whether the choice is the same for black children since no resources are being invested in developing material/books in African languages.

To facilitate the development of a new language policy in schools, a discussion document - *Towards a language policy in education* - was released in November 1995 (D.E. 1996b:34). It is hoped that this will help to resolve the complex issue of educational provision in a country with eleven official languages.

### **3.4.6 Lack of pre-school facilities**

In South Africa there is a severe lack of preschool facilities available for young children, in the communities where poverty is most serious. Relatively few of these facilities are able to provide the kind of educational programmes which disadvantaged children really need: centres are overcrowded; there are very few trained teachers; the adult-child ratio is high, and many centres are poorly equipped (Atmore 1993:43-44).

As the number of working women with young children continues to grow, the demand for affordable, high quality child care also increases. Currently, only 6-9 per cent of South African preschoolers have access to Early Childhood Development (D.E. 1996b:36). Few black children have any pre-school experience. This is one factor related to the high repetition and drop-out rate in the early years of schooling. Calculations suggest that as many as one out of every six black children starting their grades drop out during the first year (Landman 1992:37).

The present government is, however, committed to the introduction of a reception year for all five year olds, in order to address this problem. This is to be phased in over a number of years, depending on the availability of funds (D.E. 1996b:37).

### **3.4.7 Absence of a culture of teaching and learning**

The contribution of students and the youth to the liberation struggle in South Africa since the Soweto uprising of 1976 has been well documented. But youth participation in the struggle also doubled the burden placed on educational institutions. There can be no doubt that over time it harmed both the culture of learning and the culture of teaching (Sonn 1994:4). The collapse of a culture of learning in black schools is one of the gravest educational problems facing South Africa. It is also the key reason why an increasing number of black students leave school without completing their education and with no recognised skills to use in the world of work (Van Zyl et al 1994:108).

Teachers in black schools were also affected by the liberation struggle. On the one hand, some community leaders expected teachers to become involved in the liberation struggle, with obviously negative effects on their work as teachers. On the other hand, there were those who wanted teachers to continue teaching. This conflict, together with the poor conditions under which they had to teach has led to a general feeling of despondency among teachers in black schools throughout the country.

The attitudes of teachers, and in particular the principal, are also crucial in determining the climate within a school. Chapman & Burchfield (1994:401) add that particularly in Third World countries, headmasters are powerful gatekeepers, mediating the impact of central Ministry of Education policies on their school, shaping the education and social transactions within the school, and interpreting school priorities and activities to the local community. This has particular relevance when attempting to establish community involvement in schools.

#### 3.4.8 Emphasis on rote learning

Another problem is that teachers, like many South African families (black and white alike) are highly authoritarian. There is no tradition of independent critical thinking or of asking questions and exploring ideas (Murphy 1992:369). Poorly prepared teachers teach as they were taught, and coverage and recall outrank independent thinking. Stein (1993:8) remarks:

Most Soweto teachers are products of Bantu Education, a system that encourages a top-down, transmission model of teaching that is antithetical to critical thinking. Teachers expect learners not to question knowledge but to produce 'the right answer.'

The National Education Audit, (Hofmeyer & Hall 1996) describe the quality of teacher education, especially in the colleges of education, as poor. Reasons given include: inadequately qualified staff, an authoritarian and content-based curriculum, no link between theory and practice and a teacher centred methodology with the emphasis on *rote learning*.

Van den Berg (1990:10) suggests the following to enhance the quality of education in South Africa:

Improve the qualification, competence and confidence of teachers; seek to transform the learning environments they create, for so much of what occurs in schools is not genuinely educative but merely perpetuates a mindless rote learning that does little to empower either student or teacher.

#### **3.4.9 The high level of illiteracy of the community**

The level of illiteracy in South Africa is estimated at 8,3 million people, of which the vast majority are black people (Coetzee 1991:216). In its annual report published in May 1996, the Department of Education (1996b:37) includes both semi-literate and illiterate South Africans, arriving at a figure of 15 million. It must, however, be borne in mind that the extent of the problem in South Africa cannot be determined accurately because of the way in which the incidence of illiteracy is determined. In the 1980 census, figures on literacy were based on responses to a question whether a person (15 years and older) could read and write, while the 1985 census used the number of years of formal schooling for persons 20 years and older as criterium. Moreover, judging from the latest international views on literacy, it appears that literacy has many facets: it is not a simple phenomenon and is more complex in a multi-cultural society, such as South Africa, where many different languages are spoken (Coetzee 1991:216).

Internationally, there seems to be general consensus that a minimum of four to six years of relevant and quality schooling is required today to achieve an acceptable level of literacy (Coetzee 1991:217). In South Africa 40 percent of black pupils leave school with Standard 2 as their highest qualification - well below the level of basic maintainable literacy (Landman 1992:37-38).

Coetzee (1991:226) argues that the introduction of compulsory primary education will not by itself ensure appropriate literacy levels. Serious attention will have to be given to the large numbers of repeaters and poor school performances amongst disadvantaged communities in

the primary schools. What is also needed is more appropriately qualified teachers, the adequate provision of basic teaching materials, and more and better school facilities. This could go a long way in improving the quality of primary education and prevent pupils from repeating standards or dropping out of primary school. Of particular importance, however, will be a smoother and more effective transition from mother tongue instruction to English, in schools catering for black communities.

#### **3.4.10 Poor socioeconomic conditions in black homes**

The lack of housing, facilities and jobs, and the social deterioration that follows badly managed urbanisation are at the heart of the various crises in South Africa. Landman (1992:39) found that 80 per cent of black households with school going children do not have electricity, 50 per cent have an income of less than R400 per month and a similar percentage do not possess a table at which homework may be done. It is obvious that this must have a detrimental effect on the school achievement of these children.

A nutritional scheme of the Department of Education, for which R500 million was allocated for 1994/95 by the RDP, has been implemented. The scheme targets children from families living below the poverty line or living in high poverty areas, thereby contributing to improved school attendance, higher concentration levels and fewer incidents of aggression (D.E. 1996b:49).

Parents are now able to choose the school to which they wish to send their children. Moreover, many South African schools will in future be multicultural, that is, all schools beside those in the townships (Van Rensburg 1996b:16). These will maintain a largely black enrolment as the vast majority of the people living in townships cannot afford to move to more affluent neighbourhoods. Moreover, they cannot afford to send their children to better equipped and staffed schools. The people living in the townships will themselves have to improve their schools if they wish to escape from the downward spiral of poverty and the conditions of deprivation under which they live.

### **3.5 PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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. For the state, the involvement of parents in schooling has always been regarded more as a means of financing schools than as an object in itself (Mkwanazi 1994:25). On the other hand, the opposition used the term parental involvement to legitimatise their resistance to unjust official policies. Through this concept the progressive movement claimed the right to make decisions about their children's education. The history of parent involvement closely follows that of educational provision for black South Africans.

#### **3.5.1 Government initiated parent involvement in the pre-democratic era**

In the pre-democratic era, allowance was made for two types of formal parental involvement; a statutory parent body (usually called a management council or school committee) and a non-statutory body (usually called a parent-teacher association, or a parent-teacher-student association).

The statutory parent body (management council, school committee or school governing body) had certain powers given to it by law (hence the term statutory), and functioned in most traditionally white schools, but was not so well established in black schools (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88).

Although the management council could not concern itself directly with the professional activities of the school, it could, however, report on them and make recommendations to the director of education. This could include recommendations regarding the appointment of teachers (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88). The management council/school committee could also collect money to defray current expenditure and also controlled such funds. Finally a management council carried out all duties entrusted to it by education authorities (Van Schalkwyk 1988:89). The management council/school committee functioned on the local level.

The statutory body functioning on *district level* was known as a *school board*, and had a supervisory, advisory, administrative and managerial task as regards education (Van Schalkwyk 1988:88). According to the circumstances, such as the size of the school district or the number of educational institutions within its boundaries, a school board could consist of 6 to 12 members representing the various institutions.

The non-statutory parent body, usually called Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) or Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA), did **not** have powers granted to it by law. Its main purpose was to combine the efforts of parents and teachers to a limited degree when a service, such as fund raising, is required by the school.

In educational provision for blacks, school management councils were established by the government in 1953, and again re-established in terms of the 1979 Education Act (Mkwanazi 1994:25). Among the measures provided for in the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was the establishment of bodies at *district* and *local level* which would participate in the administration of schooling in black areas, called, respectively, the *school boards* and the *school committees/management councils* (Hyslop 1989:201). In introducing the Bantu Education Act the then Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd, argued that black parents in particular should be made co-responsible for their children's education and that this includes co-responsibility for the control, but also co-responsibility in respect of finances (Mkwanazi 1993:52).

*School committees* were perceived by the state as essential for creating allegiance to Bantu Education and as providing a means of forcing black communities to subsidise the kind of cheap mass education which the state was aiming at. However, Mkwanazi (1993:53) concludes that "...the school committee failed to play the hegemonic role it was designed to fulfil."

As was the case in white education, school committees were responsible for a particular school. In contrast to white schools, only four to six of the committee members could be elected by parents. In the urban areas the remainder of school committee members, comprising a majority, were direct appointees of the Secretary for Native Affairs or the local

Native Commissioner (Hyslop 1989:205). The *school committees* were to be the link to the community, controlling school funds, erecting new buildings, and advising the school boards. What real power was embodied in the system subsisted in the *school boards*.

*School boards*, in black education were wholly appointed bodies, with one school board controlling a group of school committees. In the urban areas all the members of the school board for the district were appointed by the Native Affairs Department. Hyslop (1989:205) observes: "The Native Affairs Department wanted parental participation without giving up real control." The school boards had considerable power over local schools and teachers. From 1955 all African teachers' salaries were paid as subsidies to the school boards, which meant that the boards effectively controlled hiring and firing of teachers.

Although there were many school committees and school boards in place by the end of the 1960's, their structure and policies continued to generate friction between them, the community and teachers. The lack of accountability of the boards to parents allowed them to "...trample over grass-roots opinion" (Hyslop 1989:210). The Department's treatment of urban school board members also served to undermine their credibility and their loyalty. For example, members of boards and committees who were politically suspect were arbitrarily removed from their positions (Hyslop 1989:211).

Mkwanazi (1993:53) does concede that the school boards and committees were successful in forcing parents to finance their children's education. To corroborate this, a report from the DET of 1967 is quoted:

Although school committees take their duties very seriously, their work consists mainly of the collection of funds for one purpose or another. In this respect, good work is done.

In spite of the fact that some school committees and boards in urban areas became foci of protest against aspects of state education policy during the 1970's (Hyslop 1989:217), it brought them little credibility in the community, as they were still seen as "creatures of the Bantu Education system" (Hyslop 1989:220).

A few days before June 16, 1976, parents in Soweto began to establish their own representative committees, precisely because they felt that the school committees and boards were not representing them properly. The student movements were already bypassing these state structures and an entirely new era of political and educational struggle opened up. This did not greatly influence the officials of the Department and, in spite of fierce opposition to its educational policy discourse, the state went on to introduce the *Education and Training Act of 1979*, in which both school committees and school boards were re-established (Mkwanazi 1993:55). In the DET Annual Report (1979:99) the *financing* and *control* function of school committees is once more set out:

In order to ensure community involvement at each community school, a school committee consisting of nine members is elected by parents, although their work still largely consists mainly of the collection of funds. However, school committees act in an advisory capacity, but when a school is situated in an area where it cannot be grouped with other schools under a school board, the school committee is entrusted with the authority of a school board in order to control the school.

The introduction of the *De Lange Commission* in 1980, was an attempt by the government to address the deepening crisis in education and the uncompromising stance of the parents on involvement in education through established structures (Mkwanazi 1993:55). Although the report stressed the need for parents to have a greater share in decision making, the role of the parents in legitimatising the system was once more emphasised (Mkwanazi 1993:56; Kallaway 1990:33).

The government's *Education Renewal Strategy* (ERS), launched in 1991, contained proposals for the decentralisation of the education system through the establishment of management councils at all schools with increased decision making and executive functions (DNE 1991:75-76).

The *Curriculum Model* of the same year, moves further than the ERS in regard to parent involvement in education and acknowledges their participation in curriculum development. Mkwanazi (1993:59) states that this "...represents a notable shift on the part of the state

towards recognition of the opposition's concept of parental governance." The feeling of the majority of black academics and parents was that the concessions were too few and too late.

### 3.5.2 The setting up of alternative structures by the community

Parent involvement in education considerably predated opposition to Bantu Education. As early as 1944, parents boycotted schools in protest against the dismissal of a politically active school teacher, and established a *peoples' school* for boycotters (Lodge 1990:269). The setting up of alternative structures to school management councils, in contestation of national educational policies, gained momentum in black communities as the events in the 1970's unfolded.

It was undoubtedly the 1976 uprising which brought the subject of education into black homes, countrywide. To a large extent the unrest actually revealed the paucity of black parental involvement in educational matters (Chinkanda 1994:185). The unrest also showed how little the majority of black parents knew about educational matters and the role of government. In the years following the uprising, with increasing attention being focused on: schools, labour relations, the teaching field and matriculation examination issues, black parents became better informed and more involved in these matters (Chinkanda 1994:185). Moreover, the education crisis also became a family crisis. In many families children began questioning and defying parental authority. These parents were rudely awakened when children blatantly told them to step aside as they confronted the education authorities to demand improvements in education. As events unfolded, black communities began researching the education system that was being provided for other population groups and, as the facts on discrepancies emerged, they increased their demands for equal facilities (Chinkanda 1994:185).

In 1976/1977 the *Soweto Teachers' Action Committee* (STAC) and the *Soweto Parents' Committee* were set up, in which teachers and parents sought to broaden the base of opposition (Mkwanazi 1994:25). This strategy reflected a total rejection of official state structures and generated alternative structures to legitimatise parental participation in the governance of education. These parent bodies provided political leadership. However,

circumstances compelled them to define themselves as parent committees, thereby deflecting attention from their political character to their concern with educational issues. As such the term *parent* legitimated opposition and resistance to an unjust system of education (Mkwanazi 1993:54).

In response to the growing crisis in black education, the *National Education Co-ordinating Committee* (NECC) - formerly the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee - was formed in 1985 to address the education crisis in a more organised, coordinated and deliberate manner (Squelch 1993:179). The NECC recognised the need for a well-formulated education plan for an alternative education system. Two historic national conferences were held in December 1985 and March 1986, during which the slogan *Liberation before Education* was rejected and *People's Education for People's Power* adopted. *People's Education* became an educational and political strategy for educating and empowering all students with a view to bringing about fundamental social transformation (Squelch 1993:180). The formation of the NECC was powerfully shaped by student participation and operated across a number of constituencies, embracing a multiplicity of groups. Yet the NECC spoke as *parents* and to *parents* as both a political constituency with an interest in education, and as parents who were genuinely concerned about the quality of education (Mkwanazi 1993:57). One of the NECC's main interventionist strategies was to encourage parental involvement by setting up alternative governing bodies in schools, such as Parent Teacher Student Associations (Mkwanazi 1994:25).

Hyslop (1990:86) concludes that the NECC and its strategy of *People's Education* made three very important impacts on the development of the battle around education in the 1986 period. Firstly by stressing unity between students on the one hand and workers, teachers, and communities on the other, it helped to overcome some of the divisions which had threatened to open up in 1985. Secondly, the idea of *People's Education* addressed the development of popular conceptions of education which could pose as feasible alternatives to the state's education policy. Third, in the early part of 1986, the NECC was able to draw the DET into negotiation, thus creating a mechanism through which popular education demands could be addressed to the authorities.

### 3.5.3 Government initiatives in the democratic era

The empowerment of the masses was something the ANC felt strongly about and following their victory in the 1994 elections this was also reflected in their commitment to increasing parent involvement in education.

#### 3.5.3.1 *The White Paper on Education and Training, 1995*

The changes envisaged for education in South Africa as set out in the *White Paper on Education and Training* (D.E. 1995a:22), highlights the importance of parent and community involvement in education:

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 stake holders, interest groups and role players. This is the only guaranteed way to infuse new social energy into the institutions and structures of the education and training system, dispel the chronic alienation of large sectors of society from the education process, and reduce the power of government administration to intervene where it should not.

#### 3.5.3.2 *The Hunter Report*

On the 31 August 1995, the *Report of the Committee to review the organisation, governance and funding of schools*, was released. The committee was chaired by Prof A P Hunter and the report is commonly referred to as the *Hunter Report*. In this report various suggestions relating to school governance (or formal parent involvement) are made.

The Hunter Report (1995:51) acknowledges that "...parents have both the right and the responsibility to participate in the education of their children" and recommends that schools establish governance structures that will enable elected representatives to assume active and responsible roles in the determining and adoption of policies in schools.

School governance and management are seen as interwoven elements in a process that is aimed at enabling schools to provide effective and efficient education, and therefore difficult to define. Nevertheless, the committee agreed that governance is primarily concerned with the formulation and adoption of policy, while management is concerned with the day-to-day delivery of education. This being so parents would be entrusted with the responsibility and authority to formulate and adopt school policy, while day-to-day decisions about the administration and organisation and activities, supporting teaching and learning in the school, would be the domain of the professional staff, although stakeholders should have the right to comment on and make suggestions with regard to such decisions (Hunter Report 1995:52).

In their discussion of the role and responsibilities of governing bodies, the committee agreed that not all bodies would be able to accept responsibility for the total range of functions (Hunter Report 1995:56). The committee suggested that a governing body should be able to negotiate for certain powers or functions. Examples of such functions are: the maintenance of school buildings, the purchase of textbooks and materials, and the purchase of equipment. If the governing body does not have the relevant management capacity, the educational authority will exercise these powers on behalf of the governing body (Hunter Report 1995:57).

Many schools and school governing bodies have accumulated substantial knowledge and skills to run their school effectively. Many communities have, however, not had the opportunity to do so. In this regard the committee suggests a process of capacity building, which they defined as the "power to act" (Hunter Report 1995:97). Capacity-building is directed to community empowerment and entails the development of both the material and human resources (the knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for effective governance and management (ibid). The recommendations of the Hunter Report were taken up in the *White Paper on Education No. 2*.

### 3.5.3.3 White Paper on Education No. 2, 1996

The Education White Paper No. 2, entitled *The organisation, governance and funding of schools*, was released in February 1996 and is based on the proposals set out in the Hunter Report.

Included in the White Paper (1996a:16) is the suggestion that school governing structures should involve all stakeholder groups in active and responsible roles, encourage tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision making. In accordance with the Hunter Report, the White Paper acknowledges that national and provincial policy should allow for the fact that such capacities may be underdeveloped in many communities and will need to be built.

According to the White Paper (D.E. 1996a:17) each public school must have a governing body by January 1997, which should comprise elected representatives of

- (i) parents and guardians of learners currently enrolled at school;
- (ii) teachers;
- (iii) learners (in secondary school only);
- (iv) non-teaching staff;
- (v) the principal (*ex officio*);
- (vi) members of the community, elected by the governing body.

Each public school governing body will be responsible for a set of basic functions ("basic powers"), but will be entitled to negotiate with its provincial education department to take responsibility for additional functions ("negotiated powers") as and when it is willing and believes it is able to do so (D.E. 1996a:18).

The list of powers which the Ministry of Education proposes (D.E. 1996a:19-20) includes:

#### **Broad policy**

- (i) the school's mission
- (ii) development, implementation and review of governing body policies

- (iii) promoting the best interest of the school community

#### **Personnel**

- (iv) recommending and negotiating teachers' temporary or permanent appointment (in consultation with provincial departments)
- (v) recommending the appointment of administrative staff (in consultation with provincial departments)

#### **Admission**

- (vi) admission policy (in consultation with provincial departments)

#### **Curriculum**

- (vii) school times and timetable (following provincial guidelines)
- (viii) language policy (within the appropriate framework, providing no form of racial discrimination is practised in exercising its policy)
- (ix) school-level curriculum choices (within national and provincial frameworks)
- (x) extra-mural curricula
- (xi) codes of behaviour for staff and learners (following provincial guidelines)

#### **Financial**

- (xii) raising and controlling funds
- (xiii) school budget priorities
- (xiv) purchase of textbooks, materials and equipment
- (xv) payment of light and water accounts

#### **Maintenance**

- (xvi) maintenance of buildings

#### **Communication**

- (xvii) reporting to the parents
- (xviii) school-community communication

**Community services**

- (xix) local services for children and youth
- (xx) community social, health, recreational and nutritional programmes .

A task team has been established to plan a comprehensive programme to build capacity for management and governance where this is needed (D.E. 1996a:25). The White Paper (D.E. 1996a:20) concludes:

The idea that all public school governing bodies must be responsible for a basic list of functions is deceptively simple. Once implemented, the vast majority of South Africans will recognise that this decision constitutes by far the most significant devolution of responsibility in the history of South African education.

This is indeed true, especially regarding the role of parents in predominantly black schools. However, the success will depend to a great extent on the proposed training programmes for members of the governing bodies. Moreover, not all teachers are in agreement with the proposal that governing bodies are still to be consulted regarding appointment of teachers to schools, or with the fact that parents are to be in the majority and can outvote teachers on all issues (cf 5.6.6 below).

In predominantly white schools, where some governing bodies have had extensive powers (such as at Model C schools) it is felt that the rights of parents could be violated by the limits placed on: the role of governing bodies in such matters as the appointment of teachers; the determination of school fees; language of instruction, religion and other admission criteria (D.E. 1996a:7).

In general, the acknowledgement of the government that parents have a right to be involved in decision making at schools, is commendable. However, it is lamentable that there is a lack of encouragement or incentive to expand parent involvement to other aspects of education. School governance is of great importance, but does not involve the majority of parents, beside allowing them to vote for the members of the governing body. If the advantages of

parent involvement, as set out in Chapter 2 (2.4 above) are sought, parent involvement on a broader front must be pursued.

#### **3.5.4 The present situation regarding parent involvement in black urban townships**

In research undertaken in Soweto in 1993, Mkwazi (1994:24) observes that parent involvement is related to "...compensating for the deficiencies of the system, and not to the content of the children's education or to school management."

In a survey of 20 schools in Soweto prior to the elections, Mkwazi (1994:26) found that PTA's or PTSA's had been set up in 17 schools. In two schools there were no formal structures and in one school there was a management council. This amounts to a virtual rejection of state structures, but does indicate a willingness on the part of both parents as well as teachers to work together. In interviews, principals suggested that the rejection of management councils in schools include the perception of these structures as agents of the state, as well as the argument that parents with limited or no literacy skills had difficulties in participating effectively (Mkwazi 1994:26-27). Some principals also expressed the view that most parents are extremely interested, and wish to assist in their children's progress but cannot do so because of the lack of stability in the broader social, economic and political context prevailing at the time of the research (Mkwazi 1994:27).

Mkwazi (1994:28) concluded that parent involvement in Sowetan schools cannot be considered significant and is mainly in areas which are properly the concern of the administration. She (1994:28) states that, "Parents are involved in these areas, particularly crisis management, in response to a need, but this does not bring them closer to meaningful involvement."

In 1994 I examined the extent of parent involvement in black schools by means of questionnaires. The pilot study involved approximately three hundred teachers in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville, as well as a number of parents. Teachers generally expressed the opinion that parents do not care sufficiently about their children's education and therefore do not become involved in the children's school activities. In the words of one of the respondents,

"Our community thinks that the teachers must do everything, they think the school belongs to the teachers, not to them."

Teachers did, however, also acknowledge that parents felt intimidated by the school, its staff members, the organised student movement and the then prevailing political climate. This perception was reiterated by parents, who were interviewed as part of the same research project.

A large percentage of the respondents, some with many years of teaching experience, indicate that they had very little experience of parent involvement. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of cooperation and trust between teachers and parents, which greatly hampers the establishment of a partnership between the home and the school.

Many teachers acknowledge that they have a limited view of the role parents can play in school matters. Some respondents simply equate parent involvement with 'knowing what is happening in school.' As a result, schools do not give parents sufficient opportunities to become involved in the education of their children. Moreover, there is the danger that teachers may consider parents unresponsive or apathetic regarding their children's education when parents fail to respond in the very limited ways offered them.

Various problems of a more practical nature were also mentioned by teachers, such as parents who are illiterate, work long hours and get home late, children in the care of grandparents, or older brothers and sisters, and extreme poverty in the community. In addition many parents do not have transport to the school, making attendance of school functions difficult.

Mkwanazi (1994:29) also found that most teachers and principals attribute the lack of parent involvement to the parents themselves. She warns, "Teachers should also learn to recognise the importance of parental involvement in education. Teachers have tended in this survey not to be critical of themselves."

### **3.6 EDUCATION AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GAUTENG**

Gauteng is one of the nine provinces in South Africa and includes the area previously known as the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereniging (PWV) area.

#### **3.6.1 Education provision in Gauteng**

Administration and control of education is an aspect of the South African education system which has undergone a particularly dramatic change. The 1993 Constitution makes provision for a national administration as well as nine provincial administrations (Claassen 1995:470). This means there is a single, unitary education system, although a fair amount of autonomy has been granted to provincial governments. Cooperation between the national and provincial educational departments is facilitated by the *Heads of Education Departments Committee* (HEDCOM) which was established in April 1995 (D.E. 1996b:17).

Although the nine provinces were assigned powers by way of presidential proclamation in 1994, it was only when new heads of departments were appointed from April 1995, that the provincial education departments formally came into being (D.E. 1996b:16).

On December 8, 1995 the province of Gauteng accepted the School Education Act, 1995 (Act 6 of 1995), thereby establishing a juridical basis for education in the province. Various aspects relating to parent involvement is included in the Act (Gauteng 1995:12-14).

#### **3.6.2 Legislation on parent involvement in Gauteng**

Regarding general matters, the Act (Gauteng 1995:12) states that:

Every parent shall have the right of access to any information held by the department, a public or a private school if such information concerns a learner who is his or her child.

According to the Act, it is the duty of every parent to assist the state and the governing body of a school to promote a *culture of respect* for school property (Gauteng 1995:12).

Legislation on public *school governance* in Gauteng is in line with that of central government, and also acknowledges the fact that not all governing bodies are as yet capable of fulfilling all their tasks. It is stated that, "The powers of governing bodies should reflect their capacity to render effective service" (Gauteng 1995:13).

For the purpose of promoting efficiency and active participation, the Members of the Executive Council may institute courses and training programmes for the members of governing bodies (Gauteng 1995:13-24). In other words, the Education Department of Gauteng supports the concept of *capacity building*. Unfortunately, the province does not define parent involvement much wider than the representation of parents on governing bodies.

### 3.7 SUMMARY

In urban areas throughout Africa changes have been slow and often more symbolic by nature than substantial. Africans have filtered into former white or Asian suburbs, but without the *class* characteristics of particular residential areas changing significantly (Bell 1992:193). However effective a new state will be in meeting the supply deficit, and however dramatic the improvement in provision, whatever democratic changes are made in administration and curriculum, township schools will remain in the townships. Smit & Le Roux (1993:31) endorse this saying, "A family does not live in isolation but exists in a complex social, economic and cultural environment which directly influences education in the family."

The social, economic and cultural environment in which education takes place in black urban schools was previously discussed. This illustrates that both education provision and the prevailing socioeconomic conditions under which a large section of the community live, needs to be addressed in order to break the spiral of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, Maseko (1994:13) warns that it is estimated that by the year 2 000 at least 60 per cent of the South African population will be below the age of 18. If the country fails to provide for these

young people with education of a high quality, we are likely to see even greater disintegration of the social fabric.

Parent involvement has been shown to make a positive contribution to alleviating many problems, both in countries overseas, as well as in South Africa, although its local involvement has been mainly limited to crisis management. With the government now firmly committed to involving parents and the community in educational matters, it is necessary both to determine what the community understands by this term, as well as to research the prevailing attitudes to parent involvement, particularly within the previously disadvantaged communities. Atmore (1993:139) corroborates this:

... it is particularly in disadvantaged communities that parental involvement is needed for the development of the child and the success of the curriculum. A partnership approach in which the teacher and parents compliment one another will produce benefits for the child, the teacher, and the parents.

South African history and the limited research on parental involvement undertaken thus far, illustrate a great willingness on the part of black parents to become involved in the education of their children. Mncwabe (1992:59) suggests a reason for this:

The African philosophy of life includes communalism, sharing, support, reward for hard work, inclusion in the community and being incorporated in any exercise which leads to success, empathy, and honour of the dignity of people.

These values exemplify the strengths on which to build greater community involvement in an education system which all South Africans now regard as being representative of the will of the people.

## CHAPTER 4

### QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters form an important background to the investigation contained in this thesis. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical background to, and philosophical basis for, parent involvement in urban schools. It clearly illustrates that parent involvement should be investigated on a broad front and needs to address issues such as perceptions of the role of the parent and teacher, the context of the home and community, as well as the policy of the school on parent involvement.

Chapter 3 places the phenomenon of parent involvement in black communities in historical context, thus illustrating the complexity of the problem and the alienation of the home and school due to political reasons. Chapter 3 also refers to some of the preliminary findings of this researcher in a pilot study of parent involvement in black townships in Gauteng.

The above substantive literature study, as well as the preliminary research, served to identify some of the crucial issues pertaining to the topic, as well as indicating gaps in the existing knowledge on parent involvement in black urban townships. This research addresses some of these questions through in-depth interviews with selected parents, principals and teachers in a black urban township in Gauteng.

The main steps in the gathering of data for the current research is described in this chapter, as well as providing justification for the methods of data gathering and the subsequent analysis employed.

## 4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A THEORETICAL BASIS

Traditionally research in education, as in the other social sciences, has been marked by a near exclusive preference for quantitative research methods, which emanate mainly from the traditions of experimental psychology, as the only accepted way to analyse and interpret educational settings (Goetz & Le Compte 1984:1). During the past decades *qualitative research* methods, as developed and widely used by anthropologists and sociologists, have aroused the interest of educational researchers as a valid and useful approach (Burgess 1985:4). The qualitative approach to research in education is a methodological expression of the fact that "...many researchers are more interested in the quality of a particular activity than in how often it occurs" (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990:367-368).

In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1990:17), qualitative research is broadly defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. In the case of this study, which has as its aim to determine the attitudes of teachers and parents to parent involvement, a qualitative approach is considered apt, for reasons which will be described later. At this stage it is sufficient to say that qualitative enquiry plays an important role in educational research by "...assisting us in raising new questions, by leading us to question assumptions, by cultivating an appreciation for complexity, and finally by expanding our frames of reference" (Sherman & Webb 1988:45).

Fetterman (1988:5) points out that the terms *qualitative and quantitative* are in themselves misleading. They are commonly accepted handles for both the contrasting paradigms and the methods associated with them. For this reason it is necessary to discuss qualitative research in more detail.

### 4.2.1 The origin and philosophical basis of qualitative research

Qualitative methodology has its roots in a phenomenological perspective of social reality. This means that in order to understand social reality, the researcher must understand the life-world of the individual or group from their own frame of reference (Schwartz & Jacobs

1979:5). The phenomenologically orientated researcher argues that what people believe to be true is more important than objective reality; people act on what they believe. Moreover, there are real consequences to their actions (Fetterman 1988:6).

Within the qualitative research tradition, the phenomenologist is therefore committed to understanding social phenomena from the actors' own perspective. The phenomenologist seeks understanding through qualitative methods such as participant observation; in-depth interviews; written documents, and other methods which yield descriptive data (Patton 1990:10). In contrast to a positivistic approach, the phenomenologist strives for what Max Weber called *verstehen*; understanding on a personal level the motives and beliefs behind people's actions (in Taylor & Bogdan 1984:2). This process of *verstehen* involves the need to *live through* or recreate, the experience of others within oneself (Smith 1983:7). Phenomenologists attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:31-32). Bogdan and Biklen (1982:33) elaborate on this aspect: "The meaning people give to their experience and their process of interpretation is essential and constitutive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is."

This is in essence what this study is all about: to attempt to *understand* what teachers and parents *feel* about parenting in general, and parent involvement in education in particular.

The qualitative researcher gathers *descriptive data* rather than *numerical data*; uses it inductively to lead to a conclusion based on phenomena observed, and has a descriptive outcome often involving the development of a theory (Fetterman 1988:6). The objective of the qualitative researcher is not to generalise results to other situations, but to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990:379).

#### 4.2.2 The role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Patton 1990:14). Validity in qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher. Implied in this is that the nature of the negotiated relationship between the

researcher and the researched can have a profound impact on the data and the conclusions drawn (Weinstein-Shr 1990:3460). For this reason researchers need to develop a better understanding of the skills of working with other people, not only to gain and maintain access to research situations, but also to accomplish the objectives of a particular study. As explained by Becker and Geer (1970:150): "The researcher's own actions are as much part of the study design as the research instruments used." In essence this means that the qualitative researcher is not an objective bystander as quantitative researchers profess to be. In qualitative research the researcher does not attempt to appear as an "...invisible anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding 1987:9). The *objectivity* sought after by quantitative researchers is, therefore, not pursued. Goodwood and Walker (1988:112) maintain that objectivity has become a distorted concept. They continue: "Originally it was thought to be necessary in order to reduce the impact of the researchers' bias, but it has come to imply the alienation of the 'subject' from the process of study."

In contrast to this, qualitative researchers empathise and identify with the people being studied in order to understand how they see things (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:6). Blumer (as quoted in Taylor and Bogdan 1984:6) expresses this as convictions, as "...try[ing] to catch the interpretive process by remaining aloof as so-called 'objective' observers and refusing to take the role of the acting unit, is to risk the worst kind of subjectivity."

The result of this type of objectivity is that the observer is likely to fill in the process of interpretation with his/her own convictions or preconceptions rather than observing the process as it occurs. By doing this, the researcher allows the reader to ascertain in so far the former's assumptions directed and shaped the research project (Harding 1987:7).

In qualitative research the researcher must strive to build a relationship of reciprocal trust and *rapport* with his/her subjects. The quality of the data depends on this *rapport* in so far as it increases the likelihood of participants sharing authentic knowledge of their life-world with him/her (Measor 1985:57). Moreover, qualitative researchers tend to believe that situations are complex, so they attempt to portray a multiplicity of dimensions rather than

narrowing the field; their primary goal is to *add to knowledge*, not to pass judgement on a setting (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:42).

### 4.2.3 Data collection strategies

Data are any kind of information which researchers can identify and accumulate to facilitate answers to their queries (Le Compte & Preissle 1993:158). Bogdan and Biklen (1982:73) elucidate this further stating that data include materials which researchers record, such as interview transcripts and participant observation field notes, as well as diaries, photographs, official documents and newspaper articles. However, only participant observation, unstructured interviews and focus group interviews will be discussed in the ensuing section since these are the dominant strategies employed in the current investigation (4.4 below).

#### 4.2.3.1 Observation

In essence, qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic; it occurs in the natural context, among the roleplayers who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the contours of everyday life. It contains the innate advantage of drawing the observer into the phenomenological complexity of the world, "...where connections, correlations, and causes can be witnessed as and when they unfold" (Adler & Adler 1994:378).

There are many ways of talking about the methods of gathering observational data, including participant observation; field observation; qualitative observation; direct observation, or field research (Patton 1990:203). In Gold's (1958) classic typology, as discussed in Adler and Adler (1994:379), four models through which an observer may gather data are discussed: the complete participant; the participant-as-observer; the observer-as-participant, and the complete observer. However, basically all these terms refer to the circumstances of *being in or around* an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis of that setting. For the purpose of this study, the term *participant observer* is used, mainly because it is felt that any observation will influence group dynamics of the phenomenon being observed and that the observer thus becomes a *participant* whether this was the intention or

not. It is, however, acknowledged that there is a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two extremes (Patton 1990:206).

In *participant observation* the researcher enters the world of the people he or she plans to study, gets to know, be known and trusted by them, and systematically keeps a detailed written record of what is heard and observed (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:3). In doing participant observation it is the researcher's aim to observe events while causing as little disruption as possible on the social situation. In this respect, developing trust and establishing relationships are a crucial part of a researcher's involvement in the social scene (Burgess 1984:92).

The value of being a participant observer lies in the opportunity that is available to collect rich detailed data based on observations in natural settings. Furthermore, the researcher can obtain accounts of situations in the participant's own language, which gives access to the concepts that are used in everyday life (Burgess 1984:79). Adler and Adler (1994:382) add that observation is especially valuable as an alternate source of data for enhancing cross-checking or triangulation against information gathered through other means.

#### 4.2.3.2 Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings (Fontana & Frey 1994:361). As used in research, the purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Patton (1990:278) explains the value of qualitative interviewing: it "...begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit."

The basic thrust of qualitative interviewing is to minimise the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data. It is, therefore, critical that questions should be asked in a truly open-ended fashion thereby allowing participants to respond in their own terms.

In this research use is made of the unstructured interview which employs a set of themes and topics to form questions in the course of conversation (Burgess 1984:102). The purpose of this type of interviewing is to obtain rich data to build theories that describe a setting or

explain a phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin 1995:56). This means qualitative researchers generate theory, step by step, from the examples and experiences collected during the interviews.

In qualitative interviewing the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool (Taylor & Bogdan 1984:77). For this reason "the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton (1990:279) and "the researcher's empathy, sensitivity, humour and sincerity are important tools for the research (Rubin and Rubin 1995:12)."



Researchers using interviews as a method of obtaining data need to develop certain skills and traits:

- (a) Stewart and Shamdasani (1990:79) list the following: interviewers should be genuinely interested in hearing other people's thoughts and feelings; should be expressive of their own feelings; are animated and spontaneous; are empathic; and admit their own biases. Good researchers are truly intrigued with understanding people; express thoughts clearly; and are flexible. In other words the interviewer must respond quickly and must be able to take new direction before or during sessions.
- (b) When interviewing an informant *listening* is the most important skill and should take place on three levels (Seidman 1991:56-57).
  - On the first level interviewers must listen to what the participant is saying. They must concentrate on the substance to make sure that they understand it.
  - On a second level interviewers must listen for inner voices as opposed to an outer more public voice. An outer voice is not necessary untrue; it is guarded.
  - On the third level interviewers must listen while remaining aware of the process as well as the substance. They must be conscious of time, the participant's energy levels and any non-verbal cues being offered.

- (c) In order to facilitate active listening, in addition to tape recording the interview, interviewers can take notes to help them concentrate on what the participant is saying. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:49) add that one should not *assume* that you understand what a participant means but should ask for clarification. This is of special importance in cross-cultural research, where words and symbols in the researcher's world may have different meanings in the world of the participants.
- (d) It is also suggested that interviewers should avoid asking *leading questions*. These are questions that influences the direction the response will take, by the wording, syntax or intonation of the question. Krueger (1988:61) adds that the asking of dichotomous questions, in which a simple yes or no answer can be given, should be avoided. They seem appealing because they are simple, easy to ask, and often used in social situations. In in-depth interviews, the *yes-no question* usually does not evoke the desired discussion and also tends to elicit ambiguous responses.
- (e) For all the above reasons, most qualitative researchers suggest open-ended questions. These open-ended questions provide an opportunity for the respondent to answer from a variety of dimensions. The answer is not implied and the type of manner of response is not suggested (Krueger 1988:60).
- (f) The interviewer should also avoid reinforcing what the participant is saying either positively or negatively; neither by word nor by gesture (Seidman 1991:67). This could happen as many of our responses are unconscious habits from past social interaction, such as head nodding which may be seen to signify agreement, or short verbal responses (such as ...uh...uh) which may also be thought to signify agreement (Krueger 1988:84). Moreover, researchers must avoid responses such as: 'correct', 'that's good', 'excellent', because they imply judgement about the quality of the comment.
- (g) It is also important for researchers to be aware of non-verbal communication. Social and behavioural scientists have reported at length on the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication. While recording the words of participants it is important

that the researcher does not overlook the nonverbal forms of communication (Patton 1990:229). These should be recorded in the field notes that are taken.

- (h) The researcher/interviewer should also keep the informant focused and ask for concrete detail. Although the interviewer should avoid a power struggle, he/she needs to exercise enough control of the process so that participants respect the structure and purpose of the interview (Seidman 1991:65). Bogdan and Biklen (1982:136) do, however, warn that when the interviewer controls the content too rigidly the subject cannot tell his/her story personally and in their own words, which means that the interview falls out of the qualitative range of interviewing.
- (i) In most interviews, use is made of an interview guide which serves as a guideline for the basic structure of the interview. Seidman (1991:69) warns that interviewers using a guide must avoid manipulating their participants to respond to it. On the other hand, Patton (1990:283) explains that the advantage of an interview guide, is that it makes sure that the interviewer has carefully decided how best to use the limited time available in an interview situation. It also ensures that the main areas which need to be explored are covered in the interview. At no time should the interview guide dictate the whole course of the interview.

#### 4.2.3.3 *Focus group interviews*

The use of group interviews is not meant to replace individual interviewing, but is an option that deserves consideration because it can provide another level of data gathering or perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviews (Fontana & Frey 1994:364).

The focus group is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition and procedures (Krueger 1988:18). The size of the group varies between seven and ten people, but can be as few as four or as many as twelve (Krueger 1988:27). However, Burgess (1984:117-118) discusses the viability of using a group of only three participants. All

members of a focus group should be made to feel that their presence and opinion is not only valued, but also necessary for the success of the group (Stewart & Shambasani 1990:94).

Lofland and Lofland (1984:14) suggest group interviews as a supplement to the traditional face-to face individual interviews, as it can stimulate recall and opinion elaboration. It can also serve to assist the respondents to re-evaluate a previous position or statement that is in need of 'amplification, amendment or contradiction.' This can bring the researcher closer to the "truth" by the addition of embellishing interpretive data. Moreover, groups are not just a convenient way to accumulate the individual knowledge of their members; they give rise, synergistically, to insights and solutions that would not come about without them (Patton 1990:17).

Often a major part of research is to learn more about the range of opinions of experiences that people have. Focus groups have a strong advantage here, because the interaction in the group can provide an explicit basis for exploring this issue. Moreover, group situations may encourage participants to disclose behaviour and attitudes that they might not consciously reveal in an individual interview situation (Foch-Lyon & Trost 1981:445). This may occur because participants feel more comfortable and secure in the company of people who share similar opinions, attitudes, and behaviour or simply because they get carried away.

The skills required of a group interviewer are not significantly different from those needed by an interviewer of individuals. However, in group interviews, the interviewer must simultaneously concentrate on the script of questions and also be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction (Fontana & Frey 1994:365).

Group interviews can also be used for *triangulation purposes* or employed in conjunction with other data gathering techniques (Fontana & Frey 1994:365). Group interviews will, on the one hand, triangulate the data of formal methodological techniques by adding to them the human element of the voices of multiple subjects. On the other hand, group interviews triangulate with the cross-referenced multiple opinions stemming from its group nature, lending methodological rigor to the one-on-one interpretive nature of field interviews and ethnographic reports (Frey & Fontana 1993:24). From a communication perspective, focus

group methodology has a degree of external validity based on the fact that focus groups are grounded in the "...human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups" (Seidman 1991:197).

As with the individual interview, an interview guide is also suggested for focus group interviews for the same reasons as discussed. Likewise, the focus group interview is audio-taped and then transcribed.

#### 4.2.4 Data analysis

There are many different styles of qualitative research and there are a variety of ways of handling and analysing data (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:146). For example, the typology of research purposes: basic research; applied research; summative evaluation research; formative evaluation and action research will have an effect on the analysis and presentation of findings (Patton 1990:372-373). Likewise, the method used, i.e. participant observation, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, or a combination of methods will also influence data analysis and presentation.

The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings. The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings (Patton 1990:371). In other words one cannot merely *describe* what you saw or *summarise* what you hear; it has to be interpreted (LeCompte & Preissle 1993:267). The problem is "...we have few agreed on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness" (Miles & Huberman 1984:16). Taylor and Bogdan (1984:129) endorse the viewpoint that all "...researchers develop their own ways of analysing qualitative data."

Data analysis is a 'dynamic and creative process' (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984:130). Bogdan and Biklen (1982:145) see data analysis as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts; field notes; other materials which were accumulated by the researcher to increase his/her understanding of them, and which enable the researcher to

present that which was discovered to others. Although this analysis is complicated, it is a process that can be broken down into stages which may include the following:

#### 4.2.4.1 *Organising the data*

The data generated by qualitative methods are usually voluminous (Patton 1990:379). Organising all this material may be a most daunting task, therefore Fetterman (1990:229) suggests 'data reduction' and explains that it is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the raw data. Other authors (to be discussed below) refer to this process as '*coding*'.

#### 4.2.4.2 *Coding of data*

Strauss and Corbin (1990:57) describe coding as the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualised and re-compiled into new units. This process includes:

- (a) **Conceptualising of data.** Strauss and Corbin (1990:63) describe *conceptualising* of data as the first step in analysis and explain this 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 represents a phenomenon.

- (b) **Categorising of data.** The next step is seen as *categorising*, which is the process of grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena (Strauss & Corbin 1990:65). Taylor and Bogdan (1984:137-138) propose the following steps in categorising qualitative data:

- Develop coding categories. This entails listing every theme, concept, interpretation, typology and proposition identified or developed during the initial analysis.

- Code all the data. This means coding all field notes, transcripts, documents or other materials.
- Sort the data into the coding categories. This is seen as being a non-interpretive mechanical operation.
- See what data are left out, keeping in mind, however, that no study uses all the data that are collected.
- Refine the analysis.

Different authors use different words to refer to the above process. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:156), for example, refer to this process as developing coding categories. Patton (1990:381) uses the notion of 'content analysis' which he defines as the process of identifying, coding, and categorising the primary patterns in the data.

(c) **Axial coding.** The former steps are followed by axial coding, which Strauss and Corbin (1990:96) define 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 a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/intentional strategies and consequences.

Research results are usually written up according to key themes or hypotheses, supported and illuminated by the informants' own quotes (Powney & Watts 1987:174).

#### 4.2.5 The generation of grounded theory

One of the last steps in qualitative research is the task of integrating the categories to form a *grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin 1990:117). Integration is not much different than axial

coding; "[i]t is just done at a higher more abstract level of analysis". Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) elaborate, yet further on grounded theory:

...[it] is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon.

Vis-a-vis quantitative research, qualitative research moves from research to theory. This inductive mode of research, derives from the material collected during the research process. One does not begin with a hypothesis and then endeavour to prove it; one begins with an area of study and theory relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin 1990:23). The resultant theory provides a new way of understanding the social situations from which the theory was generated (Hutchinson 1988:124). Put in another way: theory developed in this way, emerges from the bottom up, from many different pieces of collected evidence that are integrated (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:29). In this context, theory is regarded as a developing entity which is generated and developed from data, rather than a perfected product which precedes substantive work (Stanley & Wise 1979:359). Thus it results in an upward epistemological spiral.

In qualitative research data are, therefore, not collected with the aim of supporting or refuting hypotheses, such as in quantitative work, neither are research questions framed in forms of hypotheses (Lemmer 1989:131). While qualitative researchers may develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:2). Instead hypotheses are generated during the collection and analysis of data (Condrin 1975:85). For this reason, qualitative research is considered especially valuable in exploring new areas of investigation, where gaps in knowledge exist, as an initial step prior to the testing of hypotheses (Carey 1984:66). This is also applicable to the present study.

In conclusion it is beyond dispute that grounded theory offers a systematic method by which to study the richness and diversity of human experience, and to generate relevant plausible

theory which can be used to understand the contextual reality of social behaviour (Hutchinson 1988:127). Lemmer (1992:239) adds that in this way the philosophical and methodological underpinning of the qualitative approach can be systematised.

#### 4.2.6 Validity and reliability in qualitative research

Validity and reliability of research is crucial in all social research regardless of disciplines and the methods employed (Shimahara 1988:86). While reliability is concerned with the replicability of research findings, validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings (LeCompte & Goetz 1982:32).

Measures to enhance *reliability* involve a complete description of the research process so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedures in compatible settings. Shimahara (1988:87) states that this includes the following: a delineation of the physical, cultural, and social context of the study; a statement of the researcher's role in the research setting; an accurate description of the conceptual framework of research; and a complete description of data collected and analysed.

Deutscher (1973:41) is, however, of the opinion that reliability has been overemphasised in social research:

We concentrate on consistency without much concern about whether we are right or wrong. As a consequence we may have been learning a great deal about how to pursue an incorrect course with a maximum of precision.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993:46) are of the opinion that one should rather speak of *translatability* and that this assures that research methods, analytic categories and characteristics of phenomena and groups are identified so explicitly that comparisons can be conducted confidently and used meaningfully across groups and disciplines.

Establishing *validity* requires determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and whether constructs devised by researchers represent or

measure the categories of experience that occur (LeCompte & Goetz 1982:32). One way of increasing validity is through *triangulation* (Measor 1985:73). Mathison (1988:13) explains this concept as "[g]ood research practice [which] obliges the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use *multiple methods*, *data sources*, and *researchers* to enhance the validity of research findings [brackets and italics - JNvW].

Patton (1990:187) refers to four basic types of triangulation:

- (i) **Data triangulation:** the use of a *variety of data sources* in a study. Hutchinson (1988:131) also states that a grounded theorist looks for contradictory data by searching out and investigating unusual circumstances and negative cases. Data are compared and contrasted again and again, thus providing a check on validity.
- (ii) **Investigator triangulation:** the use of *several different researchers* or evaluators. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:68) state that triangulation may also be used as a way of guarding against researcher bias and checking out accounts from different informants.
- (iii) **Theory triangulation:** the use of *multiple perspectives* to interpret a single set of data. Strauss and Corbin (1990:52) add that one can refer to the literature in appropriate places to validate the accuracy of one's findings.
- (iv) **Methodological triangulation:** the use of *multiple methods* to study a single problem or programme.

Obviously not all the types of triangulation need be done, only the amount needed to satisfy the researcher that the results of the research are valid.

#### 4.2.7 Ethical considerations in qualitative research

The qualitative researcher needs to observe or interview individuals or groups, in order to collect the data on the phenomena being studied. Data will simultaneously or subsequently be analysed and the findings presented in a predetermined way. All this implies that certain

ethical principles need to be addressed concerning the informants used in any research project. Bogdan and Biklen (1982:50) list the following:

- The informants' identities should be protected so that the information collected does not embarrass or in any other way harm them.
- Informants should be treated with respect and their cooperation in the research sought. Researchers should neither lie to participants nor record conversations on hidden mechanical devices. Most authors do however feel that a broad outline of what one is researching is sufficient; too much information can cloud the interview or observed behaviour. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:25) elaborate: "Our own approach is to be truthful, but vague and imprecise."
- The terms of agreement should be made clear prior to the research. If the results are to be used solely for a thesis, this should be stated, if there is, however, the possibility that an article may be published on the research results, this must be agreed upon by the informant(s).
- The researcher must undertake to write up and report his/her findings truthfully, which may be difficult if the researcher does not like the conclusion for ideological or other reasons, or pressure is brought to bear on the researcher by persons/institutions who do not agree with the conclusions.

In summary it can be stated that the researcher's obligation to the researched should be: truthfulness; the honouring of confidences; scientific objectivity; and honest reporting (Fichter & Kolb 1970:263).

### **4.3 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY FOR THE PRESENT STUDY**

Since this research aims at elucidating parents' and teachers' experience of parent involvement, as well the context in which this takes place, it is critical that a methodological perspective be adopted which will allow the findings to develop from the data itself - rather

than from the preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed (Filstead 1970:6).



#### 4.3.1 Technical and epistemological considerations

The consideration of design alternatives leads directly to considerations of the relative strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative data (Patton 1990:13). Philosophers of science and methodologist have long been engaged in an epistemological debate about how best to conduct research. This debate has centred on the relative value of two fundamentally different and competing enquiry paradigms:

- logical-positivism, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalisations;
- phenomenological enquiry, using qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context specific settings (Patton 1990:37).

Questions relating to the merits of a quantitative versus a qualitative approach, reveals a tendency for proponents on either side to support a technical or an epistemological position (Bryman 1984:75).

Patton (1990:38) prefers a pragmatic approach, advocating a *paradigm of choice*, which rejects methodological orthodoxy in favour of *methodological appropriateness* as the primary criteria for judging methodological quality. The issue then becomes not whether one has uniformly adhered to prescribed canons of either logical-positivism or phenomenology, but whether one has made sensible decisions on method, given the purpose of enquiry, the questions being investigated, and the resources available (Patton 1990:39). In this vein Scott (1985:82) confirms this truism, "...we should use the methodology which seem appropriate to the context and the questions which we are asking." Moreover, choice of one method should not exclude the possible use of other techniques, if the occasion should so demand.

On the opposite side of the continuum, other writers maintain that the consideration underpinning the choice of method is indeed political and cannot be resolved without scrutinising underlying methodological and epistemological assumptions (Bryman 1984:75). Such writers purport that research methods ultimately reflect an undeniable epistemological position on behalf of the research and must be considered (Lemmer 1989:144). In other words when we speak of 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' methodologies, we are, in actual fact speaking of an inter-related set of assumptions about the social world which are philosophical, ideological and epistemological (Rist 1977:43). They encompass more than simply data collection techniques. Rist (1977:43) elaborates further: "All knowledge is social. The methods one employs to articulate knowledge of reality necessarily flows from beliefs and values one holds about the very nature of reality."

The paradigm governing quantitative methodologies is one derived from the natural sciences (Rist 1977:44). In contrast, qualitative methodology is founded in the broad research tradition known as the humanistic tradition, and its philosophical roots are typically attributed to phenomenology. The basic premise of this approach is the concept *verstehen* or contextual understanding. This 'inner understanding' enables a comprehension of human behaviour in greater depth than is possible from the study of surface behaviour, which is the focus of quantitative methodologies (Rist 1977:44). Cohen and Manion (1989:27) maintains that "...understanding of the individual's interpretation of the world around him has to come from the inside, not the outside."

Choosing methods is, therefore, not solely a pragmatic question of fitting research techniques to a problem as the pragmatists suggest. Neither is the choice of method as rigorously determined by the choice of paradigm as the purists suggest (Firestone 1987:20). There are in fact a number of reasons for selecting a methodological approach, but one's decision often expresses values about what the world is like, how one ought to understand it, and what the most important threats to that understanding are. In this study, both technical and epistemological considerations play a role in this investigator's choice of methodology.

### 4.3.2 Attributes of a qualitative methodology which makes it suitable for this research

The problem of this research is to determine the extent of parent involvement within the context of a black urban community. The lack of clarity regarding the problem, indicates the need for an exploratory research methodology which would enable the problems explored and the questions asked to become more specific as the study progresses. After all it is the unique demands of the problem which indicate the method rather than the method which limits the problem (Romanyshyn 1971:107).

The characteristics of qualitative research, such as the following, make it a particularly appropriate methodology for this research.

#### 4.3.2.1 *The researcher works in natural settings*

For many qualitative researchers the main object is to focus on naturally occurring ordinary events, in natural settings, so that they have "...a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (Miles & Huberman 1994:10). Qualitative researchers therefore study qualities or entities and seek to understand them in a particular context (Smith 1987:174). Edson (1988:46) concurs: "Qualitative research is context specific, that is it posits that ideas, people and events cannot be understood if isolated from their context."

This suggests a preference for participant observation, rather than experiments under artificial conditions; a preference for informal and less standardised interviews, rather than formal questionnaires (Vulliamy, Lewin & Stephens 1990:11). These are the methods employed in this research.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Qualitative research is holistic*

Qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it attempts to provide a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationship of causes and consequences that affect human behaviour (Vulliamy et al 1990:11). This emphasis on holistic understanding in qualitative methods is in sharp contrast to the logic and procedures of much evaluation done in a

quantitative-experimental tradition (Patton 1990:49). Deutscher, as quoted in Patton (1990:51), adds the criticism that despite the totality of our personal experience as living, working human beings, researchers have focused on the parts, to the virtual exclusion of the whole. In this research a holistic approach is followed as parent involvement is examined both in context, as well as against the background of black urbanisation and educational provision in townships.

#### *4.3.2.3 Qualitative research is hypothesis-generating*

Rather than testing preconceived hypotheses qualitative research aims to generate hypotheses and theories from the data that emerge, in an attempt to avoid the imposition of a previous and possibly inappropriate frame of reference on the subjects of the research (Vulliamy et al 1990:11). Researchers can, therefore, formulate and reformulate their work and may be less committed to perspectives which may have been misconceptualised at the beginning of a project (Burgess 1985:8). This makes a qualitative approach particularly appropriate for an exploratory study in which the salient issues are not sufficiently clearly visible at the onset (Hendry 1996:15), as is the case in this research.

#### *4.3.2.4 Qualitative data is descriptive*

Qualitative data is usually in the form of words rather than numbers, and is said to be a detailed, thick description, using direct quotations to capture people's personal perspectives and experiences (Patton 1990:40). The written results contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. Moreover, a qualitative research approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:28). This approach was followed in the present research.

#### *4.3.2.5 Qualitative research is concerned with process rather than outcomes*

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the process whereby certain behaviour is realised rather than merely with outcomes of behaviour (Lemmer 1992:293). Vulliamy et al (1990:11) supports this by saying that by focusing on the process of social interaction, qualitative research involves the ongoing collection of data. In this sense, qualitative enquiry is not merely a search for knowledge for knowledge's sake, but a search for the significance of knowledge (Edson 1988:46). This approach was also followed in this research.

#### *4.3.2.6 Data are analysed inductively*

Qualitative researchers do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:29). This means that qualitative researchers develop concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in the data - rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypothesis or theories (Bogdan & Biklen 1984:5).

In the case of this research, the interactive form of the research design - interviews and observation - lends itself to inductive logic. This means that the problem is most clearly stated after much data collection and preliminary analysis (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:91-93).

#### *4.3.2.7 Small samples are used*

Although qualitative research does not exclude the use of large samples, most qualitative research studies use small samples since such research focuses on the detail and quality of an individual or small group's experience (Lemmer 1992:294). Validity depends not so much upon the number of cases studied as upon the degree to which an informant faithfully represents a certain cultural experience (Lofland & Lofland 1984:62). This characteristic is also applicable to the present study. By using qualitative research, the outside world of the formalised education system is related to the inside world of the participants and the

complexities of situations, processes and action and interactions that are not shown by large scale statistical surveys or macro studies of problems within teaching (Lemmer 1992:294). Moreover, careful and deliberate selection of participants provides information-rich cases for study-in-depth (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990:374). This was also done in this research.

#### *4.3.2.8 Qualitative researchers try to understand people from their own frame of reference*

Central to the phenomenological perspective (and hence qualitative research), is trying to understand reality as others experience it. Smith and Heshusius (1986:5) refer to this as focusing on the "...products of the human mind, with all its subjectivity, emotions, and values." Qualitative researchers empathise and identify with the people they study in order to understand how they see things (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:6). The researcher therefore includes personal experience and empathetic insight as part of the relevant data, while taking a neutral non-judgemental stance toward whatever content may emerge. As Taylor and Bogdan (1984:6) put it: "The researcher seeks not 'truth' or 'morality' but rather a detailed understanding of other people's perspectives."

This is of particular importance when doing cross-cultural research (such as is the case in the present study ) as gaps and misfits can occur when models generated in Western Societies are grafted into societies with different cultural infra-structures (LeCompte and Preissle 1993:18). This is one of the main reasons for the choice of a qualitative methodology in the present study.

#### **4.3.3 Rationale for the choice of data collection strategies**

Ideally, qualitative research aims at understanding and explicating the experience of being human, without the researcher in any way predetermining the quality of the exposition of that experience. However, in practice the researcher has to prescribe some sort of boundaries into our vast continuum of lived experiences so as to be able to focus on a particular phenomenon in a particular context (Euvard 1994:74). In this research use was made of observation, as well as individual and focus group interviews to study parent involvement within the context of a black urban community.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Observation*

To investigate and clarify school context, observation was used to study the principal, the teachers and pupils, and any parent present, in different settings within the school. The focus of such observations was to get a general *feel* of the school and teaching practices. This was thought to be necessary since schools and school contexts may be regarded as cultural sites in which the school as an organisation and its mores, rituals and practices are drawn from, and is influenced by, the beliefs and perceptions of those who belong to it (Duignan, in Newport 1994:186). In other words, the beliefs and practices associated with parent involvement constructed by teachers and parents is influenced by the beliefs and norms embodied in a school's culture. The present study was interested in viewing each participating school as a *separate cultural site* and the researcher, therefore, spent some time in each school merely observing what was taking place.

Secondly, it has been taken into account that although interviews present conceptions and perceptions of the people being interviewed, and that those understandings constitute important information, it is still imperative for the researcher to keep in mind that interviewees are always reporting selective perceptions (Patton 1990:205). Thus by making their own perceptions part of the available data, researchers are able to present a more comprehensive view of the context being studied. Moreover, the observer assimilates information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be recorded even in the most detailed field notes.

Finally, since this researcher only has experience of schooling for white population groups, it was obvious that observation could facilitate understanding the situation in black urban schools, and contribute in overcoming ethnic and racial barriers.

#### 4.3.3.2 *Interviews*

The belief that "...through interaction the individual constructs meaning" (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:31), led to me to decide to choose interviews (both individual and focus group interviews) as the most appropriate method to gather data.

The epistemic value of a qualitative investigation is accessed by means of the narration of the participant's feelings, ideals, beliefs, thoughts, and actions. The objective of the qualitative researcher is, therefore, not to extrapolate insights and generalise these results to other situations, but to *extend understanding and insights* within the context of a particular situation (Fraenkel & Wallen 1990:379). Since the understanding of parent involvement within the context of a black urban community is the focus of this research, interviews with *role players* was judged to be of prime importance.

Unstructured interviews were used to elicit data from the principals of the participating schools. This agrees with the premise that unstructured interviews are preferable when the researcher is not sure which are the essential and appropriate questions to ask, but when he/she is prepared to depend on his/her capacity to recognise significant data on appearance (Newport 1994:197).

In this research principals were seen as *key-informants*; individuals who "...possess special knowledge, status, or communication skills" and who are willing to share this with the interviewer (LeCompte and Preissle 1993:166). Principals were elected also because of the important role they play in defining school policy on parent involvement. Moreover, on account of the power structure in schools, the principal can erect barriers to parent involvement, even if individual teachers wish to work with parents (Newport 1994:186). Principals were not included in the focus group interviews *with teachers* since this might have inhibited the discussion.

An interview guide was used in the interviews with principals (cf appendix at end of this volume). This guide was not seen as a structured schedule or protocol, but rather as a list of general areas to be covered with each informant. In the interview situation, the researcher decided how to phrase questions and when to ask them as the interviews developed (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:92).

Such an unstructured interview is rarely conducted in isolation; it is often part of a broader programme of research and "...draws on the knowledge that the researcher has of a social

situation" (Burgess 1984:106). In this study the researcher's own knowledge of parenting, parent involvement and the situation in townships facilitated discussions with the participants.

All interviews were audio taped and later transcribed (4.4.5 below and Chapter 5).

#### 4.3.3.3 *Focus group interviews*

The primary technique of data gathering was focus group interviews with teachers and parents, at three primary schools in Mamelodi. The focus group was used as the method of data collection because it is recognised as being "...helpful in answering questions of *how* and, in particular, *why* people behave as they do" (Floch-Lyon & Trost 1981:92).

It is crucial that focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews, by means of the explicit use of the group interaction as research data (Kritzinger 1994:103).

When conducted in a non-threatening and lenient manner, focus group interviews are especially useful when working with categories of people who have limited power and influence in life in general (Morgan and Krueger 1993:15). Thus focus group interviews are particularly suitable in South African circumstances where democracy has only recently been extended to the majority of the people. Moreover, the possibility that black parents and grandparents in a township setting would feel intimidated when questioned by a white academic decided my choice of focus group interviews. Morgan and Spanish (1984:260) also maintain that focus group discussions offer informants the opportunity to influence the discussion arena as they can decide what information to present and what not to present.

The focus group is especially well-suited to explore the attitudes and experiences of informants, which makes it particularly appropriate for this research (cf also Morgan & Spanish 1984:260). Moreover, by using interviews instead of the short answer questionnaires used in the preliminary investigation, the researcher maximised the opportunity to probe below the superficial responses characterising the primary questionnaire. Focus group interviews also provided ongoing opportunities to reveal beliefs held unconsciously.

Although the groups used in this study were smaller than the norms sometimes laid down for dynamic interaction (Foch-Lyon & Trost 1981:94), an active dialogue was able to be maintained at all times owing to the interest in the topic under discussion. All the groups did, however, fall within the size range suggested by Morgan and Spanish (1984:253).

In the focus group interviews with parents and with teachers the discussions were guided by means of an *agenda*; however, the interview guides were merely guidelines (cf appendix), and were not held onto rigidly so as to exclude the areas that interviewees would identify as being of relevance. The interviews took the form of a conversation, with the interviewees being encouraged to talk without restraint, rather than a dialogue of questions and answers.

All focus group interviews were audio taped with the informants' permission. This was done to ensure that data were accurately acquired, to avoid the problem of selective hearing and note taking and to minimise distortion and omission in transcribing. This also freed me from having to take notes during the interview and thus allowed my full attention to be directed to the interviewees and the ongoing dialogue. This allowed me to participate fully in the conversation, to pose particular questions on topics that had not been covered or needed developing (cf also Burgess 1984:111).

A final reason for recording interviews was to create a public record of the data so that other researchers might have access to it.

#### **4.4 THE DESIGN OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

The present investigation is qualitative by nature, and interpretive in design, within the ethnographic tradition of research (Guba & Lincoln 1985). It also needs to be noted that the present research is not concerned with generalisability to a wider population but with describing and attempting to explain the phenomena of the teachers' and parents' construction of beliefs and practices related to parent involvement in their specific contexts.

#### 4.4.1 Statement of subjectivity

Sherman and Webb (1988:178) warn that qualitative research cannot be carried out by people who see themselves as detached, neutral observers, concerned with the kinds of observation, measurement and prediction that are presumed to be unbiased and unaffected by the enquirer's vantage point or location in the world. In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument (Patton 1990:14), which means that "...what the researcher is influences and maybe determines the kind of data he or she receives" (Measor 1985:74). This means the characteristics of the researcher's own background could constitute important points of difference between the researcher and his/her subjects, thus presenting a barrier to the acquiring of authentic data by influencing the kind and quality of data collected (Lofland & Lofland 1984:16). The converse is also true since in other instances the researcher's background could facilitate acquiring data. It is important for all qualitative researchers to note background characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, occupation, own interests, age, et cetera as possible attributes which could enhance or hinder the research.

##### 4.4.1.1 *Ethnicity and language barriers*

The researcher is a white woman doing research in black urban communities. I had already carried out a very extensive pilot study over a period of two years, before I began with the present research (cf 4.4.2 below). One of the aims of the pilot study was to enable me to become more familiar with life and schooling in a black urban community. On the other hand, cross-ethnic interviewing can sometimes be more successful than interviewing people of the same race or culture because "...interviewees strive to explain their ethnic experiences to those who do not share them" (Rubin & Rubin 1995:111). This was found to be the case in all interviews I conducted in townships.

The fact that I was not able to speak one of the black languages also presented problems. This is discussed at length in Section 4.4.4 below.

#### 4.4.1.2 Status

Heading Rubin and Rubin's (1995:114) warning that people talk differently to *ivory-tower academics*, I went to great lengths to emphasise that research was being done as part of my studies. However, I gained the impression that this somehow puzzled the participants. Therefore I added that I am a lecturer involved primarily in the training of black teachers, and wanted to gain a better understand of township communities and schools. This explanation was more readily accepted by both teachers and parents and "...defined a mutually acceptable research role" (Rubin & Rubin 1995:114).

According to Fontana and Frey (1994:370), the emphasis in interviewing is shifting to allow the development of closer relationship between interviewer and respondent, attempting to minimise status differences and doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing. Interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings. Methodologically, this newer approach provides a greater spectrum, of responses and a greater insight into participants by giving them some control over the sequence and the language of the interview (Fontana & Frey 1994:370). This was the approach which I adopted.

#### 4.4.1.3 Gender

Parent involvement, the focus of this research, is commonly associated with women. Thus, being a women could have had a positive effect on eliciting information. Although, even where men were included in focus groups, the question of gender never seemed to have an inhibiting effect on any of the discussions. Four male teachers/principals, and three fathers/grandfathers were interviewed. Although the interviewees were *city dwellers*, I dressed conservatively, in respect of the fact that some traditional African men do not approve of women wearing slacks. Obviously, general courtesy and respect was extended to all participants.

#### 4.4.1.4 Parenthood

As a mother of two daughters (both already out of school), and someone who was always actively involved in the PTA's of her children's schools, I shared many of the experiences with the participants. This is considered a definite advantage in the establishment of a relationship with informants and may have contributed to eliciting valid responses from the informants. This *rapport* was established in spite of the differences in circumstances under which the interviewer and interviewees raised their children. This *rapport* could be because all parents share a common concern about the well-being of their children and their role in assisting the child to realise a better future.

#### 4.4.2 Background to the present research

In 1994 I coordinated a team which presented parent involvement programmes to teachers in two townships near Pretoria (ie the pilot study mentioned in 3.5.4 above). Prior to the development of the training course, meetings were held with various school principals, school inspectors, officials of the former Department of Education and Training, as well as academics, to discuss the needs and problems in black urban schools. After finalising the content, the training course was presented to the staff of two schools in Atteridgeville in June 1994. In August 1994 the training course was attended by 243 teachers from eleven schools in Mamelodi. All the teachers in Mamelodi were asked to complete a questionnaire before the start of the training programme. Examples of questions asked include:

- How involved are parents in your school?
- What do you know about parent involvement?
- What is your personal experience of parent involvement?
- What are the obstacles to parent involvement in your community?

In addition focus group interviews were conducted with two groups of parents. The data were analysed by myself.

In March/April 1995, the eleven schools in Mamelodi, which had been part of the teacher training programme, were visited. Field notes were made of these visits and the interviews with the principals. During these visits the success of the training programme was assessed by asking a number of teachers in each school to complete a questionnaire. In total, 67 questionnaires were completed. In addition, 30 primary school children and 79 secondary school students answered questions about their attitudes to parent involvement in schools. Once again I analysed the data.

The use made of questionnaires implied that there was no opportunity to pursue any aspects mentioned by teachers. On the other hand, the research involved a large sample and was conducted in the same community of the present research. It can, therefore, be used as a means of crosschecking the findings of the present study in the following ways:

- providing information on parent involvement over a period of time;
- guiding the researcher in the type of questions which need to be asked, and what to be aware of when observing the situation in a school;
- providing *multiple voices* to describe parent involvement and the problems of the community;
- posing a contrast to the situation immediately following the elections in 1994 and the situation two years later (1996);
- and by giving me a better understanding of life in a black urban township, as well as the educational provision for the children in that community.

The research findings from the pilot study provides an opportunity for triangulation from one time period to another (cf 4.4.8.4 below).

#### 4.4.3 Negotiation of access and orientation

One of the most important tasks for a researcher is the selection of educational settings and negotiation of access to the participants (Measor 1985:55). In this research it was decided to do research in primary schools, in the township of Mamelodi (cf 4.4.3.1 & 4.4.3.2).

In many instances, such as in the present study, access is facilitated by a *gate-keeper* (Lofland & Lofland 1984:25). In this study Mr Thomas Kekana, formerly of the Department of Education, and long-time resident of Mamelodi, identified three primary schools, which he judged to be both accessible and willing to be used in the study. The researcher visited all three schools to discuss the proposed study, and to negotiate terms of access. It was suggested that all staff members be orientated to the purpose of the study, requirements and time schedule involved, and that four teacher volunteers be solicited for the focus group interviews. I emphasised emphatically that my role was one of independent investigator, and that my interest had no connection with any education system or government agency. The principal and teachers were also asked to suggest parents who might be approached to be part of a focus group interview and that the purpose of the research should also be explained to them. Finally, the issue of ownership and anonymity of data in terms of future publications was discussed with all participants, and rules for preservation of confidentiality agreed upon. The results of this approach and the practical implications are discussed below.

##### 4.4.3.1 *Decision to do research in Mamelodi*

Mamelodi is a township, situated to the east of Pretoria, which originated to accommodate black workers employed in white Pretoria, during the apartheid era. In essence, Mamelodi is similar to the townships discussed in Chapter 3.

The inhabitants of Mamelodi belong mainly to the Zulu, Northern Sotho (Pedi), Tsonga and Tswana ethnic groups. People living in council houses tend to be grouped in ethnically defined neighbourhoods, a legacy of the apartheid era. In contrast to this, people living in informal settlements and squatter camps are not ethnically divided and a variety of ethnic and language groups dwell together.

The decision to conduct the research in Mamelodi rested on my familiarity with the area. Moreover, I am known and trusted by many residents involved in education in the area. I had previously requested Mr Thomas Kekana to gain access to schools in Mamelodi, and regarded him as a reliable gatekeeper. Mamelodi is also within easy reach of Pretoria, where I reside and is also a relatively safe township to visit.

[The safety of researchers in impoverished communities is, however, not something that can be guaranteed. On one visit to Mamelodi, youths indicated that I should stop my car, suggesting there was something wrong with a front wheel. Because I had been warned that this is a frequently used ploy by delinquents, I drove on to the house of a friend, where, after inspection, it was discovered that there was nothing wrong with the car. Another researcher also conducting an investigation in schools in Mamelodi, was robbed and badly beaten when she heeded a similar ploy.]

#### *4.4.3.2 Choice of schools*

Obviously, accessibility to schools and the willingness of teachers and parents to participate, were considered of paramount importance. However, factors other than these were also considered.

In the first place, schools which had been part of the training programme in 1994 were not deemed suitable since teachers would already be conditioned to answer questions in a certain way. Secondly, this research was limited to primary schools. This was done because literature on South African schooling had indicated a breakdown in home-school relationships in black communities (cf Chapter 3) and literature on parent involvement indicates a decrease in parent involvement as a child gets older (cf Chapter 2). This suggests that a study of parent involvement in black communities will probable yield far less if conducted in secondary schools.

Finally, it was necessary to select schools where the atmosphere was conducive to research, since such an atmosphere is not always a sine qua non. This presented some problems. One school originally chosen by the gate-keeper had recent difficulties with staff at the time of

the investigation. The previous principal had been forced to leave the school due to staff dissatisfaction with the former's appointment. The acting head was visibly uneasy during my introduction by Mr Kekana and my explanation of the proposed research. To prevent any problems, it was suggested that the principal should speak to the staff before committing herself to the research. Although she gave me permission to do research at the school later, she mentioned that certain the staff felt that I was there to 'spy' on them. I decided that the risk of causing further trouble at the school was too great, and another school was identified.

The practical implementation of the data gathering also presented problems. At one stage a protest march by members of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) occurred. I was advised that criminal elements often misused the resulting disruption and that my safety in the area could not be guaranteed. At another time a school had a show presented by a visiting magician, and I was not allowed there. On another occasion, a principal requested me to postpone my visit as she had "a difficult form to fill in." In another instance I was advised that the last Friday of the month was unsuitable for visiting the school as "staff usually left early." A follow-up visit to a school also had to be cancelled because of the tension which *right-sizing* was causing among the staff. The latter refers to the government policy whereby a teacher-pupil ration of 1:40 in primary schools is currently being implemented (cf 3.4.1 above), resulting in the transferral of some staff to other schools, possibly to another area.

Particulars of the three schools selected are provided in Table 4.1:

TABLE 4.1

	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Medium of instruction	N. Sotho	Zulu	Zulu N. Sotho Tsonga
Number of pupils	735	800	2138 (in two sessions: the first from 08:00 - 11:30; the second from 12:00-16:00)
Number of teachers	22	21	37 (in two sessions)
Number of classrooms	20	20	17 (plus storeroom)
Staff room	No	Yes	No
Principal's office	Yes	Yes	No
Admin. Staff	1	2	0
Telephone	Yes	Yes	No
Photocopier	Yes	Yes	No
Computers	None	None	None

#### 4.4.3.3 *Locating and selecting informants*

The number of teachers and the number of parents selected, depends on many factors including the methodology employed and the time constraints put on the research. The qualitative method of in-depth and focus group interviewing produces a vast amount of very detailed information from intensive periods of talk (Patton 1990:371). This factor, together

with the extensive research already done during 1994 and 1995, was considered and the present research restricted to the following: at each of the three schools an in-depth interview was conducted with the principal, as well as one focus group interview with teachers of the school and also one focus group interview with parents of the school. Thus I decided on three in-depth interviews with principals, three focus group interviews with teachers and three focus group interviews with parents (later extended to four, 4.4.4.4).

Principals, teachers and parents were asked to complete a questionnaire, prior to the interview. To avoid the embarrassment of parents who are illiterate or semi-literate, I completed the questionnaire with the help of these parent(s); or posed questions, and then recorded the answers. The questionnaire was used to gather data about the teachers' and parents': personal and professional circumstances; academic record; marital status; number of children; et cetera. (The questionnaire completed by principals, teachers and parents are included as appendices, at the back of this volume.)

To gain the teachers' and parents' confidence and trust, I explained that the research was not a *fact-finding* exercise, but an attempt to understand schooling and parent involvement, within the context of a black urban community. It was suggested that the present study might help researchers to better understand some of the issues and concerns of teachers and parents. Thus there was some attempt to try and share the ownership of the study with the informants.

The participants were also asked to sign a letter of consent (included in the appendix at the back of this volume), indicating their approval that verbatim transcripts be made of material recorded during the interviews, but with the assurance that the anonymity of both school and individual would be maintained.



#### 4.4.4 Data gathering and problems encountered

The complexity and variability of human life in its natural habitat mandates that those who study it, must collect rich and diverse data on whatever they study (LeCompte and Preissle 1984:158). This is one reason why more than one data collection strategy was used in this research.

#### 4.4.4.1 *Observation in schools*

During August and September 1996, I spent time as an observer in each of the three schools. I observed the children cleaning the school; meeting for assembly; practising for a choir competition; attending lessons; receiving food during break as part of the government's feeding scheme, et cetera. Parents selling food on school premises (for own income) and helping to prepare food, were also observed. In most cases the only problem was the hospitality of the staff, who felt that I should be accompanied during my observation at all times!

I provided refreshments for the staff of all schools, used in the research, as a token of gratitude for allowing me into their classrooms and sharing some of their experiences. Conversations during 'tea-time' were noted as fully as possible and proved to be a rich source of information.

#### 4.4.4.2 *Interviews with principals*

Interviews with principals did not present any problems, except in one school where the principal has no telephone and where a supply of milk for the school feeding scheme valued at R3 000-R4 000 had gone missing. The interview was interrupted because the principal had to return to his own home to phone the suppliers (at his own expense) to try and sort out the problem. Eventually the interrupted discussion was continued with the Head of Department at the school.

#### 4.4.4.3 *Focus group interviews with teachers*

On the whole focus group interviews proceeded smoothly. The teachers were able to speak English, with only occasional lapses into the local vernacular. When this occurred they translated what they said for my benefit. The only problem was an ethical one. Unfortunately the teachers were unwilling to be interviewed after school hours, and the researcher was acutely aware of the fact that the schooling of many children was being disrupted as a result of the interviews. I could never resolve the problem, but disrupting classes did not appear

to bother the teachers in any way, as many teachers stayed to talk to me after the interviews had been completed.

In one school, teachers asked the researcher why their particular school had been singled out for research, implying that the researcher was in some way 'spying'. I explained that many schools had already been involved in the pilot study, naming some of them, and that new schools had to be found where I would be welcome and where I could learn something. This apparently satisfied them, and they cooperated fully in the interview.

In total, eleven teachers took part in the three focus group interviews.

#### *4.4.4.4 Focus group interviews with parents*

The main problem in the focus group interviews with parents pertained to language. In previous research, I had used a translator in African townships and had found it unsatisfactory. In spite of 'training' the translator, I found that the interpreter was constantly 'explaining' the question to the interviewees, giving examples, which were then repeated by all respondents! To complicate matters, the parents, identified to take part in the present research, spoke Northern Sotho, Zulu and Tsonga respectively, making it difficult to find one person capable of translating for all groups. It was, therefore, decided to work without a translator. This, however, also proved to be difficult. At School A the three parents who participated spoke English, but became so enthused during the discussion that they switched to Northern Sotho, forgetting to translate. It was decided not to stop them, as it was judged that the loss of follow-up questions would be compensated for by the spontaneity of their discussion. A translator was asked to listen to the tape recording of the interview in conjunction with the transcription, and to then translate the parts where Sotho was spoken.

In School B it was claimed that 70 - 80 per cent of the children were living with their grandparents. Three grandparents and one parent, therefore, participated in the focus group discussion. The participants decided to speak Afrikaans, helping each other where necessary.

In School C only one Tsonga speaking parent arrived for the interview. A teacher was asked to act as translator, a task which she ostensibly did in excellent fashion.

Because only one parent had arrived for the discussion at School C, and because I was not convinced that the data were saturated, I decided to arrange another focus group interview with other parents. As working mothers had thus far not been included in any of the focus groups, I decided to ask women employed by a local supermarket to participate in a focus group interview. Permission was obtained from the manager of the supermarket and contact was made with one employee. With her help, another three more women were identified. Because of a lack of privacy at the supermarket, I brought the participants to my home where the interview was conducted. Although the gatekeeper had been asked to invite women with children in primary school, one of the four participants had a daughter at university. Although she participated in the discussion, her comments were not included in the data analysis. One of the women included in the group lives in Mamelodi, the other two in Atteridgeville.

In total, eleven parents/grandparents took part in the four interviews.

#### **4.4.5 Transcribing the data**

To facilitate analysis of the data all taped interviews were transcribed. There is, however, always the danger that transcribed words may lose some meaning as tone, volume, emotionality, and accompanying facial and body gestures (body language) and disposition cannot be portrayed. In order to minimise this loss of expression in the present study, a diary was kept to record many of these aspects, during and immediately following, the focus group interviews. Recapturing and conveying those perceived meanings to outsiders, are innate to the nature of qualitative research at the point of analysis and writing (Patton 1990:351-352).

While it is argued that only relevant materials should be completely transcribed because of the expense and time involved (Patton 1990:347), it was decided that all interview data in the present study would be transcribed to ensure that the data were fully accessible. Transcribing data is also important in ensuring reliability and validity.

#### 4.4.6 Analysis of the data

The process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings (Patton 1990:371).

Knodel (1993:44) points out that there are two basic sides to the analysis of data, a *mechanical* one and an *interpretive* one. The *mechanical* part involves physically organising and subdividing the data into meaningful segments. The *interpretive* part involves determining criteria for organising the textual data into analytically useful subdivisions (coding the data) and the subsequent search for patterns within and between these subdivisions to draw substantively meaningful conclusions (Knodel 1993:45). Schumacher and McMillan (1993:479) also maintain that "[q]ualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories."

The main form of data analysis used in the present study was that of *content analysis* (Miles & Huberman 1984, Strauss & Corbin 1990). Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data (Patton 1990:381). In this case the data consist mainly of transcribed interviews, and was analysed in order to understand parent involvement in black urban communities. Since communication is the most basic form of human interaction, it follows that the analysis of the content of this communication is a justifiable basis from which to understand human activity and behaviour.

Initially the transcripts were read over and over again in order to gain familiarity with it. Likewise, I listened to all tape recordings of the interviews, at the same time checking the accuracy of the transcriptions. At this stage the aim is to use the data 'to think with' (Newport 1994:229). One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything conspicuous stands out as interesting or puzzling. Glaser and Strauss (1967:105) describe this first phase in a similar way: "...the analyst begins by coding each incident in his data into as many categories as possible, as categories emerge or as data emerge that fit into existing categories."

In this way categories and sub-categories start emerging. The categories and subcategories were identified as natural themes, rather than on the basis of an *a priori* category system. As categories and themes emerged, they were colour coded. Each category was filed separately and data stored under these different headings.

Parent involvement in black urban townships has not been extensively researched. Moreover, most research limits parent involvement to activities relating to governance (Chisholm & Vally 1996; Maja 1993; Mkwanazi 1993, 1994). The linking of content with theory on the subject has, therefore, seldom been possible. All the theoretical discussions in the study are, therefore, grounded in the data collected and analysed. The process embodied in the research programme was one of moving between data already gathered, relevant existing theory and further data collection and analysis. This dynamic shifting between data gathering and analysis, and theorising the data, characteristic of a *grounded theory* approach to research, was central to the present study. Used in this way theory facilitates the coherence of data and enables research to go beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:30).

#### 4.4.7 Presentation of the data

A key issue already suggested in the presentation of the data is the inclusion of numerous examples of raw data and original discourse. Description is the major purpose of ethnographic type study (Patton 1990, Lincoln & Guba 1985). The collected data are organised into readable, narrative descriptions with major themes, categories and illustrative case examples extracted through content analysis.

Examples of raw data within the presentation helps to provide the opportunity for the reader to gauge the level of validity of research data (Bogdan & Biklen 1982:179). The present study follows this approach. Each issue, each inference, and each tentative conclusion is supported by reference to one or more extracts from a participant's discourse. As far as possible, in selecting the quotes, the writer has attempted to provide a balance of selections, so that no participant is over-quoted or omitted.

#### 4.4.8 Issues of reliability and validity in the present study

Measures to enhance *reliability* involve a complete description of the research process, so that independent researchers may replicate the same procedures in compatible settings (Shimahara 1988:87). Schumacher and McMillan (1993:385) add other factors to establish reliability: consistency of the researcher's interactive style; data recording; data analysis, and interpretation of participant's meaning from the data.

*Validity* is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings and can be divided into internal and external validity. *External validity* refers to the degree to which findings can be generalised to the population from which the participants were drawn (LeCompte & Goetz 1982:32). The present study is not concerned with generalisation or prediction, therefore external validity is not an issue. *Internal validity* is the degree to which research findings can be distorted by extraneous factors and is an important consideration in this research. High validity depends on the data collection and analysis techniques used (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:391).

Issues of reliability and validity applicable to this study are discussed below.

##### 4.4.8.1 *Reliability of design*

Factors discussed by Schumacher and McMillan (1993:386-388) applicable to this research include:

- **The researcher's role.** The importance of the researcher's social relationship with the participants requires that research studies identify the researcher's role and status within the group. This was discussed in Section 4.4.1 above.
- **Informant selection.** Informants must be described as well as the decision process used in their selection (cf 4.4.3.2 & 4.4.3.3 above).

- **Social context.** Social context influences data content and a description should be included of the people, time, and place where events or interviews took place (cf 4.4.3 & 4.4.4 above).
- **Data collection strategies.** Precise descriptions must be given of the varieties of observation and interviewing, as well as the way in which data were recorded and under what circumstances (cf 4.3.3 & 4.4.4 above).
- **Data analysis strategies.** Through retrospection accounts must be provided of how data were synthesised, analysed and interpreted (cf 4.4.6, 4.4.7 & Chapter 5).
- **Analytic premise.** The conceptual framework must be made explicit. This was done in Chapter 1.

#### *4.4.8.2 Reliability in data collection*

Qualitative researchers commonly use a combination of possible strategies to reduce threats to reliability (Schumacher & McMillan 1993:391). The following were adopted in this research.

- **Verbatim accounts.** Verbatim accounts of conversation, transcripts, and direct quotations are used in this research (4.4.7 & Chapter 5).
- **Low-inference description.** Concrete, precise descriptions from field notes and interview elaborations were used when the data were analysed.
- **Mechanical recorded data.** A tape recorder was used during individual and focus group interviews to ensure accuracy.
- **Negative cases or discrepant data.** Researchers actively search for, record, analyse and report negative cases or discrepant data. This process was also followed in this study.

#### 4.4.8.3 *Internal validity*

The following are recommended by Schumacher and McMillan (1993:391-392) to improve internal validity.

- **Lengthy data collection period.** This is said to provide opportunities for continued data analysis, comparison, and corroboration to refine ideas and to ensure the match between research-based categories and participant realities. The present research was conducted over a period of five weeks. The pilot study took place over a period of two years. In short, the total period during which parent involvement was researched in a black urban community conforms to this criteria.
- **Participant language.** In this research participants were encouraged to tell their stories 'in their own words', thereby contributing to the internal validity of the research. Issues of translation have been discussed (4.4.4.4).
- **Field research.** The participant observation and in-depth interviews took place in 'natural settings'; all taking place in the schools involved in the research. Parents were not, however, interviewed in their own homes.
- **Disciplined subjectivity.** Researcher self-monitoring, subjects all phases of the research process to continuous and rigorous questioning and re-evaluation. This was done throughout this research.

#### 4.4.8.4 *Triangulation*

Although Schumacher and McMillan (1993:498) suggest *triangulation* as a technique of pattern-seeking, most researchers use it to increase the validity of their research (Measor 1985:73; Mathison 1988:13; Patton 1990:187).

There are three recognised forms of triangulation relevant to this study. In the first place a form of triangulation occurred by comparing data from focus group interviews with teachers

with data drawn from teacher practices in the classrooms. Secondly, comparison of teacher interview data was also made with interview data from the principal in each school. Moreover, a comparison could be made between the interview data obtained from the focus groups with teachers, with that obtained in the group interviews with parents. In the third place there was also opportunity for triangulation from one time period to another in the sense that data obtained in 1994 and 1995 on the same subject and also involving parents and teachers could be compared with the data of the present study.

#### **4.4.9 Limitations of the present study**

Educational provision, and thus parent involvement, in black urban communities is beset by many problems, which this researcher found varied, according to the specific school community. This study, therefore, does not claim to identify all issues associated with parent involvement in black urban communities, neither does it propose to isolate causes and effects. The research only aims at gaining some understanding of the complexity of the problem and issues, and of the extent of parent involvement as seen through the eyes of the participants. In this way some of the gaps in the knowledge concerning parent involvement in black urban communities can be filled.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter describes the rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach for the study of parent involvement in black urban communities in Gauteng. It also describes the methods used to obtain the data, ie observation, unstructured interviews and focus group interviews, for this study. An explication of the design of the study includes the selection of participants, the problems encountered in the field, and the data analysis procedure. In the next chapter the data generated and analysed will be presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER 5

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters parent involvement in urban schools (Chapter 2), as well as urbanisation and educational provision for black people (Chapter 3) was discussed. Urbanisation, education and parent involvement within black communities were placed within historical perspective, to facilitate an understanding of prevailing conditions in black urban schools. In Chapter 4 the research methodology, the rationale for the choice of a qualitative approach for this research, and the research design utilised, were described.

This chapter presents and describes the data generated during in-depth and focus group interviews with three school principals, eleven teachers and eleven parents. Firstly, the characteristics of the participants are summarised and the significance of the birth cohort discussed. The ensuing sections (5.3; 5.4; 5.5) present significant themes which emerged from the interviews. Where the words of the informants are quoted, no attempt has been made to correct language usage. As English is the second, third or even fourth language of the participants, errors such as use of incorrect pronouns where *they*, *he* or *she* may refer to a group or an individual, regardless of number or gender, commonly occurs. Where the meaning of a remark is obscured, I added a word or phrase [between brackets] to prevent misunderstanding. Quotations are presented as indentations. Any comments within quotations are indicated in square brackets.

The interview with a mother from School C was conducted with the help of an interpreter, while the parents in School A and the parent and grandparent in School B sometimes used their home language. Thus sections of the data are translations from Tsonga, Northern Sotho and Zulu. Judging from the sections of the interviews which took place in English (or Afrikaans), I was satisfied that the translation is faithful to the course of the conversation. However, it is not possible to judge whether a change in idiom has taken place. For this reason, translations from African languages are seldom quoted directly. Quotations given in

Afrikaans were translated. Because I speak English and Afrikaans, it was easier to judge whether Afrikaans quotations were translated with as little change to idiom as possible. Because of this, such translated quotations are freely used.

## **5.2 THE MAMELODI EXPERIENCE**

In preparation for this research, an extensive literature study of black urbanisation and education was undertaken, as reflected in Chapter 3. Moreover, this researcher was part of a team which presented a training course on parent involvement to teachers in Mamelodi in 1994, during which time approximately 300 teachers answered a questionnaire relating to parent involvement. Their answers were analysed by myself. Then in 1995, I, together with an official from the Department of Education, visited the eleven schools which had been involved in the training programme. A number of teachers at each school were asked to complete another questionnaire regarding the 1994 training programme and the extent of parent involvement in their schools. In the light of this extensive background knowledge, I felt that the observation periods in schools and the in-depth interviews and focus group interviews of the present research would concur largely with the previous experience. However, this was true only to a certain extent. The richness of the data obtained during the present interviews and the extent of detail given were at times so unpredictable and perturbing that I was compelled to return to the literature to verify the validity of the informants' remarks. In all instances, I was convinced that the information could be corroborated.

## **5.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMANTS AND BACKGROUND DATA**

This section presents responses by informants which are related to personal characteristics. Attention is also given to possible effects of birth cohort, particularly as this relates to the period during which the youth were active in the 'liberation struggle' (cf 3.3.1.3). The characteristics of the schools involved in the research are summarised in 4.4.3.2 and should be read in conjunction with the ensuing sections.

### 5.3.1 The principals and teachers

Relevant background information which are needed to understand the informants' responses to questions are included in Tables 5.1 through 5.4. All informants, with the exception of the principal of School C, and two teachers from School B (as indicated in Table 5.3) are women.

[NOTE: The schools attended by the informants' children are at times listed as 'white' schools. Although these city or suburban schools are officially described as 'multicultural' schools, the majority of pupils and teachers are, at this stage, white.]

**TABLE 5.1 THE PRINCIPALS**

PRINCIPAL	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Age	60	52	49
Teaching experience (years)	13	20	21
Years as principal	15	6	2
Marital status	Married	Widowed	Married
Schools attended by own children	University/ working	'White' school	'White' school

TABLE 5.2: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL A

TEACHERS	I	II	III	IV
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	50	46	51	42
Marital status	Divorced	Married	Married	Married
Teaching experience	15	23	26	21
Children	3	5	3	3
School attended by own children	Working/ technikon	'White'/ township	'White'/ township	'White'/ university

TABLE 5.3: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL B

TEACHERS	I	II	III	IV
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male
Age	38	Unknown	42	24
Teaching experience (years)	16	26	19	3
Children	4	1	4	0
School attended by own children	'White' school	Township school	'White' school	-

TABLE 5.4: TEACHERS AT SCHOOL C

TEACHERS	I	II	III
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	42	39	33
Marital status	Married	Divorced	Married
Teaching experience	11	6	2
Children	1	3	2
School attended by own children	University	'White' school	'White" school

The majority of the principals and teachers fall within the age group 38 to 60. The exception is one male teacher aged 24. Moreover, the majority of the educators interviewed have many years of teaching experience and are able to give a perspicacious account of child rearing practices, educational provision and community life against the background of the recent changes in South Africa (cf 3.2; 3.3).

Although not referred to in Tables 5.1 through 5.4, only one person, a principal, does not live in Mamelodi. However, of the eight teachers/principals with schoolgoing children, seven have enrolled their children in multicultural schools, where the vast majority of teachers and pupils are white.

### 5.3.2 The parents and grandparents

As set out in 4.4.4.4 both parents and grandparents were interviewed as part of the research. Information relevant to the discussion of the data in subsequent sections, is included in Tables 5.5 through 5.8.

TABLE 5.5: PARENTS AT SCHOOL A

PARENT	I	II	III
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	34	23	31
Marital status	Single	Single	Single
Children	3	1	3
Highest qualification	Std 9	Std 10	Std 9
Presently employed	No	No	No

TABLE 5.6: PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS AT SCHOOL B

	PARENT I	GRANDP. II	GRANDP. III	GRANDP. IV
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	40	72	68	66
Marital status	Married	?	Married	Single
Children	5	Grand-children	Grand-children	Grand-children + son and daughter
Highest qualification	Std 4	-	-	-
Presently employed	No	No	No	No

TABLE 5.7: PARENT AT SCHOOL C

Gender	Female
Age	36
Marital status	Married
Children	4
Highest qualification	Could not determine, appears illiterate
Presently employed	No

TABLE 5.8: PARENTS WORKING AT SUPERMARKET

PARENT	I	II	III
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age	24	42	28
Marital status	Single	Widow	Single
Children	1	3	1
Highest qualification	Std 9	Std 9	Std 9
Presently employed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents I and III live in Atteridgeville and parent II lives in Mamelodi.			

The eight parents include one father and eight mothers. Of the eight women, seven are single parents. Except for the father, who completed Standard 4 and the mother at School C, who appears illiterate, all informants passed at least Standard 9. The three grandparents (Table 5.6) are illiterate or semi-illiterate and are on state pension.

### 5.3.3 The significance of the respective birth cohorts

The principals and teachers fall within the age group 38 to 60 and as such were already teaching during the years of the 'freedom struggle'. This implied that they had to make a decision regarding their own role and that of education in the 'struggle' (3.3.1). Consequently, they were either willing participants or forced to take part in strike action during those years (3.3.1.3). This could have had an influence on the 'culture of teaching' (or lack thereof) present in township schools. This facet will be explored in 5.5.4.3. Teachers' present affiliation with unions is discussed in 5.5.4.3(d).

Teachers in this age group have both experience of teaching under the previous racially divided education system, as well as under the new government (3.3.1 & 3.3.2). This places them in the unique position of being able to compare both systems, although cognisance is taken of the fact that the new government has, as yet, not been able to implement all its proposed changes.

The parents interviewed mostly fall within the age group 23 to 36, with one parent 40 and another 42 years. Thus, most of the parents were under the age of 20 during the years of the 'freedom struggle' (1976-1994). The implication of this datum could be that these informants were influenced by: their parents, family or the prevailing political and social climate in making decisions on when to leave school, when to have children, et cetera. Although the parents did not appear to be politically active, they are aware of the changes in the country and have opinions regarding their future and that of their children.

The three grandparents interviewed are, at present, caring for their grandchildren, the offspring of young people who grew up during the years 1976-1994. In contrast to that generation, the grandparents comprise a generation which spent almost their entire lives under apartheid (3.2.1), who were raised according to traditional ways and who now have to raise their grandchildren in a world that has changed dramatically.

The parents and primary school pupils discussed by the informants also fall within certain age groups and can, likewise, be placed in a certain historical period. The children, presently

in primary schools, mainly fall within the age group 6 to 14, which means that they all grew up during very violent times. Most of the biological parents of these children probably attended school for at least a few years although it is likely that their schooling was disrupted by political violence (3.3.1.3). The extent to which the parents were influenced by acts of violence during their own youth is not known.

The importance of considering the birth cohorts of the informants (principals, teachers, parents, and grandparents), as well as the people discussed by them (the primary school children and their biological parents) relates to what was discussed in Chapter 3 (particularly 3.2.2 & 3.3.1). Further reference to the importance of the age group to which a person belongs, will be made later in this chapter (5.4.2.3).

## **5.4 THE TOWNSHIP AND ITS PEOPLE**

### **5.4.1 Housing and infrastructure in Mamelodi**

#### *5.4.1.1 General impressions*

Mamelodi is a township to the east of Pretoria and has approximately 500 000 residents, some living in houses; others in small one roomed buildings or small shacks in the squatter camp. The main roads, of which there are few, are tarred, but in poor condition. Some of the dirt roads leading off the main roads have recently been scraped; others resemble dry river beds. Most roads are heavily littered. On the dirty sidewalks, hawkers sell vegetables and other goods. Many pedestrians, mainly school children, walk along the side of, or in the street. These children are seen throughout the day, some going to school, some going home during break to eat, and others, mostly high school pupils, either going to school very late or leaving school early. On some street corners and in the small yards of houses young, unemployed men stand talking. Most women in the streets appear to be on their way to work. The pedestrians share the streets with a few privately owned vehicles and taxis, the primary means of transport for the majority of black residents.

Driving in Mamelodi does not take place according to any written rules. No one comes to a dead halt at stop streets. If a robot is red and there is no traffic, this is also ignored. This is apparently done to save time (especially by taxi drivers) and because of the possibility of being robbed or having one's car hijacked at intersections.

In some areas of Mamelodi water and drainage pipes are being replaced. The construction workers are watched with great interest by small children. Many people stop and stare when they noticed me, as the sight of a white woman driving through Mamelodi is uncommon.

#### 5.4.1.2 *People's homes*

In the older parts of Mamelodi, residents live in standard four-roomed council houses. Some have shacks in their back yards to accommodate relatives. The small yards surrounding the houses are kept clean, but the overall impression is of a poor neighbourhood, with people living in overcrowded conditions. Only one parent interviewed lives in a house with inside plumbing. All indicated that their homes have electricity. All parents and grandparents interviewed are sharing a house with other family members. Eight to ten people commonly share a one, two, or three bedroomed house. One parent employed by the supermarket (Table 5.8) contrasts this with my own home:

We cannot live like you are living here, we can't. It is expensive, we can't afford this. Like myself, I am living with my parents and I have a child.

Although there are advantages if one is supported by one's family, an informant mentions the disadvantages: "Maybe where you stay there are maybe 8 or 10 of you and maybe we are not all co-operating. You see, it is difficult."

In the squatter area the situation is much worse. The homes consist of one-roomed brick structures or shacks built with any available material. The head of department of a school in a squatter camp explains that the families come from rural areas where there is no work, from Natal to escape the violence and from other countries in Africa, such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe. They expect to find work, but most seem to be unsuccessful and are forced

to improvise or to accept any available housing. I was told that most houses have electricity. Running water is usually available in the yard, or at least in the vicinity.

The single room of a squatter home is often divided by curtains, to separate the living from the sleeping area. The informant from the squatter camp shares this room with her husband and four children. However, teachers at the squatter camp school maintain that these one-roomed dwellings often house more than one family.

Father, mother, maybe the grandparents, uncles, aunts, all in one little house.

Maybe there will be 12 staying, with the grandchildren also.

There are many problems relating to child care, associated with living in such crowded conditions. Teachers from School C mention that children are witness to their parents' fighting, making love, and excessive drinking. One teacher explains:

But to be honest with you, there is no privacy, so the kids are exposed to many things which maybe are not good for them. They see their parents drinking, the whole family.

Another teacher adds:

That kind of child who comes from such a family, they always use vulgar language when talking to other kids, and even when coming to dressing, the child is not neat and sometimes he or she doesn't even wear a school uniform.

In School A, teachers are concerned about the lack of space, forcing children to play in the street, which they consider dangerous (5.4.3.1). They share the concern about children being exposed to so much at an early age. Moreover, the lack of privacy and all the noise in overcrowded houses means that "...the child doesn't have time for herself just to rest." This adversely affects the child's ability to concentrate in school.

Parents interviewed staying in township houses or in the squatter camp indicated that their children do not have a specific area to study. The principal from School A mentions that some children stay in school to complete their homework because their parents sell liquor at home and there is no place to study. However, teachers maintain that the deserted school premises are not safe (cf 5.4.3.1).

## **Discussion**

As can be seen in Mamelodi, rapid urbanisation, a consequence of the relaxation of the artificial barriers maintained over many decades, is putting enormous pressure on the limited infrastructure in the townships. Poor and inadequate housing, deteriorating public services and the shrinking job market are adding fuel to the fire of social disintegration (Ramphela 1992:25). The situation, as described above, emphasises that in many cases, black people are urbanised in name only (Van Zyl Slabbert, Malan, Marais, Olivier & Riordan 1994:131).

Another factor which needs consideration is that the house or other structure in which young people grow up is the most important space in their lives. It may provide the family with a living environment; a sense of security and stability; a sociocultural context; a place to study and the privacy of one's own room; media such as television, books, newspapers, magazines and so forth. However, for a young person living in an overcrowded shack or council house with no real family life, security or personal space, these commonalities in an affluent society, are unknown.

### **5.4.2 The family structure**

The primary school children attending the three schools participating in the research belong to different family types: nuclear families, multi-generational families, female headed households, et cetera (cf 3.2.2.1).

#### 5.4.2.1 *Parents*

The principal of School A estimates that 60 per cent of children in the school live with their parents, or a parent. Teachers from School C estimate that 65 per cent of children attending the school are living with their parents, while the principal of School B estimates that only 20-25 per cent of children live with a parent or parents. Although no schools have any official data to substantiate these estimates, it does seem as if many children are not being cared for by their biological parents.

Of the 20 - 65 per cent of children said to be staying with their parents, many seem to be in the care of only the mother. All seven mothers included in the research, are single parents (3.2.2.1(c)). Many mothers caring for children are still very young, particularly those living in the squatter camp. A teacher describes them as "below age", another teacher estimates that some are as young as 15 or 16. The Head of Department at School C says that these young mothers "...have skipped many stages." As a consequence they are unable to cope. One of the teachers at the same school elaborates: "Some of the mothers are still very young, so they cannot do anything that a child may need at school."

Many single parents interviewed (teachers and parents) relate the problems of raising children alone. One unmarried working mother says: "Myself, I haven't got a husband, I am looking after the three children. So they are all my responsibility."

Most women interviewed were abandoned by their children's father. A parent of a child at School A states: "There are many problems - black men are not good!" Another mother explains that the men just "...give us children and then they go away." This means that the woman have to carry both the financial and emotional burden of rearing a child on her own. A young working mother whose child was born when she was sixteen adds: "...they (the fathers) run away, they don't want to take care of the children."

Many teachers interviewed described young parents, as poor role models. This is felt to severely handicap the child's progress at school. The principal of School A explains:

Parents are role models. If you drink and start quarrelling...children of such parents usually go astray because a child reflects to the community how he was brought up.

Another teacher at a different school tells of parents who send children out at night to buy beer, thus preventing the child from doing homework or getting sufficient rest.

In addition, the principal of School C feels that the parents are not able to control their own feeling of aggression and that this prevents children from learning to do so. This applies particularly to people coming from areas where faction fighting is taking place as the following remark illustrates, "...and that aggressiveness has worked into their [the parents] minds, and even the pupils are affected. They are also aggressive."

Parents who are poor role models will clearly find it difficult to contribute to the schooling of their children. The principal of School A explains:

You know you have a group of parents who just drink and don't care. And you ask in what standard is your child. You know that some of them don't even know if their child is in Standard 2 or Standard 3.

## Discussion

The issue of teenage pregnancies and the inability of these young people to take adequate care of their children will be discussed in 5.4.4.5. The tendency of female headed households as found in this research is in no way unique to Mamelodi. Data from 2 661 matriculants interviewed by Kotze, Mouton, Greyling, Hackman and Gouws (1994:325) indicate that 40 per cent of black families are currently headed by females. About half of the female-headed households are extended (more than two generations) or compound (containing two or more married couples) (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:44). The existence of this extended kinship seems to cushion negative effects of disrupted nuclear family units (Armoateng and Kalule-Sabiti 1994:221).

#### 5.4.2.2 *Grandparents*

According to the estimate of teachers and principals, 35-80 per cent of children in the schools visited are cared for by their grandparents.

The informants gave various reasons for this. One of the grandfathers explained why he had to care for his son's children:

The problem is that my son, he married his first wife, but then he [the wife] left the children and ran away. Now he takes another wife, and this means that, that woman, she doesn't like those kids. So the children came to stay with me.

The grandmother interviewed is sharing a house with her daughter and son and eight grandchildren. She has to sell food at the school to try to supplement her pension. Likewise, another grandfather, aged 72 is taking care of his grandchildren who are still in primary school. In his case the children were abandoned by the mother. The principal of School B sheds more light on this phenomenon:

You'll find a teenager which is about 16 years is already having babies. Then it is too much for that girl to carry the burden of those kids, maybe every two years she is pregnant and gives birth. So she just leaves the kids there, it is too much for her because she is still very young to care for them. Then they run away... to the squatter camp. The boyfriend is not working, she is not working, she is not at school, she has run away from the kids, and now the kids are left with the granny.

Teachers at School A say that when you ask a parent to come and see you about a problem, a grandmother arrives, often explaining that the biological mother is still at school. In most cases the grandmother is forced to accept the situation, as explained by one teacher:

They accept it - what can they do? They just accept it, because the children get children while they are still babies at the age of 14, 15. What can you do? You cannot abandon your child.

A grandmother agrees that one cannot abandon one's own grandchild: "...you won't throw her away, you must keep the child in your care." In most cases the biological parents do not contribute financially. The principal of School B even maintains that some of the biological parents come home when pensions are paid and then demand money from the grandparents. According to this principal, the grandparent complies for fear of injury. She explains that the grandparent "...can be stabbed, she can be molested, anything can happen."

Some married woman leave their children from a previous relationship, or from a present marriage with their mother. Teachers at school A explain that if someone is living with her husband in Mabopane (probably with the latter's parents), she will leave the children with her mother in Mamelodi. This is apparently done because she believes that a mother will take better care of her children than a mother-in-law. If she has children by a former boyfriend, it is unlikely that her husband will be willing to take care of them.

In some cases children know who their biological mother and father are; in many cases they don't. For example, in trying to solve behavioural problems of a child in School B, the principal recalls the following conversation with the child:

When we call him and say, 'What is wrong with you, tell me where is your mother?' he answer(s): 'I don't know my mother'. 'With whom are you staying?' 'Granny'.

For this reason the principal feels the biggest challenge for the future could well be finding someone to care for these children if the grandparents were to die. She explains:

What I don't have hope with, is the small kids that we are dealing with here and the parents that should be involved. Say, for instance, the granny passes away. What will happen, what then?

The grandparents were not able to offer any solution, moreover as the father's identity is often not known.

When we all die and only the mother is left, then they [the children] have no father. Every child has its own father. Only the Lord will see how they manage to live.

This problem is increasing in severity since young people continue to have babies without being able to care for them.

### **Discussion**

Although statistics do not indicate that so many children are living in the care of grandparents, as suggested by this study, the findings are supported by a study undertaken in Soweto. It was also found that a significant number of pupils do not live with their parents but rather with their grandparents (Chisholm & Valley 1996:37).

#### *5.4.2.3 Changing roles and customs*

The family as the basic organising unit in black communities has been under pressure even prior to the beginning of apartheid. Overcrowding, poverty, and instability characterised the average black family in the early townships, placing enormous strain on normal family relations (cf 3.2.2). The practice of migrant labour led to further disruption of families (Mokwena 1992:37). Moreover, political developments in the 1980's greatly accelerated the disintegration of family life. Political unrest shook communities at their very foundation and authority structures in the home and in the school began to change.

#### **(a) The status of older people**

Black societies traditionally have been structured on premise of the dependence of children on their parents and elders. Teachers were also not to be questioned or criticised. This has changed, and the change has been a great shock to the older generation.

It is particularly the elderly themselves who are aware of the changed status of older people within the black community. A grandmother at School B points out:

But I am also just telling you that today's children don't respect a grownup person, as it was in the old time. And when you tell them, 'You may not wander about at night, or you may not go there or there.' [They answer.] 'Who are you? You're old.'

A principal illustrates the helplessness experienced by the elderly whose authority is no longer respected by relating the story of a fourteen year old primary school girl whose boyfriend had come to fetch her to come to live with him:

The guy came to fetch the child, he said, 'Look granny, you just shut up, because this is new South Africa, this is my wife'.

The principal continues:

So I said to the granny, 'Now what did you say?' And she said, 'I could see that the boy would even have stabbed me with a knife, so there was nothing, I just had to sit and cry.'

This is in stark contrast to what happened in the past, when everyone cared for their own children as well as those of the neighbours. Older people were respected by the community, not only within their own family. A young teacher in School B explains that in the past a neighbour could spank him if he misbehaved, and that this was commonly accepted. He continues:

But today they cannot even try. That is the breakdown of the African social fabric that has contributed a lot to people or to children not following in the footsteps of the elders.

One of the teachers at the same schools blames the apartheid system for the breakdown of the family structure, and the division within the community. She recalls:

In those days, Africans were one, but because of this system (apartheid) we started to divide ourselves. If I reprimand her children, they have guts to tell you, 'you are not my mother, you cannot tell me what I am doing is wrong'. But those days back, an elderly person used to say a word - that child would show respect, but nowadays, they even show facial expressions....

In contrast, the grandparents interviewed blame the breakdown of traditional ways on television, saying "...it has confused our children".

**(b) The status of education**

The principal of School C feels that education has changed the culture and traditions of the African community. He explains:

You'll find that in the rural customs, you must respect older persons, irrespective of whether that person is wrong or right. He or she must be respected. Failing which is punishable by law, even a stick is still used there.

This has changed because, according to him, young people with any education insist on being treated as equals, attending all meetings of adults, and voicing their opposition to suggestions. The principal continues: "...that child can talk to you the way he or she likes. That is not the custom with us."

A teacher at School B also argues similarly.

Education is now destroying our culture somewhat, but that must not be an issue. Your culture must be your culture, whether educated or not.

**(c) The role of the extended family**

In the past the black family was characterised by the extended family structure. Various factors (cf 3.2.2) contributed to the establishment of the nuclear family structure. One teacher at School B describes the situation.

Black people [were] originally united as families and had extended families, brothers-in-law, uncles, all stay together and you wouldn't see them quarrelling or whatever. They were united.

She elaborates on the causes of the changes which occurred:

Yeah, the African culture has broken down. The situation in the country, the apartheid system as it was, has brought those changes. Because, you'll find that the father is in exile, the mother is alone at home, the brother is also in exile - that kind of relationship.

Financial constraints dictate that families still have to stay together. The role of each within this family structure seems ill defined. Moreover, most informants complained about the lack of space and the added financial burden. There also is little agreement on who should be the head of the household. Some feel it should be the oldest man in the house. Others admit that the elderly no longer have automatic status. Asked whom the children obey, they answer, "The one which it will benefit the child most."

Although parents at School A admit that they did learn something about child rearing from their mothers, they are reluctant to leave their children with another person, even a family member. One mother explains:

No, we differ in ideas, a person might tell a child not to do this, and another person might tell him/her the opposite. Other people don't care, they say, 'it is not my child.'

In contrast, the working mothers all leave their children with relatives or a neighbour and all profess to be satisfied with the arrangement. As one working mother states: "I am staying with my mother and with my sister with the husband. And then...they help me to grow up my child."

**(d) Women who work outside the home**

Women who work outside the house is a world wide trend. In South Africa women choose to work because of the high cost of living and their desire to provide for the needs of their children. Moreover, as discussed in 5.4.2.1, many woman are single parents and are raising their children alone.

Of the working parents interviewed, one leaves her child in the care of relatives; another has asked the neighbours to look after her child; and yet another considers her children old enough to look after themselves. The children are 10 and 13 years of age.

One of the grandparents interviewed discusses the problem of mothers leaving home long before children have to go to school.

Other parents go to work. Early in the morning, when he goes to work, he thinks that his child has gone to school; but then the child does not go to school. When the parent gets back, he asks: 'Have you been to school?' He replies, 'Yes', but he was not there. Then there are all these difficulties.

All parents spoke of their fear that one of their children could become a victim of child abuse (cf 5.4.3.1).

**Discussion**

The family is a major socialising agent in society, assisting individuals as they move from childhood into adolescence and eventually adulthood. The family's status and function has changed as manifested in the disrespect shown to older people and in the role education is

playing in determining status within the community. This breakdown in family structures within black communities in South Africa has resulted in the family's inability to perform this vital socialising function.

The problem is that apartheid deeply affected the nature of community leadership (3.2.2). The paternalistic control of all aspects of the lives of black people in the cities reduced the status of adults to that of minors, jeopardising their position in the eyes of young people. Moreover, urbanisation has rendered irrelevant traditional social values and lifestyles borne and protected by extended family systems and leadership hierarchies within a clan system (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:89). In addition, in many black households children have the highest level of education in the home. This has the dual disadvantage of rendering the older generation powerless as a source of assistance with school work, and possibly causing tension within families. It is a reversal of the usual role of older generations as mentors who are responsible for the intellectual development of young people (Kvalsvig, Pillay & Krige 1994:336).

### 5.4.3 Life in a township

#### 5.4.3.1 *A violent and unsafe environment*

South Africa has become one of the most violent countries in the world. Township residents experience this on a daily basis. The informants all agree that the level of violence has decreased to a certain extent following the elections in 1994. In the words of the grandparents:

It's better after the election. Now it is not like before. It is a bit better. You see those previous times, they were rough...before Mandela took over. There were many troubles. You could not go about at night, they will steal the stuff from your pockets. You will see people stabbed to death in the street. But now that Mandela has taken over, it is a bit better.

Although all respondents agreed that the situation had improved, the level of violence is still unacceptably high. A teacher at School B remarks: "...although it [violence] is gradually fading out, it is still there. It is still there."

According to the informants the situation is particularly bad at night:

You cannot even sleep, they shoot bang-bang-bang-bang. But now there are no policemen in the night. You see nothing, but you just hear it. You cannot even sleep. Almost every night.

The grandparents found the violence particularly upsetting when wanting to visit the relatives of someone who has died, as is the custom. One of the group reports:

Now we don't go there. If you just go there, then at eight o' clock when you come back to your house, then you may also perhaps be killed; they will shoot you. That is no good!

The principal of School A says that whereas violence and crime previously took place in the name of the liberation struggle, it is now 'just plain crime' and is continuing because it has become an easy way of obtaining money.

Many examples of the way crime is affecting the community were given by the informants. The principal of School B describes how an ex-convict set up a vegetable stall just in front of her home in Mamelodi. One day he gave her son dagga in which he was doing a brisk trade. Fortunately, her son told her about the incident and she could warn him about the dangers of dagga. This is one of the main reasons she decided to move to a predominantly white suburb.

The informants also maintain that many residents of Mamelodi, particularly young people, possess firearms. A grandfather remarks:

Hey, today's children! I don't know where they get the guns from. Just when the sun sets, this little boy of eighteen years: rat-a-tat-a-tat!

Moreover, theft has become a way of life. Many tell of being robbed, having their handbags snatched and of witnessing young men burning stolen cars after first removing the radio or other items.

However, the crime most often mentioned by the informants is the rape of children. The principal of School B points out that child rape, "...is not a thing that will just come as a shock. It is a thing that we are used to."

The informants report that children are raped by older men, by relatives, or by secondary school students. A teacher at School C blames poverty and unemployment for the increase in rape cases. She says:

... their uncles are abusing them (children), because they are not working. When the kids come back from school they find the uncles at home. So they just feel like abusing the child.

Teachers at the same school also relate stories of fathers abusing their daughters, as illustrated by the following incident:

The father abused the child, telling her, 'you see, your mother is in a wheelchair, what can I do? I'll make her (the child) my wife.' The child was 12 years old.

The teachers explain that a child often does not report the abuse, particularly if the child has been abandoned by the mother, or the parents have died and the child is now staying with a relative. Such a child fears that he/she will be chased away if she reports the sexual abuse and will then have nowhere to go.

Parents at School A also say that they are scared of allowing their children to play in the street. In the words of one parent: "We can't allow our children to play in the street, because some of the older men take them and rape them, sometimes."

According to the teachers at the same school, it is not even safe for children to remain in the school after hours, as they could be abused by high school students. One of the teachers points out that the small children have to be told to go home quickly:

And we don't encourage them to stay at school, cause we feel that the boys would abuse them. In this school we say, 'go home, go home'.

Another teacher agrees and tells of a nine year old girl in her class who was abused by a neighbour's child. In spite of the case being reported and the boy identified, the police have done nothing. The boy involved is 13 years old. The teachers also blame the deteriorating situation on unemployment and poverty.

None of the informants is optimistic that the situation will improve in the near future. A grandfather sums it up as follows: "The world is going to take rather a long time before it comes right."

## Discussion

Various factors since 1976 have served to legitimatise violence: the ANC's campaigns to make South Africa ungovernable by assassinating 'collaborators'; the necklacing of informers and others; the state's counter-revolutionary strategies and illegal executions. Moreover, the struggle provided a political backdrop which sanctioned much behaviour that was simply criminal (Lawrence 1994:342). The result of this can be seen in the townships. Researchers working in Mamelodi also tell of one school in Mamelodi where eight pupils were killed in gang related violence over the last eight months. In one of the schools in the same area a teacher who came to the defence of female students while they were being molested by gangsters, was stabbed to death (Chisholm & Vally 1996:42).

The reports on child abuse also do not appear to be exaggerated, when compared with official statistics. For example, in the first six months of 1990, 4 176 cases of child abuse were reported to the police. According to a police spokesperson, the instances of reported child abuse have doubled since 1988, and the figures could, in reality, be ten times higher (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:53).

#### 5.4.3.2 *A lack of effective policing*

Related to the high rate of crime is the perception that the police force in the township is not competent, or willing to restore order. Once more, various examples are given, in particular regarding rape cases which are reported to the police. For example, the working mothers tell of a child who was molested by a neighbour. When the case was reported to the police they refused to do anything saying, "...there is nothing that happened to the child, just touch." In exceptional cases the police may respond "...but that takes long!" The mothers are also concerned about the insensitive manner in which rape cases are handled. If the child is too shy to repeat the story to the police, or starts crying, "...the police say, 'They didn't do anything to the kid, that is why he doesn't talk or do what.'"

Parents and grandparents at School B complain that police do not respond when called. If a person has died during the incident being reported, the police explain that their coming will not change the situation. If the crime is still in progress, the police often state that there is no police vehicle available and that they are, therefore, not able to respond. One grandfather comments: "We don't need these policemen, because they are just stupid, excuse me for saying so! you can call them, they don't come."

Some informants state that they are afraid of reporting a crime to the police since they will disclose their identity to the perpetrator of the crime and that this could result in their house being burnt down. They conclude "You just have to keep quiet when you see them do this. You just have to keep quiet."

Most agree that crime and violence will not decrease if one has to rely on the present police force. On the other hand, School C has 'adopted' a police corps which visits the school at

regular intervals and addresses the children. In this area the relationship between the police and the community are better.

## Discussion

It is difficult to confirm the informants' comments officially. However, Chisholm and Vally (1996:41) relate that one of their research teams visited a school in Mamelodi that had been burgled. The culprit had been identified to the police and the stolen goods found in his possession. In spite of this, the culprit was not arrested.

### 5.4.3.3 *Widespread poverty*

Most respondents spoke of the high rate of unemployment in Mamelodi and the poverty in which many families live. The small children in their torn school uniforms are testimony to this fact. The principal of School A says that she sometimes buys shoes for poor children as she cannot bear to see them so cold during winter.

At the school in the squatter camp, the children appeared dirtier and more unkempt when compared with the other schools visited. In the class I observed many children with bad coughs. Moreover, the distress of the children at School A the day they received nothing to eat was a grim reminder of how little some people have to live on (cf 5.5.2.1).

A grandfather, who still has to care for his grandchildren, discusses how difficult it is to provide for everyone on his pension.

You get R430 a month. With that money you must pay rent, say R170 or R200, and for R100 you must buy a bag of mielie meal and then the money is finished. With what will you buy sugar, or get something to buy meat with, where are you going to buy tea? The money we earn is too little.

Many informants state that there is no work in South Africa. A parent from School B has been unemployed since 1974, when the mine at which he was working closed down. He tells

of the embarrassment he feels at having to rely on his father's pension and his wife's income, and not being able to provide for the family. This man has only completed Std 4. Likewise, the mother interviewed at School C is looking for work but is also unqualified for the labour market, being both illiterate and only able to speak Tsonga. Moreover, many people also lack the funds to travel to town and look for work. Others seem to be choosy regarding the type of work they are willing to do. The principal of School B, for example, tells of her exasperation with squatter camp parents who do not accept her offer of providing seeds so that they can grow vegetables for their family. She also tells of suggesting to another mother that she should find work in Mamelodi. The woman responded: "I cannot work for a black person."

It is also distressing to see how many people are looking to the government to help them. A parent states:

We hope that they [the government] will make things a little bit better to help us black people. We must get work, we are suffering.

Some of the informants with Std 9 and 10 are also unable to find work. A parent from School A responds:

Hey, it is tough. Because some of us have finished our standard 10, but there is no work. It is hard for some of us, because we suffering financially. [Her friend agrees.] If we can get jobs, maybe a temporary... maybe we can help our children.

Some women in the squatter camp earn minimal wages looking after the babies of working mothers or doing washing. However, according to a teacher at School C this money is often used to buy alcohol. She remarks:

If they have done something like washing and get that little money, some don't buy food, they rather drink. That is why there is such a lot of poverty. They don't buy food for the kids.

According to the informants, poverty also has an influence on children dropping out of school. The father interviewed at School B says that children start going out into the streets when they realise that there is no food in the home. One parent at School A agrees, explaining that children become embarrassed when their parents are not able to provide for their needs in the same manner as working parents. This results in children starting to miss lessons. Another mother disagrees, saying that children should be aware of a parent's financial problems, and should not use that as a reason for not completing their education. She suggests:

You must teach your child: 'I don't have the money; I am not working, you see', but it is better for them to go to school, to learn. Tomorrow you live better.

In the squatter area, where the poverty is even worse than in the other areas of Mamelodi, teachers sometimes bear the brunt of parents' frustration. One teacher explains:

This poverty can frustrate people, because if they are not working, every thing that you may ask them to help you at school, they become aggressive. They mix up everything that we have said together with their problems at home. They don't even want to co-operate with you. Maybe because that person is frustrated with his situation. In most cases you'll find that the father is not working, the mother is not working.

Teachers at School A, where some of the pupils come from the squatter camp, describe how they try to help poverty stricken families:

In the squatter camps most of the parents are not working. The children wake up and come to school with no breakfast whatsoever. And then the mother is there at home the whole day. Sometimes if there is some food, we give it to the children and they share with their mother or brother.

Although some informants hope that things will improve in future so that their children and grandchildren will have a better life, many seem to have become despondent, as is captured by the words of a parent: 'We have been suffering for a long time, we have lost hope.'

## Discussion

South Africa's slow economic growth rate and the political tensions of the 1970's and 1980's has led to a drastic decrease in economic opportunities, as is seen in the increasing inability of the formal sector economy to provide school leavers with employment (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:120). Moreover, various estimates of household income suggest that approximately 16 million South Africans live below the poverty datum line and these are predominantly blacks (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:131). This has a bearing on this research since economic conditions are of crucial importance to any substantial improvement in young people's quality of life, living conditions and education. This is borne out by the fact that the main reason for dropping out of school is economic (De Kock & Schutte 1994:253).

### 5.4.3.4 *A lack of recreational facilities*

There are almost no recreational facilities or sport grounds in Mamelodi. A teacher at School C comments on how this affects children:

They don't have facilities or special ground for them to be safe. They then play on the streets and some of them have accidents because there is no one looking after them. [Another teacher elaborates.] Like maybe other places where you find a specific park specially for the children to play there, knowing that they are safe. No one will come and disrupt them.

The principal of School B adds that primary schools have to work out a roster as there is only one sport field for their use in Mamelodi. She wishes that schools in the township could have the same facilities as is found in 'white' schools since this could make school "something to look forward to."

Teachers at School C feel that the lack of recreational facilities in the township, and specifically in the squatter camp, leads to delinquency, such as robbing trains or starting fires.

## **Discussion**

Recreation, particularly sport and cultural activities are important in young people's lives. They encourage creativity, team participation and a striving for achievement, a sense of belonging to a peer group and the meaningful use of leisure time (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:45). Because of a lack of facilities, infrastructure and organisational structures, this is denied the young people of Mamelodi.

### **5.4.4 Children in urban townships**

South African youth have grown up during a period when their numbers increased visibly. While this has strengthened their right to be recognised as one of the largest population categories, at the same time it has compounded a number of social problems relating to young people (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:39).

The informants' discussion of problems relating to children often included secondary school children as well. This has been included in the data analysis since many of the children attending primary school are 14-16 years which places them in the age group normally associated with high school students. Moreover, it appears as if older children have a powerful influence on smaller brothers and sisters and because such primary school children are seldom untouched by what older children advocate or do.

#### **5.4.4.1 *Undisciplined/violent behaviour***

The involvement of young people in politically motivated violence leads to an increased likelihood of their becoming involved in other forms of violent activity and conventional crimes (Liddell, Kemp & Moema 1994:348). This appears to be what is happening in Mamelodi.

When discussing issues relating to young people, many informants emphasise their lack of respect, as well as the violence and crime they believe many young people are involved in. For example, they speak of young children stealing. In this regard, the parent from the squatter camp tells of children covering railway signal lights with a red cloth forcing the train to stop, and then robbing the train. She tries to prevent her primary school children from playing with squatter camp children, because she finds these children undisciplined. She says of these children: "I don't think they will be good again."

Other informants speak of burglaries, car hijacking, and rape. A teacher who acted as translator during an interview with a parent at School C feels that young people from the age of seventeen are "bad, terrible." She tells of her young brother who has now joined a gang, and who has been involved in the theft of video and sound equipment. She continues: "He goes with the guys who are not good, guys who are going into towns, houses, and steal there."

There are many reasons offered for the high level of crime among the youth. The parent from the squatter camp blames poverty. The teacher helping to translate, disagrees and uses her brother as an example:

I don't think so... other kids like my younger brother, he eats at home, he sleeps in a wonderful bed with sheets and duvet covers; he gets whatever he wants. My parents try to satisfy him, but he can't see that! I don't think it is like that.

She feels that her brother's friends played a major roll in him becoming a thief. Mokwena (1992:40-41) suggests that gangs also arise out of a need to create entertainment and excitement. There is a chronic lack of recreational facilities in the townships. In an attempt to deal with boredom, youths are forced into the streets for entertainment. This is where many are tutored into a life of violent crime and gangsterism.

The parent and grandparents of School B tell of a primary school child who came to school with his brother's firearm. The brother is in the local high school. They say that the children

have been asked to leave their firearms at home. One grandmother feels that children carrying firearms are also less likely to accept the authority of the teacher.

The principal of School B feels that children are led astray by the lack of clear guidelines between what is right and what is wrong because the community tends to condone such acts as stealing or drinking, while law abiding people are not highly thought of. She feels this is affecting the youth, to the extent that they are unwilling to accept any responsibility and will even abandon their a child, if parenthood is perceived to be a burden. She adds, that the young parent, "...just drops the child and moves away."

This principal attributes the problem to the policy of making the country *ungovernable* in order to effect political change. This strategy often involved children as young as 14-15 years. Moreover, she argues that the political struggle was often used as an excuse to settle old scores. She illustrates this by telling of the death of an old lady in an incident quite unrelated to the political struggle:

It was during Christmas and one of these kids had slept out and when one of the parents asked where she was, she simply told them that 'Granny captured me and put her under her bed'. Meanwhile, the child was with the boyfriend. Just twisting the story. She was burnt [the old lady]. She crawled and crawled whilst burning like that - and everybody was condoning the act. Everybody was saying 'The kids are correct, let this woman die!' I just walked away and said to myself, 'This is the last thing!'

She maintains that children involved in such acts will never be able to lead a normal life. She contends, "... you could see in their eyes that they were not normal. This is where it all started." Moreover, she believes that the youth who were part of such deeds are still playing a role in society. She concludes:

If you come to our school things look calm and you'll think that it is better now, but the element of badness is not gone. It hasn't gone.

The teachers at School B seem to be more sympathetic to the youth who were part of the struggle, concentrating more on the pain they had to endure. A teacher argues that the children of young parents who were part of the struggle are also affected:

The children nowadays are a bit, should I say, they are on the side of fighting more. I think they have some temper. In our language we say: 'The child takes after the parent', meaning 'You take this temper from your parent because your parent might have been the victim those days.'

Another teacher agrees, adding:

Maybe the children are still carrying the pain of their parents. I don't know whether this has to do with the social dynamics here. A violent society will always have a second, third generation that is violent, because the first generation has been a violent one. So I don't know whether this is caused by the social factors. There has been a culture of resistance in black areas for a very, very long time. You experience that resistance is reflected in the children today.

Another teacher also tries to justify young people's behaviour by reflecting on their past:

These children that we are now having, grew up in such situations, where a policeman would come and knock the whole night, taking them out, kicking them, those situations. So these children now see life as being useless. They are no more interested in anything. Now there is nothing that they can do on their own. They have no interest in anything. So it starts from the family background at home.

Twenty two per cent of township homes in the Johannesburg area were raided by police or the army during the state of emergency (Liddell, Kemp & Moema 1994:348). If this is also true of Mamelodi, one household in four or five was subjected to this type of treatment in the previous decade. The adverse psychological effects on children can only be guessed.

Although informants acknowledge that not all the children are involved in violent or criminal activities, they do not see things changing soon. In the words of a grandfather: "We will never change today's children. Never, no, never!"

## Discussion

The policies of rendering South Africa ungovernable which characterised the post-1983 period contributed to social disintegration. Mass mobilisation, consumer boycotts, school boycotts, 'people's courts' and the setting up of alternative structures had embedded a strong element of coercion and intimidation of those unwilling to participate (Ramphela 1992:17). Most of the responsibility for enforcing these campaigns rested on the youth. Young people thus assumed enormous powers, including the power to kill.

Youth as a social category reflects society's potential for the future. If society is in crisis, then that potential is threatened and the youth will reflect that crisis (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:15). Judging by what the informants told this researcher, it would seem as if some of our young people are indeed in crisis. Other research and statistics support this, such as the fact that nearly 66% of young people living in the Durban area have seen a corpse, and over 40 per cent had lost a friend through violence (Kvalsvig, Pillay & Krige 1994:337). Mamelodi is not nearly as violent as Kwa-Zulu Natal. On the other hand, if this is what some young people in Mamelodi have seen or been part of, it will have to be taken into account in any programmes aimed at improving education in the community.

### 5.4.4.2 *Disrespectful behaviour*

Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish precisely between descriptors such as *undisciplined*, *disrespectful* and *delinquent* behaviour, many informants repeatedly referred to the youth as *disrespectful*. Parents from School A, for example, describe high school students as disrespectful and illustrate it thus:

There is no respect for the teachers and also not for the parents. They don't work, they don't wear uniforms, they don't go to school regularly, they don't do their homework.

The group blames the abolishment of corporal punishment, adding that children are now "uncontrollable." The grandparents at School B agree, saying: "They speak [to you] just as they like."

The principal at School B adds that children were called *young lions* during the freedom struggle, asking: "Why should a young lion listen to anyone?" She says that the youth of today still feel that they were the ones who liberated the nation and that nobody should therefore be allowed to bring them to order.

A teacher at School B contrasts the behaviour of children when he was at school, with that of present day youth:

... We were still boys at the high school, but we still respected our teachers. You wouldn't find a boy going into the streets having a cigarette, but now you'll find that a boy will have a cigarette in front of the teachers, and also having a beer. With us, the respect was there and what is happening nowadays, is very hurting, because if our children are dragging feet, the feet will not come to school.

The principal of School C contrasts the discipline in white communities with that found in the township. He presumably bases his assumptions on observations at the predominantly white school his child attends.

I can see there is a real discipline in the white areas. A white child takes that parent as his parent, but in our cases we are nothing, we are just a target and they won't listen to a target. You are nothing, you can be burnt or what, you are nothing.

Teachers at School B also link lack of discipline to lack of parental control. One teacher states, "...nowadays children have taken control of their parents instead of parents controlling their kids."

According to these teachers, the difference in the behaviour of primary and secondary school pupils is not noticeable, particularly since primary school children enter the higher standards. One teacher points out: "...at primary school at Standard 4 or 5, the two classes, they have already sort of joined the high school classes. There is that situation."

One teacher at School B explains that the breakdown of respect for parents and older people can be explained in the light of the role the youth took during the liberation struggle. He maintains that the youth felt that it was the adults who should be *toi-toiing*. That they were not was seen as their acceptance of the apartheid system by the youth. He continues:

That culture developed from 1976 onwards when the youth took control of things over their parents. There is a saying that parents used to say, 'Don't challenge a white man'....There were several reasons for that, because if they do that, they could lose their job and food won't be available for the family. But being a student I don't know the responsibilities that the parents have. I can always go and do whatever I want to. So there is that situation.

He says that this made the youth "automatically adult." Moreover, the fact that many teachers did not join the struggle and resisted the formation of students' representative councils, led to teachers also being perceived as supporting the status quo. This teacher maintains that many young people feel that teachers contributed to the oppression of people in the townships and should not be afforded respect.

## Discussion

Black societies have been traditionally structured on the dependence of children on their parents and elders - teachers also were not to be questioned or criticised. All this has changed, and the change has been a great shock to the older generation. Civic and political

structures were put in place, and run by the youth who, despite the disruptions, were better educated than their elders. This has led to a widened generation gap (Manona 1994:360).

#### 5.4.4.3 *Lack of motivation to learn*

Much has been written on the lack of a *culture of learning* in township schools. Although it does not form the focus of this study, a few informants touched on the subject when speaking about the young people in their community and schools.

The effect of the slogan: 'First liberation, then education' was dealt with in section 3.3.1.3 and has obviously had a profound effect on the culture of learning, especially in the secondary school. Today, other factors are preventing children from getting a good education. In some cases parental neglect is blamed. A teacher at School C explains how small children stop attending school when they are temporarily abandoned by their mother:

Sometimes these kids, because of not having someone to look after them, waking them up to come to school, they just decide not to come to school.

A parent at School A agrees that family support is often vital in motivating a child to remain at school.

Children whose parents are responsible stand a good chance of surviving in life because they have security and are encouraged at home, but those whose parents are passive, are doomed.

Parents in the same group offer another reason for children dropping out of school. One parent explains that children feel uncomfortable in the company of children whose parents are able to provide for them, in contrast to parent who are poor. A parent at School B also feels that children leave school because the poverty in the home makes them despondent.

Parents at School A add that high school students, in particular, seem unmotivated to learn because they "...go to school at ten o'clock, any time." The consensus of opinion is that secondary school teachers, in particular, are as much to blame (5.5.4.3).

However, the problem is not confined to the secondary school. A teacher in School C indicates: "Right now you cannot teach kids, you can try all methods and resources available, but kids have turned away and it seems that you just talk alone." [Later she added that this could be because both teachers and pupils are confused and need more time.] "Maybe after these changes (taking place in education), people will be more motivated."

## Discussion

The reasons why so many black youth drop out of the education system are, according to Van Zyl Slabbert et al (1994:107), varied and range from political involvement to conditions in the school such as teachers on strike, poor quality education or lack of facilities. The *collapse of a culture of learning and teaching* in black schools is one of the gravest educational problems facing South Africa. It is also the key reason why an increasing number of black students leave school without completing their education, with no recognised skills to use in the world of work. As parent involvement has been shown to decrease the dropout rate (2.4.1), it is evident that ways should be sought to establish effective parent involvement in black urban schools.

### 5.4.4.4 *Lack of healthy recreation*

Reference to the lack of recreational facilities in townships has already been made (5.4.3.4). This results in children either playing in the streets or watching television. With the exception of School C, where it appears as if most households are not able to afford a television, most informants complained about the amount of time children spend watching television. For example, the parents of School B tell of the primary school children watching TV until 11 o'clock at night. They maintain that if children are forbidden to watch television, they simply go to a friend's house. Asked why they don't simply forbid a child to watch television after a certain hour, one grandparent says:

You may say that if [the child] is small. But the one who is a bit older will not listen...and then they go to someone and say, 'That granny or grandpa, they trouble me.' Then they kill you.'

It is difficult to ascertain whether this could really take place, or whether the grandfather is exaggerating. However, a grandmother in the group agrees saying that they learn how to kill by watching television.

Moreover, the parents/grandparents feel that the teachers in the secondary school encourage students to watch TV, by discussing the different programmes with them. The smaller children then view the programmes with older children in the house.

## **Discussion**

In the light of the number of people (8-12) living in a small four-roomed council house, it is difficult to limit children's viewing time without affecting everyone in the house.

Once more it must be stressed that recreation and proper recreational facilities are needed, to enable youth to use their free time creatively and constructively. Many young people have never had sufficient opportunity to develop interests and talents outside the education arena.

### *5.4.4.5 Sexual activity*

As related in 5.4.2.1 many parents with children in primary school are themselves still students in high school. For example in Soweto it was found that 90 per cent of female matriculants at a particular school had one or more children (Chisholm & Vally 1996:40). Moreover, children left in the care of grandparents have often been abandoned by their mother, because the mothers are too young to accept the responsibility of parenthood (5.4.2.2).

The grandparents from School A also complain that children are very young when they start going out with someone of the opposite sex. They state: "Today's kids, they do many adult

things." The grandparents tend to blame television for the many pregnancies among young people.

Other informants also tell of young girls living with their boyfriends. The principal of School B tells of a 14 year old girl who went to live with her boyfriend. She continues:

And this is not the only case. We have cases where a 13 year old, a 12 year old would stay with a boy on a nightly basis at the boys home.

Asked about sex education, teachers at School A say that reproduction is addressed only as part of biology in Standard 5, but not ways of preventing pregnancy. However, a teacher at the same school feels that young girls are not perturbed by the prospect of having a baby. She remarks: "And then they are proud when they have children, they say 'I have a child and I am alone, you must have a baby too!'"

Another teacher adds that young people don't want to take measures to prevent pregnancies.

We can't advise them as far as sex is concerned. Even these condoms, they make it a joke. They tell you they don't use condoms.

In the majority of cases the father does not accept any responsibility for the care of the baby.

## **Discussion**

The incidence of teenage pregnancy is cause for concern. Some statistics indicate that at least 70 per cent of teenagers have had sexual experience or relationship before reaching the age of 20 (Van Zyl 1994:435). This could be linked to a lack of sex and life skills education, as well as a lack of parental guidance. On the whole, teenage pregnancies seem to be the result of new lifestyles and attitudes.

On the individual level a birth to a woman in her teenage years has many negative implications. Her schooling is terminated or severely disrupted, her employment prospects

are reduced (less education plus having a baby to care for) and in many cases a birth in the teenage years may contribute to the vicious spiral of poverty (Van Zyl 1994:436).

It is commonly acknowledged that issues such as reproduction and contraception are best addressed at home, but for a variety of reasons this does not happen. The school can also deal with this issue, but resistance from parent and educational authorities has been an obstacle in the past (Van Zyl 1994:437). It is obvious that a comprehensive sex education programme needs to be facilitated.

#### 5.4.4.6 *Disciplining the youth*

The interviews suggest the discipline of young people differs according to the generation or gender to which the informant belonged.

Parents at School A (all single mothers) agree that one should rather speak to your child and not resort to physical punishment. In the words of one respondent:

You must sit down with her or him and tell him what is going on in this world. 'If you are not going to school my child, tomorrow you are going to suffer, you are going to get a baby and you will never get a job'.

The teachers at School A agree that the best way for parents to discipline a child is to talk to them. But acknowledge that,

Most of them, they spank their children. Which is a bad method, they don't get the reason why the child does such a thing.

Moreover, the children are often beaten with whatever the parent can lay his or her hands on. The group feels that this happens because most parents are uneducated.

The informant from the squatter camp also feels that one should initially speak to the child, but if this does not help the child should get a hiding. She uses a stick to beat the child.

Although her husband may initially reprimand the child, he will then start hitting and kicking the child. She admits that at this stage the husband is usually drunk.

Teachers at School C agree that some parents talk to their children when they misbehave, others use corporal punishment, some beating the child badly. One teacher illustrates this by telling of a little boy being beaten so badly, that he has lost bladder control and he needs to go to the toilet frequently.

On the whole, the grandparents seem to believe that children who disobey should be hit. However, they remark that this is no longer possible:

Then you take a sjambok and you beat him. Then there is trouble. These days, children also have power. They say we kill the children and you may not beat children. Now when you speak with them, then there is great trouble.

'If you beat me, I'll go to the police station.'

The grandparents admit that they no longer beat children, mainly because they do not obey. Grandparents are also afraid of being reported to the police.

Although most parents and teachers interviewed feel that one should rather speak to a child, the majority state that the abolishment of corporal punishment, particularly at secondary schools, has made pupils impossible to control (cf 5.5.5.2).

#### **5.4.5 Conclusions on black urban communities**

Rapid population increase and rapid urbanisation create numerous social and educational problems. In the first place, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide essential amenities such as housing and recreational and educational facilities. In the second place, given the economic demands faced by many black urban families, a large number of children are likely to grow up in an environment which lacks adequate care.

Although this research does not prove widespread parental neglect, it does indicate that many children are not growing up in a nurturing environment, and lack adequate physical care and emotional support. Moreover, urbanisation and westernisation has caused changes in the lifestyle of many black people which is leading to the breakdown of their traditional culture. This has not been replaced by adequate social support structures. Therefore, there is a need for educational programmes which can provide supportive guidance for parents with regard to child rearing and parental involvement in education. Such programmes could assist parents in adequately fulfilling their formative task.

The effects on children of growing up in an environment that is characterised by a low economic and social status; a low level of educational provision; unemployment and limited community involvement in education are profound. These children are environmentally handicapped and are characterised by the display of a poor self-concept, limited motivation, perceptual deficiencies, poor creativity, obscured future perspectives, confusion about moral and cultural norms, rejection of authority and the establishment, and alienation from their parents (Van Greunen 1993:92). These needs will have to be addressed in educational programmes aimed at the youth. Moreover, the role of parents in this educational process must be emphasised.

Problems affecting urban youth are, however, compounded by the role that many played in the black people's struggle for independence. During the struggle the youth were exhorted to become *young lions* in order to shake off the yoke of their oppression (Mokwena 1992:36). Violence became a socially sanctioned means of attaining change within black urban populations. In the process, the youth developed a noticeable arrogance which resulted in intense generational conflict between youth and elders in the community. In many cases the cycle of hostility towards figures of authority, the older generation and the wider community has not yet been broken and juvenile crime and violence are often still the order of the day (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:88). Parents and grandparents seem to be unsure of how to handle the situation, mainly because they are unclear about their roles, due to the shifting relationships between children and parents, both in the home and in the broader community.

The adverse psychological effect on the youth of being labelled in a generalised way as the *lost generation*, *alienated* and *violent* cannot be overstated. Schlemmer (in Lawrence 1994:342) correctly reminds us that, between these extremes, there are an *invisible majority* who are just ordinary young people.

## 5.5 EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

### 5.5.1 School facilities and staff

#### 5.5.1.1 *School buildings and administrative staff*

Schools A and B are reached via very poor, untarred roads. The school buildings are old, except for the administration building at School B. Neither schools have suitable playing areas for children. Although the schools are fenced, the fences are broken and do not serve to separate the school from the rest of the township. The school grounds are clean and in both cases a small garden has been laid on in front of the offices. At the gate, a few mothers are selling biscuits, sweets, and other food stuffs - all for private gain. In the school courtyard and in the passages children are cleaning the area with bundles of straw. The principal of School B expresses the wish that township school could have the same facilities as white schools, so that children will enjoy coming to school.

The toilet facilities at both schools are inadequate. Facilities for children to wash their hands are lacking and after school break a basin with water is put in front of the classroom for children to wash their hands before entering the classroom. During the visit to School B the water supply to the whole area had been cut off without prior warning to the residents. This meant that none of the toilets could be flushed throughout that day.

At School A the principal describes the lack of facilities at the school:

We don't have a staff room where teachers relax and have their tea. We don't have a sickroom. If a child is ill, sometimes I just take a child here in the office. Parents come in and out.

Most schools visited during this research, including those visited in 1994 and 1995, do not have a staff room. Staff usually form little groups during break and drink their tea in one of the classrooms. This means that there is limited opportunity before school or during break to discuss school matters with all staff members. Although this was not discussed with the informants, this possibly contributes to division within the staff and the forming of cliques.

Although School C is situated in an area with small one-roomed houses and adjacent to an informal squatter camp, the road leading to it has recently been scrapped and the school is easy to reach. It is a new school and the school has security fencing. No administration building has yet been built. The school was built 'for the community' and the people in the area do not vandalise the school. On the other hand the fact that the school 'belongs' to the community also creates problems in the sense that community matters and school issues sometimes become confused.

One of the working mothers describes how poorly resourced schools affect learning:

It is difficult, because at our schools where our children are, sometimes there is no electricity, and when it is raining you see, in the house it is a little bit dark and they can't see clearly to the board where the teacher is writing.

Both Schools A and B have clerical staff and both schools have a telephone and a photocopier. School A raised money to purchase the copier.

School C has no administrative building, no telephone and no clerical staff. In spite of this, the principal is expected to manage the school and its 2 138 pupils. The site where the administrative building is to be erected was pointed out. As yet, the ground has not even been levelled. This school is one year old. It seems unlikely that the situation will improve in the near future.

### 5.5.1.2 *Classrooms and teaching staff*

In School A and B there are sufficient classrooms and approximately 35-40 children per class. School C does not have enough classrooms, in spite of using the store room as a classroom and dividing the school into two groups: one group attending school from 8:00 to 11:30, the other from 12:00 to 16:00. In most classes there are 60-70 pupils. Moreover, there are no cupboards in this newly built school. As the classrooms are used for the morning and afternoon sessions, as well as for Adult Basic Education classes later in the day, teachers are unable to leave any books or teaching aids in the classrooms. One teacher with a class of 64 Grade I pupils finds this particularly irritating:

We who are teaching the grades, we need more teaching aids because children learn by looking. Some of the things you explain are too abstract for them, so they need to see something that you are talking about so that they can gain more.

She also feels that small children in the squatter camp should not take their books home as there is nowhere to keep them clean and safe. She explains:

The kids must not go home with their books, because most of the time they leave their books at home, or the books get lost. So tomorrow when you say, I want your maths book, they don't have it. That is why they must have cupboards at school for the books to stay here.

#### Discussion

*Chapter 5*

Chisholm and Vally (1996:13) support the notion that the morale of school-goers and teachers alike is deeply influenced by the physical environment in which they work. Clearly, conditions at these schools should be improved.

The absence of telephones in many schools as found in this research and corroborated by Chisholm and Vally (1996:16), is a contributory cause of poor communication both between the Department and the school, and between the school and its constituency.

The Teacher Education Audit (Hofmeyer & Hall 1996) has set the optimum pupil:teacher ratio in primary schools at 40:1. However, they recognise that in practice, the real ratio will be higher than this, since six additional pupils need to be added to the relevant pupil:teacher ratio if pupil:teacher ratios are to be translated into class size. Thus a pupil:teacher ratio of 40:1 yields a class size of 46 pupils. This is because a number of teachers such as principals, deputy principals, heads of department and librarians are involved in non-teaching activities (Chisholm & Vally 1996:18). The effect of this on teacher morale is discussed later (5.5.4.4). An additional problem is that classrooms in most township schools are too small to accommodate that number of children and desks.

## **5.5.2 Support services and administration**

### *5.5.2.1 Feeding schemes*

A feeding scheme was introduced by the government in most schools and is of great help for the poorer children, who often are entirely dependent on the scheme. When the allocated amount to purchase food is finished, or nearly so, the school reapplies for money. This can take up to one month. All principals spoke of this problem, saying that the response of the Department of Education is usually that the cheque needs to be processed. When provisions start getting low, the children do not get much to eat. During visits to schools, I saw children receiving a cup of baked beans, a plate of porridge and boiled cabbage, or two slices of bread and peanut butter. The organisation on all fronts seems to be poor. For example, at School C the suppliers of milk insisted that three deliveries of milk had been made and signed for, while the school only had a record of two deliveries. Regardless of who is to blame, the children suffer. During this time the children go hungry, which is acute for a child from a poor home where there is little or no food in the house. The principal at School A agrees:

You find those who come from very poor families who are never given a cent to eat, it depends solely upon the food they get here. If you see them, they are so pathetic.

One teacher describes what happens when food is not provided and the children are not told about this beforehand.

These small ones are crying like babies, because they were not told. Yesterday, there was no food, so when the bell rang, they took out their dishes and ran out to find there is no food, and then they came back, 'Mam, there is nothing!'. And their homes are very far, they are very far from home, yes. They don't even have a cent in her pocket, so they are sitting on the stoep and crying, most of them. Then I started by saying, 'You share with this one, you share with this one'....Now when the teachers are eating, we say, 'Please, if you have something left, just give it to me, I am going to give it to another child.'

Often the food the child gets at school is their only meal. The teachers at School C say that when the children get bread and milk, "...their little tummies are so unaccustomed to food that they fall asleep."

#### *5.5.2.2 Other support services for learners*

The schools in Mamelodi have few support services to assist in meeting the various needs of the pupils and teachers. For example, none of the schools have libraries; at best they have a few books which are kept in a box.

Moreover, schools are not able to call on experts to help them cope with the various problems of children in the school. Teachers at School A mention that they are not able to call on a remedial specialist. This means teachers are unable to deal with children with learning disorders.

Teachers at School C also tell of the problem of having to cope with children with special needs, without any expert help or support. One teacher elaborates:

We also have children who are mentally retarded, and if you're trying to meet the parents to discuss the child, they become emotional: 'How can you tell me that my child is mentally retarded? She is normal and it is your duty to teach her.' And you are trying to give guidance so that maybe they can take steps, but they don't agree.

Another teacher agrees, adding that when help is eventually given and a child is tested and found to be retarded, very little can be done about it. A child in her class had been diagnosed as retarded, but she had been asked to keep him in the class until other arrangements could be made. By late August he was still one of the 64 children in her Grade 1 class.

The head of department at School C finds having to cope with children with behavioural problems difficult. As the school is serving a deprived community, many of whom have fled from areas plagued by faction fighting, the school is in need of advice on how to cope with these children. He explains:

And it is difficult for us, because we are not specialists in talking to children to change them from aggressiveness. Most children from this area are hyperactive. So we need specialists in this area.

As children living in more violent communities seemed to express aggression more readily at a very young age (Liddell, Kemp & Moema 1994:348), the concern of the head of department seems valid.

## **Discussion**

Even after the 1994 elections, violence has remained endemic in South Africa. One can only speculate on the psychological and behavioural effects of this on young people. Moreover,

in the areas, such as the township, where children have been witness to violence, there are no support services to help teachers cope with the trauma of the children in their classes.

### 5.5.2.3 *Departmental support*

#### **(a) Financial support**

Although school is now compulsory and free, parents are still asked to pay a small amount per year to cover certain costs. At School A and B parents have to pay R10 per child, per year. At School C parents have to pay R20 per family per year. The money thus collected is used to buy extras for the school, such as uniforms for the choir or athletic gear. One item which now has to be bought out of these fees and which was previously supplied by the Department is toilet paper, a fact mentioned by all the school principals.

Principals often spoke of administrative problems which they experienced with the Department of Education. One principal spoke of the frustration of having to choose new books for children, without any guidance from the Department of Education. Another complained that a school already had enough desks and chairs for their pupils, but now had been given new furniture for the whole school, whilst his school still awaited the basics.

The perception is that government officials only take care of themselves, and have little feeling for the "little people" doing the job. The principal at School C describes the people in power as "hungry" and intent on enriching themselves. This principal is of the opinion that people are not appointed to high posts on merit, but merely because they have been "in jail or in exile."

#### **(b) School inspectors and subject advisors**

Some of the principals and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the new school inspectors appointed by the Department of Education. The principal at School C speaks of the school inspectors of the former Department of Education and Training, whom she considers helpful

and knowledgeable. She finds the young and inexperienced people they have been replaced with as unsatisfactory. She is of the opinion that the young men "who trained in Luanda" do not understand the problems of principals in township schools and do not listen "to your problems." She presumes that the present government has the attitude: "If you don't like what we are doing, you can leave."

A teacher in the same school, however, feels that school inspectors are criticised because they are strict.

### (c) In-service training for teachers

All schools visited mention the present lack of in-service training for teachers and principals which they were accustomed to in the past. The principal at School B found the training given in the past helpful:

...there was some workshops for teachers how to manage your classroom - it was good! ... Even now, if I have a problem, I refer to them.

Although she admits that help has been promised once all posts have been filled, she feels frustrated, 'because the kids are seated there' and she needs advice on running the school.

### Discussion

There is a great need for teachers to be trained to meet the challenges of a new political dispensation and restructured education system. Moreover, this training must be suited to the needs of the teachers and the community they are serving. Chisholm and Vally (1996:34) remark that township teachers whom they interviewed found that teacher upgrading courses only met the needs of white teachers.

District directors should link up with schools more frequently because many schools are uncertain about the workings of the new system and where they fit in. Chisholm and Vally (1996:45-46) agree:

There is clearly room for greater communication between the Department of Education and its teachers. Much of the communication problems are due to the transition, but unless these issues are addressed now, and ways developed of interacting and communicating regularly and in a friendly manner with teachers, the problem will continue. As a school community in the Vaal put it: 'In the darkness of transition, people want to see what is going on.'

### 5.5.3 Language of instruction

#### 5.5.3.1 *Mother tongue instruction*

On the whole schools provide mother-tongue instruction during the first few years of schooling for most children. Although School A provides for Northern Sotho speaking pupils, the principal does admit to having a few children who speak Tswana and Ndebele at home. School C offers schooling in three languages in an effort to provide mother tongue instruction for the children in the squatter camp. In all three cases mother tongue instruction is only used for the first three years of schooling.

#### 5.5.3.2 *English as medium of instruction*

At present English is used as the language of instruction as from Standard 2 in most schools for black children. Since there are no white teachers in the township, English can be said to be the second, third or even fourth language for both teachers and pupils. This places all involved at a disadvantage, yet both parents and teachers believe that English is the key to a better future for all children. A parent at School A explains:

Because English is the communication language. Afrikaans too, but English is the most important...English is main, the main language. As long as you know English, it is good.

A teacher at School C enrolled her children in city schools, among others so that they could become more proficient in English. She explains:

They are also then exposed to the languages, especially English, so that they can do better. I am a victim of the old apartheid systems, so I couldn't attend to Model C schools where I could have been exposed to English.

The question is to what extent it is possible to teach children to be proficient in English with limited time available during school hours, with teachers who are themselves not always proficient in the language and with parents and friends who do not speak the language to the children when they go home from school (cf 3.4.5).

While attending a Grade 1 class at School C, I observed during an English lesson that the 64 children were not all repeating the same words as the teacher. It seems unlikely that these children could be sufficiently proficient to use English as medium of instruction by the time they reach Standard 2, under these conditions.

At School A children in Standard 2 are receiving extra lessons in English in the afternoon. This is made possible by a grant whereby teachers are paid to give lessons in the afternoons. The children in the class which I observed are self-confident and speak English better than other children of their age observed in the other two schools. Their mothers are also very proud. One says: "Our children, this year, they know how to speak English."

## **Discussion**

Research by Shuring (1994:416) indicates that 79 per cent of black people prefer multilingual models of education which contain both L1 and L2. Older people are more in favour of mother tongue instruction than young people. In a similar study done in the Ciskei only 6.5 per cent of respondents wanted Xhosa as the language of instruction throughout the school years. Employers interviewed also stated that competency in English is important even for unskilled workers. In other words, pupils and future employers prefer English to the vernacular as the language of instruction (Hosking & Hosking 1994:313). However, this presents problems. According to the 1991 census, 49 per cent of black youth between 15 and 24 years cannot speak or write English. Thus more than two million young people will not be able to attend secondary school or training institutions because the medium of instruction

is always English (or Afrikaans). If they do attend a secondary school, most of them will become repeaters or dropouts. As in many other African countries, the medium of instruction is effectively barring them from obtaining a proper qualification (Van Zyl Slabbert et al 1994:109-110).

#### **5.5.4 Teachers in township schools**

##### *5.5.4.1 Teacher training*

Teachers need to be competent as regards their academic task, as well as being able to deal with the complexities of problems their pupils bring with them from home. However, a teacher at School B feels that his training did not prepare him for these different roles:

The training that I had was more designed to suit a situation that is conducive for progressive education. But if you come to the practical situation here, you find that the situation is completely different from the textbook situation of what a school should be.

He describes working in a school where children are taught to resolve differences in a peaceful manner, while outside the school gates an opposing culture prevails. He explains:

You have a certain community culture, that has been disturbed, a violent culture, and then a school culture that is being developed. You are then beginning to move into concepts that you cannot solve problems with the use of conflict. But at the same time, after school hours, the students still go back to the very community that practises their culture which we are trained to get rid of in the school. At times it is frustrating, depending on the character of a person. There are certain weaknesses that might put you in a situation to lose your integrity as a teacher.

## Discussion

The complexity of teaching in a township calls for relevant PRESET and INSET to equip teachers for their difficult task. Van Zyl Slabbert et al (1994:117-118) make the following recommendations relating to supporting teachers to fulfil their role:

Teachers and trainers should be restored as the legitimate educators by developing them into a competent, confident, critical and well-informed corps. Whether they are highly qualified or not, they should be supported by government structures, and opportunities for INSET (in-service training) should be increased tenfold.

The lack of facilities and resources in the schools (5.5.1), the absence of support services (5.5.2), and the problems experienced by the teachers endorse these suggestions.

### 5.5.4.2 *Teaching in a township*

#### (a) **Coping with pupils from different backgrounds**

Teachers mention how difficult it is to work with children coming from different homes. As one teacher points out:

Other parents are ignorant, they don't help their kids. [Her colleague agrees.] Yes, and especially in broken families where you find that maybe their families and parents are fighting each other in front of their children, or maybe they don't love their children.

Obviously the home circumstances influences what happens in school. This is most apparent in the squatter camp school. One teacher at the school tells of a mother who left her husband and children and moved in with someone else. In the three weeks that she was gone the six year old child in her Grade 1 class did not attend school. She continues:

How can you teach a child if he can spend more than three weeks at home because of family problems? Can you see that when a child comes to back to school, it seems that you have to start afresh. So you sometimes don't know whether you are going forwards or backwards!

Home circumstances also influences the extent to which homework assignments are carried out. One reason for poor homework is that children don't have anywhere to do the work. Other reasons are even more upsetting, as a teacher at School C elaborates:

When you give them homework - because of the situation at home the child cannot do the homework. Maybe they [the parents] always send the child to go and buy beers. The child doesn't even get enough time to rest. Such things affect the child at the school and hinder his progress.

It is no wonder that teachers in township schools say that they are required to fulfil multiple roles. In the words of a teacher at School A:

Being a teacher requires a lot of responsibility, because you are not only a teacher at school, you become a teacher and a social worker at the same time, and lawyer, and also a doctor! It really requires a lot of responsibility.

Teachers coming from a rural background profess to being unable to cope with children from an urban township. A teacher from School B expresses it this way:

It is quite challenging. Because you see, as we come from rural areas and then we come here and the situation is different; the kids have lost that respect more than in the rural areas. You've got to work hard in order to go with the situation in the township, because children come from different backgrounds. The situation is violent in itself and then you as a teacher, you must try to bring the situation down, because you'll find that the situation is bad at home and when the children come to school, they are somehow nervous. There have been shootings. There has been violence.

A teacher at School C also admits to a feeling of frustration caused by the situation under which she is teaching.

There is a bright future in teaching. The only thing that is disturbing, is the situation where we are teaching; the area. It is different from other areas, because in that area you get a lot of problems whereby you end up saying, 'I don't enjoy teaching.' Because that teaching process has got a lot of problems, from the community, from the pupils who have bad backgrounds, family problems or maybe poverty. You have to teach, and at the same time, you encounter problems. And some of the things don't make teaching effective enough. As a result, you as a teacher, you cannot even evaluate yourself. Did you do this in a perfect way, or maybe should you change the method of teaching, maybe the children will understand better.

**(b) Working in poorly resourced schools**

Although much has been said about well qualified teachers being able to teach under all circumstances, most teachers in the township do complain about the lack of resources. A teacher at School C points out that:

We don't have enough classes for the school and the teaching aids are lacking, especially we who are teaching the grades, we need more teaching aids because children learn by looking. [Her colleague agrees.]. Yes, and to add on that - we don't have something like cupboards for their books. The kids must not go home with their books.

Moreover, I found that the vast majority of children from the squatter camp bring their books to school in a plastic bag. The books are filthy, folded and torn.

## Discussion

In view of the discussion regarding black urban communities (5.4) there is no doubt that teaching in a township school must be a difficult task. This is also supported by the literature. Meyer (1993:19) maintains that in urban schools sociopolitical problems seem to have contributed primarily to problems in these schools: politicisation, militancy, vandalism, a history of youth heroism, polarisation within the institution and/or community, the breakdown of adult authority, disillusionment in terms of employment opportunities, et cetera. It will be difficult for teachers to address all these issues without teacher training and other support from the Department of Education and the parent community.

Moreover, the Department of Education has an obligation to provide the resources and infrastructure necessary to improve the conditions under which teachers teach. However, provincial budgets, and especially that of Gauteng, have been cut. In the last financial year, in an effort to meet targets, the Department of Education did not build any new schools or employ new teachers. The Department of Finance has commended the Gauteng Department of Education for its fiscal discipline (Chisholm & Vally 1996:49). However, although fiscal discipline is an important economic strategy in a poor economy, it is disastrous for the school communities described above.

### 5.5.4.3 *Professional ethics and code of conduct*

#### (a) **Commitment to teaching and community upliftment**

Certain teachers and principals showed a great commitment to uplifting the community. For example, the principal at School A vows never to leave Mamelodi as she feels that *professional flight* will make conditions in the township worse. Another principal from School B visits children's homes as much as possible trying to help solve some of the problems there.

However, such commitment seems to be the exception. A teacher at School B feels that there has been a shift in practice and that many teachers feel that their responsibility ends at the school gate. He reports:

Today it is difficult to even get the background of some children. Once we [the teachers] move out of the school yard, that is where our responsibility ends. But in the past it was practice to go beyond. The school developed that relationship with families, but today we don't have that.

The principal at School C contributes the lack of commitment to various factors, for example the quest of teachers for higher qualifications. He says: "Teachers are hungry for money, they want to improve their qualifications - they don't care about the kids."!

The principal also feels that a lot of work is being lost because of disagreements between staff, students and principals often resulting in strikes. The children are suffering as a result thereof, whereas teachers still collect their 'fat cheques' in spite of not having worked.

The principal argues that all role players should be trained to resolve their differences without disrupting the educational process. He feels that disputes between teachers and the principal or the Department of Education is to the detriment of the child who has to pass the exams in spite of having lost valuable tuition time. He continues:

We are adults, we have passed our lower standards, so why should we really let the poor kids suffer? They are going to write matric or they are going to write Standard 5 exams, but there is a problem today, there is a problem today.

These periodic disruptions in education have caused many teacher and other professionals to enrol their children in predominantly white suburban schools. As one teacher at School C remarks: "I have realised, during strikes or the boycotts my children are staying at home and then they loose classes for the day."

The principal at the same school agrees. He says that he kept his children in township schools until the new government took over, believing that teaching would improve. However, according to him, teachers were still "doing chalk-down". He continues:

Then I said to myself: 'For what good reason?' because before they said they want the same education, now it is the same education, but they don't want to teach, they do 'chalk-down', children are moving around, up and down in the streets.

**(b) Professional conduct**

In some cases interviewees questioned the professional conduct of teachers. One of the working mothers, for example, questions the right of teachers to leave children without help while they further their own studies and qualification. She captures the effects of this effectively:

The teachers ma'm, they are alright, but sometimes, let me say like when the others are studying private...they just take some study leaves and they leave our kids just like that. And sometimes when they take study leaves, others will just tell our kids, because mine is so small, they'll say, this week you mustn't go to school, your teacher is not there.

The principal of School C also questions the professional conduct of teachers, in particular secondary schools teachers. He elaborates:

I think, the discipline between teachers and the children, we are lacking something there; we lack the boundary, we lack the boundary. Sometimes, you can't differentiate between a teacher and a school child, more especially in the afternoon or over weekends. And that breaks the morale.

One reason for poor conduct and socialising among students and teachers is that the students are often as old as, or older than the teachers. This is mainly attributed to the school

disruptions which resulted in many students repeating standards. The principal continues: "That is the problem!! Maybe it is the backlog of the education of blacks. Maybe it will improve."

**(c) Parents' perceptions of teachers**

Many parents interviewed are dissatisfied with the teachers' conduct and list a variety of reasons for this. One aspect that seems to bother the grandparents is the perception that teachers do not control class attendance effectively. One grandparent suggests:

They should count the children. So that when the children are at school, she [the teacher] may know how many children there are. But there is nothing like that. The children just leave.

If children are not at school, they suggest that teachers phone to let them know. Parents found that their children frequently read letters addressed to them on the way home and tear them up if there is anything in the letter which could cause trouble for them at home.

Although secondary school teachers are most often criticised by parents, some parents feel both neglect their work. One parent sums it up as follows:

It's just the same. The primary and the high schools are just the same. Now when they should work, then they just stand there. They stand in the sun and chat. The children play continuously there...they do not do any decent work.

However, most parents agree that secondary school teachers are the worst. Parents at School A feel these teachers do not encourage students to learn. One parent remarks that teachers have the attitude:

Whether they [the children] come to school or not, it is not my job or my problem. I do my lessons and I get my salary every month - I don't care about you!! The children control themselves.

An Atteridgeville mother agrees, adding: "What is needed, is for the teachers to pull up their socks!"

The parents all wish that they could afford to send their children to 'white' schools (multicultural schools), because "There I see that the teachers are working very hard." The perception is that township teachers do not work to the same extent, although these parents state that they are satisfied with the primary school teachers. The parents also feel that it is unsafe to send one's child to a boarding school in the rural areas, mainly because both boys and girls fall victim to sexual practices.

A working mother also complains that children are sent to the shop while she has left the child in the care of the school.

These teachers in the location, they like to send children to the shop during school hours, and when the child is gone to the shop, she misses the lessons. And it is not safe in the streets for the child.

Another parent tells of the older teachers who 'won't take pension' and who seem to be uninterested in teaching the children.

Most of time they'll say, 'Now it is time to sleep' because she is tired!! If she is tired she says, 'Everybody, let us sleep!' and the kids will just say, 'Hooray!' and then they don't do any work.

On the other hand some parents do appreciate the fact that as working mothers, their child is left in the care of a teacher. They admit that the teachers, "...are parents doing their thing while we are at work."

Another mother discusses how she appreciates being informed of how her child is progressing as it is not possible for her to monitor the child's progress, because, "...always when I reach home she is asleep."

**(d) Teacher unions**

Teacher unions played a key role in the later years of the liberation struggle, particularly after 1990 (3.3.1.3). The strike action by teachers meant that many children had to repeat a school year. It also alienated many parents to their cause. Although strike actions are not taking place as often as in the past, many parents have lost faith in the teachers' commitment to teaching. As one principal points out: "It is only those parents who cannot afford (multicultural schools) whose children will remain in the township schools."

It is the opinion of this principal that teachers have damaged their own reputation and that of township schools. She maintains that as soon as people bring their differences into school, causing the disruption of education, the culture of teaching and learning will be severely affected. She suggests that when teachers are involved in disputes, "...their differences should not affect the schools."!

At School B the principal says that although her teachers still acknowledge their membership to certain unions, they are no longer active members, and only attend meetings if they feel that the issues being discussed affects them directly.

Parents state that they are upset when teachers go out on strike, as described by a parent at School A:

We are offended when teachers go on strike because they neglect our children. Our children - who will help them? The time is going, and at the end of the year, our children fail.

Teacher strikes are particularly upsetting for working mothers who have left their children in the care of the school. One parent explains:

Yes, it is upsetting, because sometimes they (the teachers) don't tell us anything, they don't give us notice that tomorrow we are going to do such a thing, and we just send our kids to school. If my mother is not there at home

and my kid is only six years old, when he comes back from school and say 'there are no teachers today', what is she going to do alone at home? No keys to go inside the house, just stay around outside, and maybe it is, let's say, raining, and where is she going to stay?

## **Discussion**

Complaints regarding the conduct of teachers is not limited to this study. Many other examples can be found in the literature. Maja (1993:11) tells of alcohol abuse among young teachers in Soweto, describing how they leave the school during working hours to go to a bar, or how teachers attend meetings while drunk. Moreover, he contends that the majority of male teachers have intimate relationships with women pupils (Maja 1993:26).

A research team visiting a secondary school in Mamelodi found that only half the teaching component was at school when the team arrived at midday (Chisholm & Vally 1996:32). Parents in Soweto are also concerned about teachers upgrading their qualifications during school hours, or studying further in courses which are not related to their teaching (Maja 1993:18). Parents feel that this proves that teachers are only interested in their pay cheques and not in the students.

Judging by the above examples of disruption of schooling, many hours of tuition are lost because of conflict between different role players. One reason could be the younger teachers entering the profession.

As younger, more militant generation of teachers emerged and grew impatient with the seeming collusion and conservatism of older teachers and principals, the stage was set for generational, political and educational conflict between the majority of teachers and principals! (Chisholm and Vally 1996:24).

It seems clear that teachers need to develop ways of resolving conflict without disagreements being allowed to disrupt the whole school. In this regard guidelines from the Department of

Education could be of value. Parents, particularly the PTA, could also be trained to play a conciliatory role in disputes.

#### 5.5.4.4 *Teacher morale*

On the whole the researcher found poor morale among many teachers. Various reasons were given for this. The primary cause is the governments policy of *right-sizing*, whereby primary schools are compelled to realise a teacher: pupil ratio of 1:40. This means that a number of teachers in School A and School B must be transferred to other schools. One teacher at School B describes his feelings:

I am not quite sure what is happening. One feels like getting out of the teaching fraternity. One feels like looking for employment somewhere, because you are not sure what is happening. They are speaking of letting off teachers. Some of us want to go out before they will redeploy us to a school where you don't want to go to. And at the same time I feel sorry for my pupils which I like so much. But what will happen if they place me somewhere where I don't want to go to?

Another teacher at the same school also fears being transferred to a school far from her family.

You now see yourself in the desert. There is no longer that love for teaching, and yet in the past I used to say there is no profession as noble as the teaching profession. But now days, when I pinpoint the problem, it is just this confusion - we do not know really what to do - and when it will be. So I think we must just pray, pray, pray.

At School C where classes are overcrowded, right-sizing is not an issue. At this school the problem is that 25 out of 31 teachers do *not* have permanent appointments. This contributes greatly to the fact that many teachers experience job insecurity. One teacher explains:

It does worry me! You don't know if they want you, or when you are temporary, when they will chuck you away!! Because of the deployment - they employ teachers from other schools who do have experience, or they tell us to go to Northern Province, Mpumalanga.

However, she remains optimistic adding, "But anyway, we enjoy teaching!" She does state, however, that this job satisfaction depends on the reduction of the number of children in the classes by the government.

A teacher at School B also feels demotivated by the lack of response she experiences in her classes and relates that she feels incapable of judging whether her teaching methods are at fault, or whether the fault lies with the children. She explains:

I should think that teaching was a very good profession in the past, but now you just come to work because you've got to work. You used to enjoy teaching, you used to come and teach and see the fruits thereafter. Right now you can't teach kids, you try all methods and resources available, but kids have turned away and it seems that you just talk alone.

This teacher is also frustrated with the children and the subjects (Afrikaans and science) she has to teach, stating that it makes her feel that "...maybe its time to look for another trend and be out of this education." On the other hand she feels compelled to persevere because this is the educational provision black people have fought for. It does, however, seem as if changes are not taking place fast enough and as if there is still considerable confusion. She continues:

The children are confused, we are confused. There is a lot of change in the government, in the education structure, and whatever. Maybe I must give it a chance, and maybe after these changes, people will be more motivated.

One of her colleagues admits to the same confusion.

The world is confused in as much that even though one would say, 'I am optimistic that perhaps things will come right one day', it seems that things are going from bad to worse.

The problem is partly caused by current rumours about the future of education and teaching. Teachers do not know who to believe any more. A teacher at School B sums it up:

Even if somebody comes here and tells us the real thing, we will never believe him because we have an insecure situation in our lives.

Teachers at School A are more positive regarding the future, but not relating to township schools. One for example feels that the future is bright as she is about to retire; another feels positive because she feels that in five years time she will be teaching in a white school and a white teacher will have to cope with the conditions in a township school.

Another factor which teachers mention as contributing to their frustration with teaching is the poor salaries paid to teachers. Teachers at School A add that their qualifications are not respected by the community, as one points out:

People in the community, they respect you being a teacher, but some undermine you, seeing they don't get enough pay...it is bad for us. And some say, especially when you are teaching in primary school, your qualifications are not very good and they respect those who teach in high schools who maybe went to universities.

A teacher at School B also admits to feeling frustrated by the poor salaries of teachers while "all those big people" (officials at the Department of Education) are earning big salaries. She warns:

That is another thing that will drive teachers out of the teaching fraternity, because they are the lowest paid, and they carry such a big load. When you reach home, you are exhausted. At the end of the day you are going to die,

and you are going to leave your kids without a cent, because you are the lowest paid!

A young teacher at the same school, is one of the few teachers optimistic about the future, although he does not necessarily see his future in education. If he decides to remain in teaching, he believes that he should specialise in certain vital areas thereby putting himself in a position where he is "indispensable". He also argues that teachers are not creative in "terms of survival" and should be looking at ways of improving their income after school hours. According to him teachers work from eight o'clock to two o'clock, and could thus look for something to do in the afternoons. In the ensuing discussion his suggestion that teachers should seek afternoon employment was challenged by other interviewees. They said they are exhausted after a day's work and have health problems. However, no one contradicted the fact that teachers do not work after two o'clock in the afternoon!

Although teachers agree that some conditions have improved recently such as the teacher: pupil ratio and the amount of input they are allowed to make on aspects affecting them, the lack of security regarding their future is demoralising. One teacher at School A acknowledges:

At least now we have the freedom of speech. Yes, in the past it was not like that. As a teacher, you have to obey - don't ask questions, don't ask why, just do what they say, yes.

On the other hand they feel that there is a lot of confusion, "up there" in the Department of Education and that the teachers are suffering as a result. As one teacher puts it: "We are suffering the most and they don't pass information to the teachers."

## Discussion

It is suggested that redeployment should not be implemented in a blanket manner, and that mechanisms be established to deal with the unique situation of each school (Chisholm & Vally 1996:50). Insecurity and even confusion is inevitable during a time of rapid social

change. However, strategies to boost teacher morale and communication changes are essential. Chisholm and Valley (1996:59) suggest that new educational directives and school decisions should not be made in response to crisis or for political expediency. Rather they should be properly planned, backed up by support systems and workshopped in large educational forums. Better methods should be devised of keeping teachers informed of departmental policy.

Many teachers also feel overloaded by overcrowded classrooms and difficult students; no psychological or guidance services and no social work and other support services to assist them with students.

On the other hand, it is clear that there are teachers whose conduct is highly questionable. In this regard the Department of Education should establish clear guidelines on teacher behaviour and situations under which a teacher's services can be terminated. Notice should also be taken of parental concerns regarding the poor education their children are receiving in some schools as a result of poor teaching practice.

### **5.5.5 Pupils in primary schools**

#### *5.5.5.1 Inadequate school readiness*

In the squatter camp school, Grade 1 pupils do not appear to be coping with the work expected of them. Some are too young, some are 'slow' and one or two are mentally disabled. The teacher explains that parents come to register children and either lie about their child's age or insist that the child be admitted. Some of the parents become very aggressive when their children are refused access to the school, insisting that their child has a right to education. Under parental pressure it becomes easier to admit the child. She also tells of the children in the class who have been abused, pointing out a boy, who had been kicked by his father and now no longer has bladder control. She declares that mentally disabled children present another problem. In the first place parents refuse to believe the teacher's diagnosis. Secondly, if this is officially confirmed, the teacher is usually told to keep the child in the class until arrangements can be made. The child observed cannot concentrate for any length

of time and constantly distracts other children from their work. In a class of 64 pupils, this is difficult to handle.

At School A the Grade 1 teacher complains about the poor preparation children receive prior to coming to school. She states that even after eight month's of schooling, some children are still unable to hold a pencil correctly. The principal confirms:

Those who come from the preschool, they are mentally seasoned. They already know procedures, they can sing, and those who have never gone there, they cry and do funny things!

On the whole teachers and principals seem ill-informed about the proposed Grade 0 (or reception year) which the government is planning to introduce (White Paper No. 1 1995).

## **Discussion**

The lack of preschool care within disadvantaged communities was discussed in 3.4.6. Suffice to say that there should be preschool facilities targeted in the most disadvantaged sectors of society, as teachability is a prerequisite for quality education (Meyer 1993:11). Moreover, there is a need to provide parents of pre-school children with parenting skills. Parents can undoubtedly make a substantial contribution to school readiness if adequately trained.

### *5.5.5.2 Difficult to discipline*

Although most parents and teachers state that the best way to discipline a child at home is to talk to the child, most seem to feel that corporal punishment is the only way of controlling children at school. One parent at Atteridgeville (interviewed during the pilot study) sums it up: "And then the punishment must come back, because if there is no punishment, the children won't listen." Asked what form the punishment should take, she responds: "Hit them!! Extra work won't help - they just don't do it."

The parents at School A hold the same opinion:

Since they say there is no punishment to hit somebody, yes, since the abolishment of corporal punishment, to be honest, the children are now uncontrollable. A child can swear or use vulgar words; they disrespect their teachers.

When asked whether the situation is better in the primary school, teachers respond that Standard 4 and 5 have "...already sort of joined the high school classes" and are also difficult to discipline.

One teacher declares that students in South Africa are no longer prepared to accept school rules or discipline. He explains that a student arriving at school at 8:30 would expect to be allowed to join the class, even if the school officially starts at 8:00. This is because they were part of the strategy of making the country 'ungovernable'. This meant disregarding all established rules. According to this teacher, this attitude still prevails.

Many teachers seem uncertain as how to discipline pupils as this teacher points out:

So we don't know what is right and what is wrong. Even if the child does wrong in class, we don't know whether we should punish the child or not.

One reason cited by teachers and principals for placing their children in 'white' schools is the lack of discipline in township schools.

## **Discussion**

Teachers and parents interviewed showed ambivalent attitudes to discipline. On the one hand, they fear retribution from children (cf 5.4.4.6); yet they endorse corporal punishment. Regarding discipline at schools Chisholm and Vally (1996:47) suggests that the Department of Education needs to meet with all role players to discuss alternatives to corporal punishment and explain the reasons why the practice has been abolished.

### 5.5.5.3 *Commitment to learning*

According to the informants, pupils do not seem to realise that disciplined effort on their part is the main factor contributing to success, not school facilities or resources. The principal at School C agrees: "The problem is that most of our children, they don't study. That is their problem."

Although the lack of motivation to study is most often mentioned in relation to high school students, the principal at School C argues that the Standard 4 and 5 pupils are not putting enough effort into their school work. This he attributes to the following:

I think the *involvement of the parents in the school is not enough*. Also in the children's education. There is an empty space between the school and the parents. [italics NvW]

Lack of commitment is also manifested in the willingness of students to engage in strike action. Striking at township schools is usually initiated by secondary school students or teachers. In both cases primary school children may be affected. The principal at School B explains that prior to the elections, high school students would come to the school to inform her that there would be no school on the following day as they were planning to 'solve' something. She continues: "Then you ask them, 'now why is the small kids involved?' They tell you that it is politics; it is solidarity. It is a pledge."!

However, things have now changed and primary school children are no longer included in the disputes found at secondary schools. The principal illustrates this by relating an incident where a student at the high school had been killed during the weekend. The students advised her that they were planning a protest meeting, adding that the primary school children were not to join them but are to be told not to wear their school uniforms. She concludes:

You know, it is irrelevant, but then you sort of compromise because they are not taking the kids out of school, so they can wear casual wear. It is that sort

of thing now. It is no longer 'take the kids out of school, lock the gates and leave the school!'

## Discussion

The lack of discipline described by the interviewees is borne out by Maja (1993:28) who admits that secondary school children attend school only when it suits them. He contends that pupils are demotivated, reject educational authority and engage in counter-productive patterns of conduct because they do not see any promising future in their lives.

Moreover, most of the youth hold the government responsible for improving education and job opportunities (De Kock & Schutte 1994:253). This means that in black societies an image of *the victim* has developed and is used as a resource for survival. This creates and exacerbates a culture of entitlement amongst those seeing themselves as victims. Ramphela (1992:22) contends that it is futile to plead victimisation and demand special treatment, unless this is matched by a determination by the individual to take responsibility for his or her own success.

### 5.5.6 Conclusions on education in the township

The breakdown of a culture of teaching and learning in South African schools is, according to Meyer (1993:ii) the outcome of at least four sets of factors which interact differently in different school, depending on the local and institutional dynamics:

- inadequate facilities and resources;
- administrative and managerial problems affecting most interest groups, at both the micro and the macro governance levels;
- pedagogical factors such as teacher and pupil demotivation, inadequate teaching and learning methods, difficulty with the language used as medium of instruction and an irrelevant curriculum;

- socio-political factors, particularly demographic changes, poverty, the rejection of illegitimate governance structures, turmoil in civil society (particularly family relationships) and a high incidence of criminal and political violence in many areas.

The interviewees confirmed these factors. Therefore, solutions must be sought on a wide front, many of which are beyond the scope of this research. However, judging by the advantages of parent involvement as set out in 2.4 many problems can be alleviated if *more effective parent involvement* can be established in schools. This has the added advantage that the strategies chosen will correspond to the situation in the particular school. This needs to be stressed as solutions which do not take into account local complexities and particularities are bound to fail.

## 5.6 HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

### 5.6.1 The perceived benefits of parent involvement

Although their knowledge of parent involvement seems to be limited, teachers and principals do list benefits of parent involvement in their school. In most cases the benefits apply to what they believe would happen if parents were involved, not to what they have experienced in practice. The following benefits were mentioned by teachers.

#### 5.6.1.1 *Parent involvement lightens the workload of teachers*

The principal at School B says that parent involvement is the school's 'priority'. She argues that improved parent involvement will lighten the workload of teachers.

We think if we could work along with the parents, and if they could take an interest in the kids, our work will be easier. If a parent is helping you with a kid, your work becomes lighter, you are not burdened with a lot of things if the parents are there.

### 5.6.1.2 *Greater control over children*

Parent involvement is perceived to be a strategy to improve discipline. The principal at School C says that if parents and teachers work together, children will realise "I have no room for playing...At home my parents know the teachers and my teachers know the parents." Teachers at School A agree, stating: "The child must not only be supervised here, they must also be supervised at home."

### 5.6.1.3 *Parents' contribution to problem solving*

Parent involvement is seen as a means whereby parents can help teachers solve problems, as one teacher explains:

I think if parents are involved in school, we can share ideas with them. Some of the parents, maybe, know better things than us. We can help each other so that we give their children a good upbringing.

In the past this school involved parents to help solve political differences in the period prior to the elections. The principal at School B also mentions asking parents to help solve various issues at school, mainly by asking the opinion of parents visiting the school, or living near the school.

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

Teachers recognise a parent's role in home learning. In most cases the teachers state that parents should check the child's homework regularly. A teacher at School A elaborates:

Otherwise, if it is only the teacher and the pupils, they will never come right. The parents must be involved in their child's education. They must be, they must support the child.

The principal at School C agrees, adding that parents who check their children's school work have 'brighter kids'.

However, a parent's role in homework is not seen as including anything more than checking to see whether the homework has been completed.

#### 5.6.1.5 *Parents' provision of insight into the child's problems*

Teachers believe that parents can explain situations at home which makes it easier for the teacher to handle the situation in the class. A teacher at School C explains;

Some of the pupils have problems at home that he brings with to the school. This can be better explained by the parent, because we only see the results of the child, not knowing what had happened before; the family background we don't know.

Information needed to understand the child's behaviour can be supplied by the parent.

### **Discussion**

The advantages of parent involvement as listed by teachers are limited when compared with the literature (cf 2.4). Moreover, it does not include all the benefits I observed when I visited institutions in the USA. Important benefits are improved students' grades, decreased truancy and decreased drop-out rates. These are advantages of parent involvement which need to be stressed in the South African context.

#### **5.6.2 School policy on parent involvement**

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

School B, for example, does not have a written policy on parent involvement, although the principal says that she strongly supports involvement. She points out that parent involvement,

...is in fact our priority. Maybe we are not good teachers, but if we think if we could work along with the parents and if they could take interest in the kids, our work will also be easier.

However, the principal acknowledges that there are just "a handful of parents" who are involved with their children's education.

## Discussion

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

### 5.6.3 Communication between home and school

#### 5.6.3.1 *Parent meetings*

In the schools observed, parent meetings are the main way in which contact between parents and the school takes place. All schools hold these meeting during the weekend, usually on Sunday mornings.

According to the interviewees, the meetings are well attended, although teachers at School A and B complain that the majority of the people at the meetings are grandparents. The principal at School B admits to using any means to get parents or grandparents to attend meetings.

We even go to the extend of threatening the kids. We say, 'look, if your granny is not here, Monday you are going to get it!' I mean, that is a bad

thing to do... To the small kids it is just an impossible thing. They cry and say, 'Granny, if you are not there I am going to get it!' And the grannies normally come, saying, 'you told my grandchild that you are going to give him as hiding'. And then I'll say, 'yes, but that is a way of getting you to school!'.

On the whole, parents report that attending meetings is of some help. One remarks:

When parents come for the meeting at the school, the teachers may talk about the children not attending school properly or something like that. These meetings sometimes help.

At School C the teachers relate that they experience problems with parents at some of the meetings held at the school. One teacher explains:

Our place is different from other places, because the community is still having lots of meetings to prepare the place for themselves, so if they come to school, they mix up what is in the school, together with their problems.

This means that some school meetings are used to discuss community issues unrelated to education, such as provision of services to residential stands, et cetera. Another teacher elaborates:

This is a community school, they have some powers here, so they come with a lot of demands. So we must satisfy their needs.

Teachers and parents offer different descriptions of what is discussed at parent meetings. Whereas the school staff usually state that parents are asked to support their children's education, most parents say that much of the meeting revolves around the non-payment of school funds. At School A, for example, the principal says the following is discussed:

I usually call those parent evenings and then I tell them, the PTA also tells them, we really tell them to be involved in education, and we stress to them that education is a tripod, with two legs it cannot materialise.

On the other hand, parents at the same school emphasise the following:

They talk about other parents who fail to attend parents' meetings and are also pleading with parents to support their children at home financially when there is a need, eg school funds.

Other issues mentioned include being asked to support the school by donating items such as candles, floor polish, or brooms. Parents are also asked to donate money to cover the costs of a funeral where the parents are unable to do so. Issues regarding the school uniform are also discussed.

At School B the grandparents mentioned that the negative effect of too much television was discussed, and parents and grandparents asked to limit the children's viewing time. At the same school, the principal says that she invites experts from the community to speak to the parents. As an example, she mentions the traffic inspectors speaking on road safety.

At School C one of the teachers contrasts parent meetings at the township school with what she experiences at parent evenings at the 'white' schools her children are attending. She says that in township schools there is no opportunity for parents to meet with teachers or view children's school work. In township schools, problems of a general nature will be discussed with parents as a group. Considering that the teachers at this school have 60 to 70 children in their class, this is probably the only option.

A parent of School C states that the following is discussed at parent meetings.

They talk about the kids, improvement of the child, progress in class, the uniforms and also that they must not drink to make their children suffer. Because that is the problem that makes them to go outside instead.

The working mothers interviewed are given the opportunity to discuss problems with individual teachers at the schools attended by their children. One parent explains that valuable information is passed on to parents at such meetings.

Sometimes maybe after two months they call a meeting, a parents' meeting, you go to your child's class and then you have a talk with the teacher. And she tells you that the child doesn't listen in class; he is playful. He do this and this. And maybe sometimes he is having problems at home, maybe there is a lot of shouting at home and maybe the kid is disturbed and then won't listen, or maybe she is a slow learner. And the teacher will then tell you how is the kid, because I don't stay with the kid long, it is only a few second which I spend with my kid, always when I reach home she is asleep.

On the whole the meetings at all schools are well attended. In contrast, research at a Soweto school shows that parents are not in touch with what is happening at the school. Moreover, some of the teachers object to having parents involved. The result is that most parents do not come to meetings (Maja 1993:17. However, this research was conducted at a secondary school. It is possible that similar results will be found in Mamelodi secondary schools.

#### 5.6.3.2 *Home visits*

At School B the principal usually visits children's homes when there are serious problems. The principal explains that this could include family problems or when the school nurse has diagnosed health related problems while examining a child. She explains:

But in severe cases where maybe a child has lost a parent or something has happened to a child that has been raped, we go, we go personally to be there. So if the nurses are here they will say, 'look, we have to go and visit this home.'

Most teachers feel that conditions in the township have made it impossible to visit children's homes. A teacher at School A explains: "In the past we did do it, but now conditions are different. It is dangerous, the parents of today are not the parents of those days."

A teacher at School B maintains that contemporary teachers see their responsibility as ending at the school gate and will, therefore, be unlikely to pay the family a visit.

#### 5.6.3.3 *Written communication*

School A and B are able to duplicate letters and are in the position to send out letters to parents to inform them of meetings. These letters are written in the local vernacular as well as English. No one provided examples of any other types of letters being sent to parents in the school, such as information regarding school activities or invitations to attend a choir recital, etc. The majority of letters sent to individual parents relate to problems a child may be experiencing or causing at school. In exceptional cases, again usually related to problems, the parent might be contacted by phone.

#### 5.6.3.4 *Communication between class teacher and parents*

All teachers state that they invite individual parents to come and speak with them. In most cases it concerns a problem regarding the child. Teachers at School A say they write a note asking the parent to come and see them, or they tell the child to tell the parent that they are to come to school. In some cases they phone the parent. The teachers say some parents will respond, others not. One teacher elaborates:

Some of them will come to the classes, but some of them, up to now, you never meet them, up to the end of the year. You only meet them when they want the reports. Maybe the child has failed, then she comes to you and say to you, 'why did my child fail?'. And then I say, 'during the year I've invited you to come so that you can help the child'.

The principal confirms that there are opportunities for parents to come to school to talk to teachers and that parents make use of this, but "not too much".

Parents at School A feel that teachers should contact parents in the following instance:

When the child has any problem, the teacher must contact her and tell her that the child is doing this or this. She must punish her.

All parents interviewed at School A have children in the same class. They are most impressed with the teacher, saying that she contacts them if their child is having problems. According to them she is the first teacher at the school ever to have done so. Their children are in their fourth year at school. According to these mothers the teacher "...must encourage other teachers to do the same as what she is doing now."

On the other hand these parents feel that parents should not wait to be invited, but should take the initiative and find out from teachers how their child is progressing. One says: "We must stand by ourselves and come here and ask a teacher how your child performs." [These mothers have all passed at least Standard 9.]

The principal at School A confirms that literate parents are more likely to contact the school. She states:

The literate parents, those who are well-read they are very much interested, they want to know, they come to school, they come and ask A-B-C, they want to know why their children are not performing well.

Teachers at School A say they hold class meetings about once per year. They say about half the parents attend - a figure they describe as "poor attendance".

Although teachers at School B confirm that they do invite parents to come and speak with them, parents from the same school state that they are not informed on what is happening

at school. There is a difference in the perception of teachers and parents on the success of the school's communication efforts.

Teachers at School C do not have class meetings. They indicate that individual parents are called to discuss problems:

If you have a problem with a child in the class, you can sit down and ask the parent to come in and discuss the problem. Maybe she will help the child how to write or how to read. And if the parents do exactly what we've said, you can see the progress of the child in the class.

Asked whether parents came to school uninvited, the teachers answer: "Yes, some of them, but not very often."

Teachers do admit that effective communication between the home and the school is beneficial. A teacher illustrates this with the following example:

I have a child in my class who's father and mother both are not working, but at least his mother came to me, telling me that he (sic) is not working, so I try to help this child by giving him some books.

The illiterate parent interviewed at School C says that teachers do not treat her badly and that it is "very easy" to talk to the teachers.

Many parents say that they know what is happening at school only by what their child tells them. This can lead to misunderstanding and problems. At School B the parent and grandparents say that if one listens to one's child, one would feel tempted to go to school every day to confront the teachers. The children often claim that teachers are absent from school and that they were not given any work.

## Discussion

For effective education to take place, good communication between teachers and parents must take place (Meyer & Vollentine 1994:7). Although the success of parent meetings in the schools visited, is to be commended, much still needs to be done to establish two-way individual communication. Epstein (1995:704) suggests the following relating to 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 transitions. Seen in the light of this many aspects can be improved.

### 5.6.4 Parenting skills

#### 5.6.4.1 *Teachers' attitudes and experiences*

Teachers at School A have very definite ideas of what constitutes good parenting. However, they do not attempt to share these skills with parents. Some characteristics of a good parent mentioned include:

- someone who looks after their children, "especially after dark."
- she must see to it that the child goes to school regularly and "...be interested to look into their books and see what they've done during the day."
- a parent should also care for the physical needs of the child: "She must be interested to see that they have something to eat, to wear."

- a good parent must "...have some responsibility and must be an example to the children."
- a good parent should also give her children love. "They need love from the parent."
- a parent must be available for a child to discuss his or her problems with: "They must never have fear about going to their mother or maybe to their father. They must be able to be free so that they can say everything (to the parent)."
- a good parent must participate in his/her child's education. "She must be supportive to educate the child. She must never take it that it is the child's responsibility."

Interestingly, most teachers referred to a good parent as "she". This could be a result of common confusion of pronouns or it could suggest that the primary responsibility of parenting is seen to be that of the mother.

Although this list could form the basis of a educational programme aimed at parents, it has never been done.

At School B the teachers felt that the culture of learning and disciplinary problems can only be addressed by educating parents and improving their parenting skills. One teachers expresses it as follows:

I should think by starting to educate parents; that is our most focal point. Parents need to be educated and motivated to be involved in the education of their children.

At School C the feeling is that parents require considerable help in coping with their tasks as parents. In the words of one of the teachers:

I think that this illiteracy costs a lot, because if, maybe, the parent doesn't understand, even themselves the parents need more guidance, just like their

kids. They need to be guided, somehow, so that they can understand what is good and what is bad and what the school needs from them.

The head of department at School C argues that parents at the school are not able to cope with their parenting tasks. He contributes this to the poor conditions under which they are living.

They are all sleeping in one room with their children, it is difficult for them to be like parents to their children. Whatever they talk, they say this in front of their children, whatever they do, they do just in front of children. And because they don't work, most of them, whatever they do, they do it in front of their children, and so discipline is lacking.

The school is trying to address this by speaking to parents on issues relating to their role as parents. The head of department says that at meetings the school appeals to the parents to:

...stop using abusive language in front of the children, to take care of the children instead of buying expensive clothes for themselves they should groom the children first with uniforms and what-have-you.

He also tells of one joint attempt by himself and a social worker to educate the parents by having workshops for parents during a school holiday. "Only six parents turned up." They then told the children to tell their parents that refreshments would be provided for workshop participants. One hundred and eighty parents attended on the following day. He concludes: "So now you can understand what type of parents who are having here."

Although parents complain of not knowing what to do as regards their children, particularly relating to discipline, none felt that the school should provide some form of training for them. Moreover, the parent at School C feels that some parents will not attend such workshops as it would imply that they are not educating their children correctly.

#### 5.6.4.2 *Determining responsibility*

When asked who should educate the parents, informants differed in opinion. At School B some felt that teachers could not educate parents. One teacher explains:

If we meet them as teachers...it is difficult to have them (parents) take suggestions we put. Only a few will take it, but a large group don't like to take that.

She feels that some parents will respond by saying that it is the duty of teachers to educate the children.

Another teacher suggests that the government should become involved:

I should think that the government must also be involved in this issue, because that was the government who put us in this mess now. Our education is now falling apart and the government was fully responsible for this by dividing the education departments, and whatever.

This teacher believes that if there had been one Department of Education, the illiteracy rate would not be so high. She argues that if parents were educated, "...they would have seen things differently." She therefore suggests 'adult schools' where parent involvement could be made a subject. She continues:

They (the government) can just make it like an issue like the Aids Project. They can make it Parent Involvement Projects where parents are trained to cope with the child who is delinquent, a child who doesn't go to school. They will then be in a position to address the different situations, but right now, they are just confused. When we call them to meetings, they just say, 'I don't know what is happening to my child. I can no more control him.' So now they are trying to push every thing back to the teacher.

Some of her colleagues do not agree. One contrasting suggestion is that class teachers should educate the parents of the children in his or her class. A teacher comments:

I'm not talking in terms of calling the whole school, but every teacher should call his classes' parents. In that way people will get to understand one another.

He compares this approach to God who plants one tree, "...that became a forest." He warns against always wanting to do things on a grand scale, of "wanting to hit the headlines", adding that, "One seed will produce another."

He is joined in this suggestion by another teacher who feels that if parents could be trained in their school and "maybe in another three or five schools" change will become apparent. However, she does not believe that the parents will be willing to accept extra responsibilities.

The youngest teacher of the group is also against government involvement, referring to the failed attempt to address the Aids issue by means of the Sarafina II project (an expensive musical show produced to further Aids awareness, severely criticised and the subject of an official investigation).

In spite of all the bright ideas, this school does not have any programme in place. Neither does the school have a policy of improving the parenting skills of the community. Nurses are, however, sometimes asked to address parents at parent meetings. The principal says that she explains this to the parents as follows:

If you know it is the principal who's going to say this, you are not going to listen. That's why I've invited so-and-so to come and speak to you as parents about this topic.

The teachers at School C don't know who should train parents, and ask whether the literacy classes could be used. Another teacher suggests that parents be helped on an individual basis when they visit the class.

### 5.6.4.3 *Parents' attitudes and experiences*

Parents and grandparents at School B relate how they were invited to school where they were told to encourage their children to work hard and not to watch so much television. They feel that the benefits of such strategies are undermined by the poor example set by secondary school teachers who they accuse of encouraging students to watch television by discussing the different programmes with them.

The parents and grandparents also admit that training sessions to improve parenting skills will only be attended by a few parents. They feel that some parents will have the attitude that their children are attending school regularly and doing well and that they, therefore, do not need advice on how to help their children. Moreover, parents of 'problem children' seldom attend such meetings. One grandparent adds: "Those parents whose kids behave properly at school, they attend. But those whose kids are naughty, they do not attend." Because of this, the attitude of this group seems to be that meetings to improve parenting skills will be a waste of time.

The parent at School C contends that some parents may feel offended because of the implication that they are unable to raise their own children. No one argued that strategies to improve parenting skills could be of benefit to *all* parents, and that attending such classes did not imply that one was unable to care for your child.

## **Discussion**

Judging by the information set out in 5.4.2 it seems as if there is a need to help parents in black communities 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 parent involvement programme organised at school level, such as the Comer approach (2.5.4) or implementing the Epstein model (2.5.5). However, it can also be addressed at regional or national level, using programmes such as Gordon's Family Impact model (2.5.2.1). Judging by the extent of the problem, it seems as if all role players, and at all levels, should be addressing the

issue. Clearly, the benefits to all parents of parenting programmes should be stressed. The misconception that attendance of such programmes implies criticism of one's parenting practice should be addressed.

### 5.6.5 Homework policy and practice

#### 5.6.5.1 *Teacher/parent attitudes*

When I asked the principal of School B whether parents are involved in the children's homework, she began to laugh.

Do you know why I am laughing? Because you are just hitting on all the things that I wish were happening!! Parents and homework - that would make work for us here more simpler. That would even make the kids better - sometimes you look at a child and say, 'This is not a below-average child, his intelligence cannot be that of a child who needs to go to a special school.' If there was some follow-up, if there was somebody who helps with the homework, this child would be better off.

She believes that even grandmothers are capable of helping smaller children, but suggests that a relative or friend be asked to assist as the child gets older. She illustrates this by discussing how her brother had helped her child with maths, something she felt she was not capable of doing.

Teachers at School C agree that parents should be involved in a child's homework. One elaborates:

If the parents could just look at the books and sign them to show that they saw the progress of the child or I saw everything that the child did that day.

Parents at School A feel that one should ask one's child about homework every day. They feel strongly that parents should be involved in children's homework. The class teacher spoke

to them about homework and the importance thereof, however one parent remarks: "This is the first teacher who do that."

A teacher at School B is of the opinion that township parents will not be willing to be involved in children's homework. She sketches the following scenario to illustrate this:

If they (the parents) go out of the school yard, they meet their friends who have kids in other schools who'll say, 'why do they bother you so much? You have no time to rest, you must go there evenings and weekends'. That one will say, 'no, where my child is, there are no meetings.' When the child goes to school, that is where the responsibility ends'. What is the parent going to do? He is going to take the child out here and take it to the other school where he is not going to be overloaded, where no-one will say, 'check the books, sign for homework'.

#### 5.6.5.2 *Involving parents in home learning*

The principal at School B says that she speaks about the importance of homework at parent meetings. She elaborates:

Well, they come to parents' meetings and you always tell them about the importance of examining the children's [work] and supervising them, and we request not to let the children be over-ruled by TV.

No specific guidance on *how* this should be done is apparently given. Moreover, none of the teachers interviewed has ever given parents advice on *how* to help children with homework.

One of the working mothers interviewed says she helps her child with homework, but has not been given advice on how this should be done. She says she and her child are "...just doing it on our own."

The problems experienced by parents, especially uneducated parents, in trying to supervise children's homework is illustrated by the story one of the grandparents tells. He is concerned about being asked to sign his grandchild's books, because they have not been marked by the teacher. He argues that he might be signing something which is incorrect. It is obvious that he does not know whether his signature is needed to indicate that he has seen his grandchild's work or whether he must sign to show he has seen how the child is progressing at school, as indicated by the mark the teacher has given her.

#### 5.6.5.3 *The extent of cooperation*

Teachers interviewed are not very positive about the amount of cooperation they get from parents regarding homework assignments. The principal at School A explains: "The literate parents are the ones who look at a book, but the illiterate ones don't care."

A teacher at the same school elaborates:

When I give them homework, I usually tell them where parents should sign, but you know, not all the parents sign. You find that the child would come and say, 'Oh, my mother was busy and my father was not at home'. She will give lots of stories.

Teachers at School C sometimes describe how a request for help with a homework assignment is sometimes met with aggression:

Like when you ask them to paste pictures in their books. But some of the parents are very rude!! They'll say, 'Just go and ask your teacher where should I get the pictures from, I'm not mad!! Should I go around picking up papers!'

Another teacher adds: "And others will say, 'Tell your teacher that he can also paste it! I don't have time!' Very few are co-operating."

Having driven past the one-roomed houses and the shacks of the squatter camp, it is doubtful whether asking children to find pictures on a certain subject, is a fair request. Moreover, it is possible that parents' aggression would be reduced if they had been part of a discussion on the homework policy for the year.

A parent at Atteridgeville (in the pilot study) feels that teachers should not presume that parents are not interested in helping their children at home. She feels that all that is needed are some guidelines from the teacher. According to her, such help is never given.

## **Discussion**

Parents' assistance in home learning is a vital means of improving school performance. However, interviews showed that both parents and teachers need information on the advantages of parents helping children with homework. Moreover, both groups need advice on *how* this should be done. South Africa has a very high illiteracy rate (3.4.9) which makes it difficult for parent to be involved in their children's homework - but not impossible. However, teachers will need to be taught strategies of ways of involving parent in children's homework. This training can be included in teachers' basic training or as part of in-service training courses. The result could be better student grades and a decrease in the dropout rate in black urban schools.

### **5.6.6 Contribution of role players to decision making**

#### **5.6.6.1 *Parent Teacher Associations (PTA)***

There is a PTA operative in all three school visited. At School A and B this parent body seems to be functioning fairly well. For example, the principal of School B seems to have a good relationship with the PTA, especially with the chairperson. She describes him thus:

He normally comes and visits the school, the parents that elected him are lucky. He is always here to say, 'do you have a problem, can we call the parents?'

When this researcher visited the school, the chairperson and the principal were trying to find ways of providing less expensive school uniforms for the children of the school.

School A also has a PTA, which replaced the school committee in 1990. The principal says that they are mainly responsible for the maintenance of school buildings and controlling any school funds. The PTA also "...helps solve the school problems." She explains that this could, for example, be a burglary, or dealing with people who live next to the school and play loud music, etc. The principal acknowledges that prior to the elections, many school meetings were held to try to resolve the conflict brought about by different factions in the school:

Whenever there is an emergency we can call a meeting, maybe 15 times a year, especially during those days of crisis when there was so much fighting in schools...from 1990 the school had lots of problems, there were problems, you know, politics came to schools. There were lots of organisations among teachers and there was no understanding among teachers but now it's much better.

The head of department at School C experiences that parents do not have enough insight in what is happening at the school, and that involving them in decision making could lead to problems. He explains that parents get "information from somewhere" and then set about making the school as ungovernable as possible. He argues that such things are still happening in the squatter community, citing as example a meeting which was held between parents and teachers, where it became apparent that: "...most of these parents were given information by people not from this school, but people with a different agenda against our school."!

He suggests that many parents discuss school matters without knowledge of the school, and when meetings are called to clarify issues, the people involved don't attend the meeting. He concludes: 'So they are sort of backbiting us.'

All principals state that politics do not play a role in the choice of candidates for the PTA. An informant sums it up: "No, they (the voting parents) are looking at the potential of the person."

#### 5.6.6.2 *Decision making outside the PTA*

School B is situated in an old area of Mamelodi. This means many residents and teachers know each other and there is a certain amount of informal contact between the two groups. The principal explains:

Teachers are so much in contact with the parents. Even at home they've got friends with the parents - it is some sort of a bonding.

The principal maintains that these parents are often involved in any problems which may arise at the school. She confirms: "We normally call those parents who are not working to say 'Look, there is a problem.'" These are not necessarily parents serving on the PTA.

Other than this informal inclusion in decision making this school, as well as the other two schools visited, has no policy of involving parents in decision making concerning the school.

#### 5.6.6.3 *Envisaged governmental changes*

The planned governmental changes to governing structures in schools is set out in 3.5.3.3. The principal at School A is aware that a new governing structure is to be introduced in all schools and says that the Department of Education has promised to train these bodies. She is in favour of governing bodies being trained, as she feel some of the PTA's of the past "used to overstep". She illustrates this:

They [the PTA] want to even get to...disciplining teachers that they are not supposed to do. They want to tell the teachers their do's and don'ts. So they are now going to be trained so that we know they can go thus far.

The head of department at School C feels that the composition of the governing structure should be changed so that parents are not in the majority. He feels that teachers as "enlightened professional people who know about children of other people" should not be placed in a position where they can be outvoted by parents.

## **Discussion**

The establishment of a governing structure at all schools is to become law in January 1997 (3.5.3.3). Judging by this research the role of all participants needs to be spelt out very clearly. In Soweto it was also found that many PTSA members do not understand their function, power and responsibilities (Chisholm & Vally 1996:37). All schools seem to welcome the idea of having parents as part of a governing structure. However, as the interview progresses it becomes apparent that it is felt that the powers of parents should be clearly set out and should not exceed those of teachers. It is clear that members of new governing bodies will have to be very well trained. Likewise, it is clear that cognisance will have to be taken of the fact that not all schools or communities are the same and that homogenising policies could make the situations at some schools worse. School C in this research could be a case in point.

### **5.6.7 Volunteers in the school**

#### *5.6.7.1 The practice of using volunteers in school*

At School A volunteers are sometimes used. However, in most cases it seems as if parents are asked to clean the school or to act as an audience at school events. The principal gives the following example:

We have often appealed to them (parents) to help the children (to clean the school). The children come to school well-dressed - then they have to scrub, and have to polish. Then we appeal. Can't some of the parent's help? But they have never really done that.

Asked whether parents accompany pupils on choir outings, she answers: "These parents who are interested to accompany the choir, should just come and we take their names." She sees the presence of the parents more for "moral background", adding that the teachers are good at looking after the children and seeing to it that none get lost. The principal says there are no parents helping in the classroom, adding: "It has never happened."

Parents at School A say they have never been asked to help in any way except "with the money." When they are invited to a class it is only as audience, never to participate or to help.

The parents who cook meals as part of the feeding scheme at School A are paid R300 and are employed by the Department of Education. As such they are not seen to be 'volunteers' in the South African context, where the system of paying teachers' aids, for example, has never been allowed.

School B has no volunteers helping in the school. The parents cooking meals are also paid by the Department of Education, but in this case are not from the community. The principal finds this unacceptable. She feels the children's parents should have been offered the posts. Moreover, she feels that parents of the children would "cook with love", saying: "I'm cooking for my child who is here."

At School C parents help only to clean the school or to get the bread ready for the children for break. At this school no cooked meals are served and the volunteers are not paid. The parent interviewed says that they were not asked to help to clean the school; a few mother just decided that it was necessary. This mother also helps to serve bread to children during break. She says the mothers are not paid and "go back to our homes with our own hunger." Asked whether she is not given some bread to eat, she replies:

We are afraid and also we cannot eat without first giving to the children and see that they are fed. But they finish all the bread so that we cannot get. There are so many children at school that there are sometimes a shortage of food here.

No other examples of using volunteers was given by informants.

#### 5.6.7.2 *The perceived role of parent volunteers*

One teacher at School C did acknowledge that volunteers in a classroom would help parents understand the conditions under which teachers were teaching. She comments:

Maybe that can help to let the parents understand some of the problems we have at school. This class is overcrowded. While the teacher is teaching, other children are playing. So the particular parent can understand the situation in the class.

However, this teacher does not mention that, in addition to gaining insight in the working conditions of teachers, a parent volunteer could help to alleviate some of the problems.

On the other hand, a teacher at the same school expresses the fear that the teacher:pupil ratio will not be reduced if use is made of parent volunteers in the classes. Asked whether one could not use a parent even if there are 40 children in the class, she replies:

If you then pick up problems, then you call a parent. Because having a lesser class you will be able to attend to each and every one.

In other words the perception is that one can give individual attention to all children if the ratio drops to 1:40 and that teachers will then not need help.

## Discussion

Using volunteers in classrooms is a concept foreign to the South African education system. On the whole teachers in this country subscribe to Swap's Protective model (2.5.3.1). However, things have changed dramatically and it is time to look at education in a different light and to seek solutions which are innovative. Parent volunteers could be one option to improve learning in overcrowded classrooms.

### 5.6.8 Community relations

In School A businesses are only involved if a person is, at the same time, a parent. The church is mainly involved in scripture reading during assembly. The clergy are not used to speak to the children or parents on any other matters. The school premises are used for ABET classes in the afternoons. English classes are given to Standard 2 pupils by teachers of the school, paid for by a sponsor.

At School B, the principal uses the community in different ways. She uses traffic inspectors to talk about road safety; uses nurses to discuss issues of health and also works with the civic association concerning burglaries at the school. The principal also makes use of the young boys who were formally in her school and who have now dropped out of secondary school. She uses them to look after her car and also asked their assistance when the school was asked to host a group of pupils from Witbank. She recalls saying to them:

We want you to monitor that these kids from Witbank are safe, that the thugs from outside don't bother them even when they go to play at the grounds. You've got to go with them.

Afterwards the young people were invited to join the group for lunch and were introduced to the school during assembly. The young 'delinquents' she is using are the same children who used to break in and steal from the school! She assembled them and said: "Look, the school is yours...we're giving you this portfolio, we want you to monitor everybody who comes and [leaves]."

She says that the youths are doing excellent work and that she hopes that at least one child will decide to return to school again and complete his studies.

School C adopted a police unit - hoping that the talks they give pupils will help combat crime in future.

The school premises at School B and C are also used by other groups such as ABET after school hours. None of the schools mention using children in the school to improve the area they are living in, or to help the community in some way.

## **Discussion**

Schools should realise that *community* must be defined to include all groups affected by the quality of education, not just people living in the vicinity of the school. Greater awareness of community resources which could be used by the parents and children should also receive attention, and this information passed on to those needing help. Moreover, in the spirit of the 'new' South Africa it is necessary to get rid of the 'victim syndrome' (Maja 1993:31) which many people are still relying on. One way of doing this is by the school getting involved in projects through which pupils (and parents) can start serving the community in which they live.

### **5.6.9 Barriers to parent involvement in township schools**

School personnel may either facilitate or inhibit parent involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes about parent involvement! This appears to be especially true of low-income neighbourhoods where parents are seen as part of the problem in educating their children, rather than a resource (Eccles & Harold 1996:11). This appears to be true of this study as well.

Parents and teachers both observed a lack in one another's behaviour and responsibility. Many points refer to a lack on the part of parents, identified by teachers. It is recognised that these reflect the lack of communication and trust between parents and teachers who tend to

view their roles as exclusive of each other. Moreover, where teachers hold negative perceptions of parents' desire for involvement, it should be noted that these are the very areas the school should be addressing if they are committed to a policy of parent involvement.

Moreover, teachers appear to have an unrealistic notion of what constitutes successful parent involvement. For example they are disappointed when only half the parents arrive for a class meeting (5.6.3.4), or when the child's grandparents come to school rather than the biological parents (5.6.3.1), or when the parents who arrive are illiterate. In this regard teachers will have to be shown that these are not barriers, but opportunities, and that even five parents/grandparents who are committed can make a difference.

The ensuing section summarises some of the main barriers to parent involvement mentioned by the teachers interviewed.

#### 5.6.9.1 *Parents' disinterest*

Many principals and teachers expressed the opinion that parents are not interested in becoming involved in the education of their children or that they don't care about their children. In the words of the principal at School B:

But even then, we know that there are parents that wouldn't come. We know them. We say, 'even if we give this one a letter, they will not come.' You know the background. You'll find that no-one is responsible.

A teacher at School A gives another example: "Some of them will come to the classes, but some of them, up to now, you never meet them, up to the end of the year."

There are also teachers who feel that parents have changed and are no longer interested in helping their children. One teacher recalls:

I would say our job was easy, because parents used to be together, parents used to help their children. Now as the years go on, things have changed dramatically.

Her colleague agrees, stating that maybe today's parents "...don't want to involve them with the education of their children."

#### 5.6.9.2 *Parents' negative attitudes*

Teachers and principals also describe parents as negative, or uncooperative. A teacher at School A comments:

If you tell children 'tell your mother to help you' they (parents) say, 'tell your teacher that she is earning money for teaching you, tell her that!'

Teachers at School C agree that parents do not cooperate and relate this to 'their negative attitudes.' Teachers attribute this negative attitude to parent's lack of knowledge and to the poverty in the community.

The principal at the same school feels that this negativity prevents the development of a partnership. He explains:

And also, they (parents) don't appreciate the little what teachers are doing; he is coming here to criticise. More especially once a teacher or principal has made a little mistake they capitalize on it. They will say that it has spoilt everything. I think, that is our problem.

He does add that parents who have moved to urban areas so that their children may attend school, have a positive approach to the school.

A teacher at School B mentions that class meetings were held in the past, but only a few parents arrived, and if you constantly called on them, they too would no longer cooperate.

On the other hand, the principal at School A argues that although parents are still negative, things are improving.

Well, the parents of this community, some are a little bit negative, but others are positive, because you know parents are beginning to open up. You know, in the past, parents used to think the school is solely for the teachers but not any more, I see most parents are now involved.

#### 5.6.9.3 *Parents' lack of education/illiteracy*

The principal at School C feels that parent involvement in the school is not enough and describes this as "an empty space between the school and the parents". He attributes this mainly to the fact that most of the parents are uneducated.

Now the problem of the teacher, we are trying here to call parents sometimes, but it seems most of our parents think that they are not educated - they thus run away from teachers, and that brings a problem.

A teacher at School A says: "Other parents are ignorant, they don't help their kids". A teacher at the same school elaborates: "Sometimes it is because of illiteracy, and because they work...They (parents) fear to come here. They don't come to school, only grannies come to school."

Teachers at School C also agree that the illiteracy of parents is a barrier to effective parent involvement. One teacher explains:

Some of them don't even understand...and if you maybe show the parents problems concerning his or her child, he or she doesn't understand you, because of that illiteracy. They want to force you to pass their children.

#### 5.6.9.4 *Parents' fear of the school*

Most teachers link the fact that parents feel intimidated by the school to the parent's lack of education. A teacher at School B argues that parents feel so belittled by the fact that they do not understand what is happening in school that they withdraw from all school related activities. According to this teacher, this "...puts the child in a position of command."

The principal at School A also speaks of parents being afraid of coming to school.

Some parents are afraid to come, they're afraid of teachers, they want to keep in their own cocoons. You know those who are afraid are those who are illiterate.

Although the following remark made by a teacher was meant to illustrate that parents should not be afraid of coming to school, it also illustrates that the teacher is thinking in terms of social classes and places most parents in a class below professionally qualified people. She remarks:

Sometimes they [parents] are afraid to come to us. Maybe they think when they come to me, I am going to ignore them, because they are not educated or not on my level. The blame is maybe with the teacher.

#### 5.6.9.5 *Limited opportunities for involvement*

In the above sections it was noted that parents are not given many opportunities to become involved in their children's education. Mention was made of the fact that they are expected to do little else other than sign children's homework (5.6.5). Except for members of the PTA, few parents are involved in decision making (5.6.6). Parents are also not given any tasks when accompanying the pupils on any trips, neither are parents used as 'aides' in the classroom. It seems as if very few opportunities are extended to parents to become involved in aspects affecting their children's learning. A parent describes the role ascribed to her as

follows: "And then you'll find that maybe every week they will tell us, 'come on Saturday and clean the school.'"

In many cases it seems as if parent involvement is seen as the paying of school fees. A parent at School A find this embarrassing. She says, "...they must understand, maybe it is not that I don't want to pay, maybe I don't have the money to pay." She is very willing to become involved in other ways.

#### 5.6.9.6 *Lack of teacher preparation for parent involvement*

The staff of School A attended a course in parent involvement some time ago. The course was presented by a private organisation. The teachers were not able to provide this researcher with a copy of the course notes and it is therefore impossible to comment on the approach taken. However, no difference was seen in the attitude to, or practice of parent involvement in this school when compared with other schools visited. The teachers in this school also mention the fact that their basic training did not include techniques to involve parents. They are of the opinion that this is now being addressed in present day teacher training. The researcher found no evidence of this in interviews with younger teachers.

On being asked whether she or her staff had been trained to implement parent involvement, the principal at School B says: "No. No training whatsoever. I wish I could be able to get them [parents] more involved. I wish I could get some training, some strategies."

A teacher from the same school also sees the lack of parent involvement as stemming from the fact that teachers are not trained to work with parents. He explains:

We are only taught how to manage a class, controlling books. The part of where does the parent come in, is not there, only the scope with the children and books. So, parents are not part of the package of management. I think that we basically need workshops.

The teachers at School C also admit to never having been trained to implement parent involvement. They feel that this is necessary as they are of the opinion that the school should take the lead in establishing parent involvement. A teacher explains: "The school must first invite the parents just like the way they call a parents meeting. We can look at the parents who are interested."

#### 5.6.9.7 *Limited time*

Most studies on parent involvement point to the limited time available to most people today as one of the barriers to parent involvement. In black townships, this is also mentioned as a barrier to parent involvement. A teacher at School B whose child is in a 'white' school says that parent meetings at this school can be held during the week. He explains why this is not possible in a township school.

Here we cannot do it, because the parents knock off very late. The whites, they travel short distances to work, but us blacks travel many kilometres. That is why things have to be done on a weekend. It is very, very busy weekends. On weekends they have also got weddings, funerals, all these things.

A teacher at School A confesses that she does not communicate with parents as much as she should be doing. She expresses it this way: "We don't have time sometimes. When we have the children here, we forget about the parents sometimes, that they will help us."

A teacher at School C also finds the lack of time and opportunity to meet with parents frustrating, as this comment shows:

We don't have enough time to come together with parents to discuss their children's problems. And also to ask them to help us in the development of the child. It is difficult.

She explains that another group of teachers use the school building immediately after the first session is dismissed. Moreover, some parent are working adding to the difficulty of finding a suitable time to discuss problems.

#### 5.6.9.8 *Lack of implementation of ideas*

Teachers interviewed have quite a lot of suggestions regarding ways in which parents can be involved at schools. These include:

- Helping at school functions: "When we have got functions, they must be there to come and help us, to come and help the teachers."
- Accompanying the children when going on trips: "Even if we are going on trips, going to the zoo - they must be there to help us and to observe what we are doing to their children."
- Helping with fund raising: "They can help in fund raising. Right now, sometimes you find that we don't even have brooms in classes. And then you find yourself taking money of your pocket and you don't have that money, but for the sake of a clean class, you do it."
- Help with homework: "If you give the child homework, they must help them with homework, or at least supervise. Make them do their homework, even if you don't know the work, supervise them."
- Assist the school by donating paper, drawing pins, et cetera, things the teachers feel the parent could perhaps get at their place of work.
- Improve the school grounds: "The parents can come to the school, planting some trees, grass."

- Assist in serving food to the children during break: "Maybe when we have the feeding scheme, they can come and do the work and give the children some food so that the teachers don't have to do it."
- Cleaning the school: "Even cleaning the schools, maybe on weekends."
- Assist in disciplining the child: "Parents can also help by helping in the development of their children, especially with discipline from home to do their school work, neatness."
- Help in solving problems: "If we have problems and we could call the parents and talk about it, and maybe after that the child is satisfied, even the parent."

All these suggestions are positive and could serve to bring parents into the school. Very few of these suggestions are, however, implemented. Reasons given are lack of time, lack of knowledge on how to implement the suggestions, lack of a school policy on parent involvement, and the perception that the parents are 'negative', 'uninterested', 'uneducated', and 'illiterate'. Another reason often listed is the fact that mainly grandparents come to meetings.

#### *5.6.9.9 Grandparents not accepted as surrogate parents*

Teachers and principals complain that when parent meetings are called, one just "sit(s) with grannies." Asked whether the school cannot work with grandparents instead of parents the principal at School B responds:

Yes, we are working with them now but we know the situation with the granny. If we say, 'Look the school wants this for your child, you've got to pay this', they just tell you that it is impossible, because the people who should be doing that are not there!

Teachers at the same school say that the vast majority of people who come to meetings are grandparents, adding that the "real parents are not involved."

Teachers at School A also mention the presence of grandparents at meetings and are even more outspoken in their opinion that this is of no help. One remarks:

I don't know what is wrong. Three-quarters of the attendance at meetings are grandmothers. And most of them cannot read or write. So what support do you have from them?

Similar situations were found in schools in Soweto (Chisholm & Vally 1996:36).

#### **5.6.10 Conclusions on parent involvement in black urban schools**

This research indicates that there are many factors impeding parent involvement in black urban communities. These include: a lack of school policy on parent involvement; illiteracy of many parents in the community; the fact that many parents seem ill-equipped to deal with their parental duties; time constraints; and the fact that it is unsafe to venture out after dark, thus limiting all school activities to the already overcrowded weekends. Moreover, because teachers have not been trained to implement parent involvement or even to work with adults, they do not offer parents a variety of ways in which to become involved at school. Neither do they assist parents to improve their parenting skills.

Parents are their children's first, and in many cases, most influential teachers. The home efforts can therefore greatly improve student achievement. However, when parents find themselves in a vulnerable position or with handicapping conditions, they should certainly be helped, so that they may be able to meet the challenge of providing the support their children need to succeed in life (Carrasquillo & London 1993:109). Grandparents caring for children are even more in need of advice and support. Moreover, parent involvement programmes should take cognisance of this group, assisting teachers in adapting strategies for parent involvement to the needs of grandparents.

The difference in attitude of teachers and parents suggests that schools and families need a better understanding of each other, what they are currently doing to help children, and the role each expects the other to fulfil. Only then will schools and parents be able to work together to meet children's needs, regardless of family background.

Schools are neither homogenous nor free of context. Besides the general recommendations made to implement or improve parent involvement, clear and tailored strategies corresponding to the specific problems and dynamics of each school are required.

## 5.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented characteristics and background data on the informants and the context in which this research takes place. The data collected during observations and in-depth individual and focus group interviews are presented and discussed under three key thematic areas: the township and its people; educational provision in township schools; and home-school-community relations. The last chapter will conclude with a synthesis of significant themes, the implications for parent involvement and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 6

### OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION AND GUIDELINES ON IMPROVING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN BLACK URBAN COMMUNITIES

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The final chapter opens with a general overview of the investigation in order to show that the aims originally expressed in 1.5 have been addressed and achieved.

The theory underlying parent involvement and models of parent involvement as well as an overview of educational provision for black people in South Africa in historical perspective has been integrated with the experiences of teachers and parents concerning parent involvement in a black urban community in Gauteng. A synthesis of the main findings are given. Finally, recommendations for improving parent involvement derived from the research are briefly set out. The identification of possible areas for further research concludes the chapter.

#### 6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE INVESTIGATION ✓

What constitutes parent involvement is often difficult to determine as the term is used to encompass a broad spectrum of activities. However, a common theme is that all activities relating to parent involvement bring together the separate domains of community and school (1.1). Central to the success of the plethora of parent involvement programmes is that the school should know the parents, understand the circumstances under which they live, and provide as many options for involvement in a school's repertoire as possible (1.1).

##### 6.2.1 Parent involvement: A theoretical basis ✓

In order to determine the place and role of parents in education a literature study, as well as an exploratory fact-finding visit to the USA was undertaken in May-June 1996. The emphasis throughout was on parent involvement within disadvantaged, urban communities.

The conceptualisation of urban education arose in the USA in the 1960's. Principal among the issues of urban education investigated by researchers was underachievement of minorities and the desegregation of schools. From the debate surrounding underachievement, a conceptual division of theory emerged, namely the *deficit* and the *different* models of children (2.2.2). The issue of *deficiency* is posited to be located in the child, his/her home and cultural background. The educational solution is, therefore, to remedy the deficiency by means of compensatory programmes, such as improving the English proficiency of children from deprived backgrounds (2.2.2). The deprivation found in black urban communities in South Africa (5.4) has inspired powerful arguments in favour of incorporating Gordon's Family Impact model (2.5.2.1) or Swap's School-to-Home Transmission model (2.5.3.2) into school programmes. However, in most cases, this has the effect of absolving the schools from all blame relating to children's underachievement at school.

✗ In contrast, the *difference model* argues that it is the difference between the world of the school and the world of many urban children which causes underachievement at school (2.2.2). In this regard, Gordon's School Impact model encourages teachers to learn from parents and parents to learn from teachers, thus bridging the gap between the home and the school (2.5.2.2). The findings of this investigation (5.5) lends itself to this type of approach. However, to argue that bridging the gap between the home and the school will resolve all problems in black urban communities, including improving student grades, is merely to oversimplify a very complex problem. Clearly other strategies are also needed.

✓ The barriers to parent involvement in black urban communities are discussed in section 2.3. The findings emphasise that the main barrier is the lack of school policy and practice of parent involvement (2.3.10). This endorses the literature (Chapter 2) which stressed that school practices, not just family characteristics, make a difference in determining whether parents become involved in, and are informed about their children's education.

✓ The advantages of parent involvement for students (2.4.1); parents (2.4.2); teachers and schools (2.4.3) and the community (2.4.4) are clear. Of importance for black urban communities in South Africa is the well-documented evidence in the literature that parent

involvement improves student achievement, leads to a decreased dropout rate, decreased behavioural problems and increased parent self-esteem.

Although there is no single empirically based theory or model of parent involvement, a number of evolving theories or models are widely recognised and applied in schools overseas. These were discussed in 2.5 and can be useful if judiciously adapted to the South African context.

### 6.2.2 Educational provision in black urban communities X

Educational provision in black urban communities in South Africa was firstly examined by means of a literature study. The role of parents was included in the study and amplified by means of a pilot study carried out in two black urban communities in 1994 (3.5.4).

Following the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa, many black subsistence farmers left their land to work on the mines (3.2.1). The system of migrant labour and the subsequent introduction of the pass laws for black people resulted in the separation of many black families for long periods of time. Black people working in the industries adjacent to the mines brought their families to live with them and thus, the contemporary black township developed. Both black miners and labourers lived under very poor conditions. Black families and communities were further disrupted by the policy of resettlement or relocation which was implemented after 1948 (3.2.1). In 1986 the repeal of the influx laws greatly increased black urbanisation and the provision of housing and urban infrastructures became a problem. Because of these factors the traditional extended family structure was generally replaced by the nuclear family, female-headed and multi-generational families (3.2.2.1). The active involvement of black youth in the freedom struggle after 1976 put a severe strain on traditional social relationships between adults and children, and further contributed to the breakdown of the black urban family (3.2.2.2).

In order to accommodate cultural diversity, the previous government established different departments for the administration and control of education and different schools to accommodate the different racial groups. In spite of the *separate but equal proviso*, black

education was characterised by poorly qualified teachers, inadequate physical resources, overcrowded classrooms, high attrition rates and poor examination results (3.4).

Opposition to Bantu education, though widespread only developed into open political rebellion in the 1970's, culminating in the Soweto uprising in 1976 (3.3.1.2). Although various Education Acts sought to remove the worst aspects of education for black people, racial segregation remained (3.3.1.3). Efforts by black parents to intervene in the educational crisis, particularly through the National Educational Coordination Committee (NECC), were mostly unsuccessful. Moreover, in the period 1986-1988 many leaders of the NECC were detained (3.3.1.3). This void in leadership was filled quickly by politically active youth. Teachers became more active in the struggle during 1993, mainly through the agency of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). Their strike actions further disrupted schooling in black communities.

The 1993 Constitution of South Africa officially ended educational provision based on race (3.3.2.1). The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) included, among other, the principle that education is a basic human right. However, although educational provision is now theoretically equal, much must be done to improve black urban schools.

In the past parent involvement in black urban schools was mostly related to serving on government instituted governing structures (3.5.1). The powers of parents were limited and in practice amounted to little more than collecting funds from parents. Following the 1994 elections, the government acknowledged the importance of parent involvement in the White Paper on Education and Training (3.5.3.1); the Hunter Report (3.5.3.2) and the White Paper on Education 2 (3.5.3.3). Although extensive powers are to be extended to parents on the new governing structures to be established in 1997, the government does yet not propose broadening participation to include *all* parents.

### 6.2.3 The research design X

Chapters 2 and 3 provided a useful and necessary background to parent involvement models and theories, as well as educational provision for black people in South Africa. However,

they did not provide a detailed account of parent involvement in black urban schools or of factors in the communities and schools affecting such involvement. As few studies have investigated the former, a phenomenological qualitative approach (4.3) was considered appropriate for an exploratory study of parent involvement in a black urban community in Gauteng. Three primary schools in Mamelodi (a black urban township outside Pretoria) were identified with the help of a gatekeeper (4.4.3) and a period spent in each as participant observer (4.4.4.1). In-depth interviews with the principals (4.4.4.2) and focus group interviews with teachers (4.4.4.3) and parents (4.4.4.4) were also included in the data gathering. The data were subjected to qualitative analysis and organised according to emerging key themes (4.4.6). The themes relate broadly to the context within which education takes place (5.4), educational provision (5.5), and home-school-community relations (5.6). A further synthesis of the emerging themes was undertaken whereby significant findings discussed under 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 were interlinked and arranged under rubrics (6.3) to form grounded theory (4.2.5).

### **6.3 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS X**

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

#### **6.3.1 Significance of pupils' home circumstances**

The investigation suggested that many families in urban townships are living in poverty (5.4.3.3). Eight to twelve people typically share a one to four roomed home (5.4.1). Amenities such as electricity, water, sewerage and refuse removal are under provided. Privacy and a place for children to study are frequently lacking.

#### **Recommendations**

Children learn, grow, and develop both at home and at school. There is no clear-cut boundary between the home and school experiences of children and youth; rather home and school experiences are reciprocally influential. It is, therefore recommended that teachers of

children from deprived communities are made aware of the prevailing conditions under which families are living. Colleges and universities involved in teacher education should also adequately prepare teachers to work in schools serving these communities through the presentation of relevant courses.

However, although the socio-economic and political context plays a major role in the character of schools, this alone does not determine school effectiveness or school quality. Both effective and troubled schools can and do co-exist in the same socio-economic context. This is equally true of families. In this regard Swap (1992:57) states: "Often teachers think of low-income/low-status families as being 'deficient' and many dwell on family problems while ignoring family strengths." Most parents are generally interested in methods to help their own children, especially strategies that are relatively easy, fast and linked to their children's school environment (Carrasquillo & London 1993:85). Thus, schools in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods should explore ways of involving parents which do not incur expenses on the part of the parents. The fact that many caregivers in these communities are unemployed and thus, have time during the day to become involved in school projects should also be explored. Moreover, the number of adults sharing a single home should be utilised positively. For example, a person who is literate in the home may, therefore, be able to help a child with homework activities. Lareau (1996:63) suggests that students in deprived communities identify and appoint three homework helpers at the beginning of the year to help monitor their progress at school. These designated homework helpers may sign a contract promising to help monitor homework completion.

### **6.3.2 Parenting skills of caregivers**

Children in township schools are not necessarily cared for by their biological parents. This research confirmed that children may be living in female-headed, in multi-generational homes (3.2.2.1; 5.4.2.1) or in the care of grandparents (5.4.2.2). Many women work outside the home (5.4.2.3(d)). Findings suggested that a significant number of mothers are under age (5.4.4.5). The research undertaken in Mamelodi also indicates that parents and other caregivers experience many problems relating to their parenting tasks (5.6.4).

Parenting is clearly a very grave responsibility and the ways adults practise parenting affects the psychological, social, and educational growth of their children. In this regard, the so-called *curriculum* of the home has been found to be twice as predictive of academic learning as family socio-economic status (Carrasquillo & London 1993:214). Thus, parents and caregivers, particularly those coping with deprived circumstances, need to be supported in their parenting tasks.

### Recommendations

Schools should accept that the idea of a typical family is the exception in many communities. All those working with the different caregivers of children should emphasise the strengths and not the liabilities of different family types. This means that teachers should be prepared to work with single parents, grandparents, adolescent mothers and to adapt parent involvement programmes to their needs (cf 5.6.9.6 & 5.6.9.9). In order to optimise cooperation between the school and the child's caregiver, school registration forms should seek information about whom the child resides with and who should be contacted in the event of problems at school. All caregivers should be made to feel welcome at school and treated as valued partners in the education of the child. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that parent involvement can be an efficient factor in non-traditional families for improving students' outcomes (Schneider & Coleman 1993:66). However, LLoyd (1996:256) warns that if we simply try to encourage parents to get involved with their children in school without first strengthening their own family culture, parents will become frustrated. Parents in non-traditional families want the best for their children but often do not have the tools needed to create a successful family learning culture.

This means that the school could develop programmes to assist adults in coping with the added responsibility of parenthood. Gordon's *Parent Impact model* (2.5.2.1) provides an example of a programme in which the school reaches out to caregivers through home visits or other communication techniques. The aim is to aid caregivers in learning effective ways of rearing their children.

The principle of assisting all caregivers to cope with their parenting tasks is currently addressed in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995:21):

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.

Parenting programmes may address a number of related issues. For example, sex education programmes should place greater emphasis on the responsibilities of and the problems associated with unplanned parenthood, and not just on preventative measures.

### 6.3.3 Changing family structures in black urban communities

The black family structure was severely affected by migrant labour, the apartheid system (3.2.2) and the involvement of the youth in the 'liberation struggle' (3.3.1.3). Moreover, rapid urbanisation has rendered irrelevant traditional social values and lifestyles emanating from and protected by extended family systems and leadership hierarchies (3.2.2). This has been borne out by the experiences of the informants in this investigation. Carrasquillo and London (1993:22) confirm that any system that deprives a people of its family structure denies the humanity of that people. They argue that slavery as practised in the USA focused on destroying the positive self-image of the black family structure and that the latter has not completely recovered from the effect of slavery. Consequently, many issues and behaviours that derive from the experiences of slavery continue today. In some respects, black people in South Africa appear to have suffered a similar fate (3.2.2.2).

## **Recommendations**

The family structure in black urban communities should be strengthened by people at all levels of society. In this regard a multi-disciplinary approach is appropriate. The school, church, social services, community leaders et cetera need to work together to strengthen the family. Moreover, students need to be included in all projects. Franks and Glass (1994:273) found that the black youth in South Africa are rooted in their community and have a desire to learn from and respect their parents. They also cherish a basic belief in law and order and a hope for a better future based on their own efforts and education. This suggests a very positive starting point for parent involvement programmes. The government's proposal that senior students be represented on school governing structures (3.5.3.3) acknowledges that young people should have a say in their education. In the light of the history of the youth's participation in the liberation struggle, they should be taught that rights should be balanced by the acceptance of responsibility. This could probably be addressed as part of a school subject, for example, life skills education as well as collaborative parent involvement projects in which parents and children participate together.

### **6.3.4 Urban schools located in communities characterised by violence**

Regrettably even after the general elections of 1994, violence has remained endemic in South Africa (3.2.3 & 5.4.3.1). Moreover, many young people who were involved in politically motivated violence show an increased likelihood of becoming involved in other forms of violence and conventional crime. In addition, child abuse is on the increase (5.4.3.1). Many informants confirmed the violent and dangerous nature of township life. They frequently linked crime and violence to the prevailing poverty in the community (5.4.3.3) and a lack of effective policing (5.4.3.2).

## **Recommendations**

It does not lie within the scope of this research to comment on the need to improve economic conditions or to increase the policing in areas with a high crime rate. However, it is the duty of all communities to protect their young and in this regard, the school and the home should

cooperate in preventing violence towards children in the townships. Measures could include using parent volunteers to patrol school grounds before and after school, or to be visible in their yards when children go to or return from school. Children should be taught by their parents and the school that no one has the right to abuse them. Experts in the community, such as social workers, nurses, doctors, could address parents on this issue as part of a parent involvement programme. Parents and teachers could also expand the activities offered by the school in the afternoons, so that children can take part in healthy and stimulating recreational activities without resorting to unsupervised play in the streets. Moreover, the role of women in the community should be strengthened and acknowledged, so that they are empowered to prevent abuse from taking place within their own homes.

### **6.3.5 Specific problems of young people in black urban communities**

Contemporary schools cannot meet all needs of children. The sheer number of at-risk children and problem situations and the changing demographics of South African society dictate a collaborative stance. In particular, children who have experienced prolonged, direct exposure to violence typically display symptoms such as feelings of fear and hopelessness, withdrawal, depression, helplessness and dependency, as well as a propensity to the use of force to settle disputes (Meyer 1993:17).

According to the informants, young people in black urban communities tend to demonstrate undisciplined/violent behaviour (5.4.4.1); are disrespectful (5.4.4.2); lack motivation to learn (5.4.4.3); do not have access to or habits of healthy recreation (5.4.4.4); are sexually active at an early age (5.4.4.5) and are difficult to discipline (5.4.4.6).

### **Recommendations**

The adverse conditions under which many black youth live and the political violence they witnessed or took part in cannot be underestimated. However, these problems cannot be addressed by the school or the family in isolation. Government support and the involvement of social workers, child psychologists and other community leaders is imperative. In this regard the White Paper on Education and Training (1995:22) has argued that:

The education system must *counter the legacy of violence* by promoting the values underlying the democratic process and the charter of human rights, the importance of the due process of law and the exercise of civic responsibility, and by teaching values and skills for conflict management and conflict resolution, the importance of mediation, and the benefits of toleration and co-operation. Thus peace and stability will become the normal condition of our schools and colleges, and citizens will be empowered to participate confidently and constructively in social and civic life.

This principle should be implemented. Van Zyl Slabbert et al (1994:161) agree:

Given the high levels of violence in South African society, peacemaking programmes and the development of conflict resolution skills should become an integral part of school curricula. Peacemaking and conflict resolution lie at the heart of a sound education system. It is imperative that local communities and NGOs be involved in such programmes.

Moreover, parents should be helped and supported in regaining control over and disciplining their children. To this end, parental guidance centres should be established in residential and work areas (De Kock & Schutte 1994:257). It is also recommended that grandparents be included in these programmes. Schools provide ideal sites for such programmes. Moreover, parent involvement can improve students' grades, decrease student dropout rates, truancy and behavioural problems (2.4.1). These are aspects which need attention in black urban schools.

The culture of entitlement among young people who see themselves as victims should also be addressed by school and home cooperation. The Coleman theory (2.5.1) emphasises that the school provides *opportunities, demands and rewards* in the socialisation process of children; whereas the family inputs can be described as *attitudes, effort and conception of the self*. Much of this social capital was lost due to the tremendous strain placed on the school and family in the past. The school and the home should now devise strategies to address this need. In this regard, Swap's School-to-Home Transmission model makes useful suggestions for restoring the *cultural capital* of children in deprived communities (2.5.3.2).

### 6.3.6 Lack of resources and facilities in schools in black urban communities

Most township schools are housed in old buildings, have no playgrounds, virtually no teaching aids, library books or administrative help (5.5.1). Moreover, frequently neither teachers or pupils have access to support services (5.5.2). This was borne out by both participant observation and comments of informants during this investigation.

#### Recommendations

The morale of both teachers and pupils are deeply influenced by the physical environment in which they work. However, given the fiscal constraints, it is unlikely that much will be done to improve these condition in the near future. Schools, together with parents, should determine needs and make plans to address them together. In this they require guidance and training. The proposed *capacity building* of new governing structures could help to prepare the governing body to make decisions and prioritise the school's needs (3.5.3.3).

The lack of support services is even more crucial than the state of the school buildings and more difficult to resolve. Improved communication between provincial departments of education and schools is essential, so that the former can be made aware of the needs at grassroots level. Secondly, the principle of addressing the legacy of violence as set out in the White Paper (6.3.5) should include the provision of qualified people to help traumatised children. Schools could also use community resources, such as post-graduate students and staff at universities to help teachers cope with children needing specialised help. Parents and teachers need assistance in dealing with traumatised children and this should be provided.

### 6.3.7 The culture of teaching and learning

This research suggested that the conduct of many teachers (in particular, secondary school teachers) is unprofessional and not conducive to a culture of teaching and learning in schools (5.5.4.3). Moreover, many students are not motivated to learn (5.4.4.3 & 5.5.5.3). This and the high dropout rate confirms this (3.4.3).

## **Recommendations**

The absence of a culture of teaching and learning is a complex problem and cannot be addressed in any detail in this study. However, the education department, teacher unions, individual teachers, parents and students should review this situation. Guidelines should be established on ways of resolving disputes within schools, without resorting to actions which disrupt schooling in any way. Moreover, a clear code of conduct for teachers should be agreed upon and teachers who transgress this should be disciplined. This code of conduct should be widely published and rigorously applied (cf Hofmeyer & Hall 1996).

However, parent involvement can also help restore a culture of teaching and learning in schools (2.4.3). For example, Becher, in Henderson (1987:73) maintains that teachers become more proficient in their professional activities; devote more time to teaching; experiment more often and develop a more student-orientated approach, when there is adequate parent involvement.

### **6.3.8 Low teacher morale**

The research showed that teachers in township schools work under difficult circumstances, often with little support from the department, support services or community (5.5.4.4). The current retrenchment or redeployment of teacher acutely contributes to their anxiety.

## **Recommendations**

In addition to better communication between the department and teachers and additional support services (6.3.6), the positive effect of parent involvement on teacher morale should be stressed (2.4.3). Generally, when there is effective parent involvement, teachers report more positive feelings about their school and their work (Leitch & Tangri 1988:72). Moreover, where parent involvement has been established in schools, teachers enjoy the support of and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving (Swap 1993:10).

### 6.3.9 Inadequate school readiness of pupils

In South Africa there is a severe lack of preschool facilities, particularly in poverty-stricken communities (3.4.6). Moreover, relatively few of these facilities are able to provide the kind of educational programmes which disadvantaged children need. Teachers of Grade 1 pupils observed during participant observation in the schools visited experienced this problem (5.5.5.1). Children who came from low socio-economic backgrounds and who had illiterate parents were likely to be unprepared for school (3.4.6 & 5.5.5.1).

#### Recommendation

Implementation of the government's commitment to introduce a reception year (or Grade 0) in the future (DE 1995:26) could take considerable time as facilities to accommodate extra children in already overcrowded schools must be extended. In this regard, parents can be assisted in preparing their child for school by programmes such as Head Start, Chapter 1 programmes (Chrispeels 1992:11), and Follow Through (2.5.2). In this regard schools and local health clinics could work together. Schools could also consider offering advice to parents on how to prepare their child for school prior to their enrolment at the beginning of the year. If there are older siblings already at school, they could also be asked to help by demonstrating skills such as how to hold a pencil, cut with scissors, tie his/her own shoe laces, et cetera.

### 6.3.10 Lack of school policy on parent involvement $\times$

None of the schools visited had developed a written policy on parent involvement (5.6.2). Moreover, the schools 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

As explained in paragraph 2.3.10, a lack of a school policy is a major barrier to parent involvement. In this regard Epstein (1990:109) maintains:

Status variables are not the most important measures for understanding parent involvement. At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies and teacher practices and family practices are more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status, and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education.

It is recommended that schools, particularly those in deprived communities, formulate a policy which will address all aspects of parent involvement. Swap's Partnership model (2.5.3.4); Comer's School Development Programme (2.5.4) or Epstein's Typology of parent involvement (2.5.5) can be used to guide policy making. Surveys reveal that schools' policies and practices to involve families are more important than family background variables such as race or ethnicity, social class, marital status, or mother's work status for determining whether and how parents become involved in their children's education (Epstein 1996:217). Moreover, it is strongly recommended that the government's policy with regard to parent involvement should be broadened to include all parents, not only those serving on the school's governing body. (15A)

### **6.3.11 Communication between the school and the home**

Informants reported that parent meetings at schools are fairly well attended and are a well-established practice in both the primary school and the community (5.6.3.1). However, this does not appear to be true of secondary schools as confirmed by Maya (1993:17). Furthermore, although teachers profess to inviting parents to visit them at any time regarding their child, this does not always realise in practice (5.6.3.4). The teachers interviewed admitted that parents may be afraid of coming to school (5.6.9.4).

### **Recommendations**

School meetings could be made more effective and used to discuss many issues, not only the non-payment of school fees and administrative matters. The needs of parents should be assessed by the school and addressed at the meetings. Thus, issues such as child discipline, motivation to learn or increasing a child's self-confidence could be discussed. Experts could

be invited to address parents. Moreover, parents should be given the opportunity to speak with their child's class teacher after the general meeting is closed.

It is recommended that all teachers conference with every parent at least once per year, with follow-ups as needed; that a weekly or monthly folder with a child's work be sent home for the parent to review and to comment on; that parents should be asked to collect school reports and that opportunities be provided to discuss the child's progress and possible ways in which teachers and parents can help to improve this. Class teachers should be available at regular intervals for parents to contact them about any problems they or their child may be experiencing.

Ogbu (1974:143) states that parents usually go to see teachers because of 'trouble' for which they imagine teachers hold them responsible; particularly since teachers often explain students' difficulties in terms of their home background. This should be avoided and teachers encouraged to contact the family regarding students' successes as well.

### **6.3.12 Homework policy and practice**

In most cases teachers limited the parents' role in homework activities to that of uninvolved supervisor (5.6.5). Teachers admitted to neglecting to give parents guidelines on how to assist children in their homework.

### **Recommendations**

Schools should provide parents with information and ideas on ways for helping their children at home with homework activities and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning. This could include the designing and organising by the school of a regular schedule of interactive homework that gives *students* the responsibility for discussing important things they are learning. This would also help families stay aware of the content of their children's class work (Epstein 1995:705). Emphasis should be placed on the role of parents in *helping* at home by encouraging, listening, reacting, monitoring and discussing, but not *teaching* school subjects. This makes home learning more acceptable to teachers and less threatening

to parents. Moreover, teachers should realise that children from economically or educationally disadvantaged families face a number of ill-defined obstacles in the learning process; consequently, they may depend more than usual on support from their parents (Schneider & Coleman 1993:115). Parents need to be helped to fulfil this role. Importantly, students at all grade levels report that they want their families to be more involved; are willing to be the communicators and to conduct important exchanges with their families about school work and school decisions (Epstein 1996:234).

### **6.3.13 Decision making**

Most schools in black urban communities have some form of governing structure in the school (3.5.1; 3.5.2; 5.6.6.1). This was also true of the schools observed. The precise role this body should play was less clear. In some cases parent participation was welcomed; in others the opinion was expressed that parents should not be allowed to out-vote teachers. The involvement of parents outside the governing structure was seldom mentioned (5.6.6.2). Although principals are aware of the new governing structures to be introduced in 1997 (3.5.3.3), they do not know what role the structure will play.

### **Recommendations**

All parents serving on school governing structures should be adequately prepared for their task. This is of even greater importance for parents serving on such structures in black urban schools, as most have not had experience of this type of structure. In this regard the proposed capacity building (3.5.3.3) is to be commended. However, given the fact that this and other research indicates that there are different views on the role parents should play in decision making (5.6.6.1), it is recommended that the role of each group of stakeholders on the governing structure be clearly defined. If not, the new structure could aggravate problems at some schools instead of alleviating them. Finally, elected members of governing bodies should have sufficient opportunities of reporting to the parent body which elected them.

On the other hand, relatively few parents can, or wish to, participate on a school's governing structure (Carrasquillo & London 1993:86). These parents should not be excluded from all

decisions affecting their children, such as decisions regarding homework policies, school discipline, sex education programmes, et cetera. Involving parents (and students in secondary schools) 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 (Meyer 1993:18).

#### **6.3.14 Parent volunteers**

Parent volunteers are seldom used in black urban schools (5.6.7). Where parents are used, their help is usually unrelated to their children's education. Informants reported that tasks parents are commonly asked to help with include cleaning the school and serving food (5.6.7). The use of parents in the classroom as teacher aides was viewed as a threat to the teacher's authority (5.6.7.2).

#### **Recommendations**

The use of parent volunteers outside the classroom, such as accompanying children on excursions or helping with choir practice is an easy way of involving parents in school activities. However, parents need to feel that their efforts are appreciated. Limiting parents' involvement to cleaning the school does not indicate a willingness on the part of teachers to accept parents as equal partners.

The use of parent volunteers as aides *in* the classrooms appears to be an unfamiliar and a threatening concept to most teachers. However, it could provide a useful way of addressing the problem of overcrowded classrooms as it frees teachers to help children needing attention. Teachers will, however, need to be taught the value of class volunteers as well as strategies of using parents in the class. Teachers will also need to be taught how to prepare parents for work in classrooms. Gordon's School Impact model (2.5.2.2) addresses the issue of school volunteers, as does Swap's Curriculum Enrichment model (2.5.3.3).

### 6.3.15 Community involvement

The research showed virtually no community involvement in black urban schools (5.6.8). This could also be as result of the alienation between the school and the community originating in the apartheid period and the liberation struggle (3.3.1). Moreover, community involvement is mostly understood in terms of financial support for the school by the community. Schools are seldom involved in projects aimed at uplifting the community in which they are situated.

### Recommendations

Community involvement implies that resources and services in the community should be identified and integrated to strengthen school programmes, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein 1995:704). This suggests that the school should be able to provide information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational and social support. Moreover, the school could serve to integrate the different services in the community available to parents and students. Schools should work more closely with businesses, not just relying on their financial support, but utilising the available expertise present in the business sector. Secondly, teachers and students should realise that they have a commitment to the community in which they live and work, and should assist it in all ways possible. This could contribute to addressing the culture of entitlement of many youth in urban communities.

### 6.3.16 Barriers to parent involvement

Many barriers to parent involvement listed by the teachers during the focus groups refer to a lack on the part of the caregivers, such as the perception that parents are disinterested (5.6.9.1); negative (5.6.9.2); illiterate and therefore incapable of helping (5.6.9.3); afraid of the school (5.6.4) and that grandparents are not able to care adequately for children (5.6.9.9). Other barriers to parent involvement such as limited time (5.6.9.7), lack of teacher preparation for parent involvement (5.6.9.6), and lack of implementation of ideas on parent involvement (5.6.9.8) were mentioned.

## Recommendations

A consistent finding in the literature is that teachers have very different views of parents than parents have of themselves (Dauber & Epstein 1993; Epstein & Dauber 1991). Thus, school personnel may either facilitate or inhibit parent involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes. This is especially true of low-income and minority neighbourhoods where parents are seen as part of the problem in children's education and not as a resource (Eccles & Harold 1996:11). This suggests that many parent involvement initiatives have focused on *fixing* parents, not rethinking how teachers need to restructure their actions and relationships with parents and develop the relevant skills to do it (Chrispeels 1992:21). If schools wish parents to be more actively involved in children's learning, a coherent series of learning opportunities should be offered to parents. But, to do so, teachers should be taught the skills they are at present lacking (5.6.9.6). As Solomon (1991:360) argues:

Parent involvement that boosts student learning doesn't just happen. Thoughtful coordinating planning and systematic actions must integrate parent involvement into school and classroom programmes.

In introducing programmes it should, however, be kept in mind that schools are neither homogenous nor context free. Besides the general recommendations made to implement or improve parent involvement, clear and tailored strategies corresponding to the specific problems and dynamics of each school are required.

### 6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this study on parent involvement in black urban communities suggest the following priority areas in the search for further knowledge.

From a methodological point of view, it is recommended that the potential use of qualitative research methodology in the investigation of educational issues in black communities be further explored. This methodology seems particularly appropriate for cross-cultural research. The separation of the ethnic groups in South Africa has led to various assumptions on the

part of different groups. Large scale quantitative research based on erroneous assumptions could prove to be costly. A qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for the discovery of important areas or themes because it allows informants the opportunity to define the topics and questions to be pursued in larger research projects.

Because of the lack of research on parent involvement in black urban communities, particularly if parent involvement is defined more broadly than participation on governing bodies, this research attempted to investigate different types of parent involvement, as well as place it within the context of black urban schools and communities. However, many aspects relating to parent involvement in black urban communities requires more detailed research, such as:

- The effect of the changing family structure on student achievement.
- The effect of parent illiteracy on student achievement.
- Strategies to involve illiterate caregivers in their children's schooling. X
- The extent to which a child's schooling is affected if in the sole care of grandparents. X
- Preventative strategies to offset negative effects on a child's schooling if cared for only by grandparents.
- Strategies of improving the parenting skills of under age mothers. X
- Ways of helping caregivers prepare a child for school. *stimulation to develop skills*
- The role of parents in establishing a culture of learning in black urban schools. *helping stories telling* X
- Appropriate discipline of children in school and at home. X
- Strategies to equip parents and teachers to handle traumatised children. X

diverse  
groups

- Combining adult literacy classes with children's homework activities.
- Ways of adjusting parent involvement strategies to the different school levels.
- Determining how parent involvement can be included in the content of teacher education programmes.
- Determining the effects of an effective parent involvement programme in a black urban school on parents, teachers, and learners.
- Investigating the nature of school, family and community partnership in diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Investigating how African philosophy such as *ubuntu* can be utilised to further parent involvement.
- Ways in which parents from different ethnic backgrounds support their children's school success.

## 6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As a phenomenological research project based on qualitative methodology, this study of parent involvement in a black urban community in Gauteng demonstrates both the strengths and the limitations intrinsic to such an investigation.

The small size of the sample, typical of qualitative research (4.3.2.7), is the most obvious limitation of the study. It cannot support a general theory of parent involvement. Different schools and different communities will disclose different findings. On the other hand, this research was designed to be exploratory and descriptive in nature. It was not concerned with generalisation or prediction. Moreover, it does allow important conclusions to be drawn about the situation in which the three schools are found, about the families and teachers

involved in the focus groups and the circumstances in which parent involvement should take place (4.3.2.2).

The research was also purposefully limited to primary schools, selected by a gatekeeper (4.4.3). Network sampling was used to select teachers and parents for interviews (1.7; 4.4.3.3). Thus, the method of selection was not based on sufficient criteria to allow a precise replication of the study. Moreover, the fact that both the schools and the informants were selected on the grounds of their willingness to be part of the research, implies that different results might be obtained in different circumstances, such as by including the school that was not comfortable with participating in the research (4.4.3.2). The primary goal of the study was to understand parent involvement from the perspective of the informants within the context of a black urban community. Therefore, no attempts are made to generalise or quantify the findings. Data were presented in descriptive form only. While the overview of the existing literature (Chapters 2 & 3) provided a valuable background to the interviews, the paucity of information on parent involvement in black urban communities dictated that unstructured interviews be used (4.3.3.2). The suggestion that focus groups are especially well suited to the exploration of the attitudes and experiences of the informants (4.3.3.3) led to the choice of this data collection strategy to gather data from teachers and parents. Participant observation was used to investigate and clarify school context (4.3.3.1). The potential for bias was present in as much as the researcher herself constituted the research instrument (4.2.2). All possible factors which could have influenced the research were included in the statement of subjectivity (4.4.1). Following data analysis, findings were presented according to themes which emerged from the informants' accounts (4.4.6 & 4.4.7).

In spite of these limitations, the rich data, characteristic of qualitative methodology (4.3.2.4), yielded information which may be used for a larger and more rigorous study. It also illustrated the complexity of social, educational and parenting realities in black urban communities. Moreover, certain key areas (5.4; 5.5; 5.6) contributed to a better understanding of parent involvement and the context in which it takes place and indicated areas in which further research needs to be done (6.4). In this limited sense, the study may expand knowledge of parent involvement in black urban communities through the

presentation of grounded theory (6.3) and speculative hypotheses which may form a useful basis for large scale studies of parent involvement in black urban communities.

## 6.6 IN CONCLUSION

So far, no parallels have been found in the international literature for the pupil activism and the degree of disruption that has characterised South African schooling since 1976. Moreover, no society has had to deal with the effects of political repression and resistance on schooling such as those found in South Africa. Meyer (1993:13) argues that although education has played a significant role in revolutionary strategy in Latin American countries, the emphasis has differed from strategies followed in South Africa in two major ways:

- the aim was to mobilise disadvantaged groups through **adult education** and
- from the outset education was not used to mobilise people during the pre-revolutionary stage, but its importance was stressed for empowering and equipping people with skills which would enable them to contribute to **social reconstruction after the revolution**.

In Latin American countries, education was also used as a conscientising instrument, but disruption of education was mainly at university level (Meyer 1993:i). In South Africa militants contended that their behaviour was politically motivated and that education should be considered as an instrument of social transformation. This resulted in a 'war' fought in *schools* which were already weakened by the unequal and inferior educational provision of the apartheid regime. It is, therefore difficult to look to the literature to address ways of establishing effective schools in the black urban communities of this country. However, Epstein (1996:211) argues that, although it was not one of the initial elements of effective schools, parent involvement has been quickly added to an expanding list of components that research and practice suggest can improve schools and increase student success.

In this regard, the move by government to legislate parent participation on school governing bodies, is a step in the right direction. However, it can be argued that this is not enough. In

the USA Coleman's research (2.5.1) led to legislative initiatives which focused on providing support for low-income families through pre-school programmes such as Head Start, Follow through, Title 1 (now Chapter 1). Schools were also encouraged to provide parent education and involve parents more actively in the life of the school and their children's learning. These programmes did *not* close the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and predominantly white middle and higher income students (Chrispeels 1992:11). However, subsequent studies of these programmes indicate that those with a *comprehensive* parent involvement component have a stronger and longer-lasting positive impact on student achievement. The implication is that the government's suggestion that parents be involved in decision making will not automatically produce the advantages discussed in paragraph 2.4. Parent involvement should be instituted on a broader front than school decision making. To do so, teachers should be instructed in methods of involving parents in the education of their children.

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STATEMENT OF CONSENT

As part of a research project for the degree DEd (University of South Africa) for which I am presently enrolled, I am conducting a limited research project on parent involvement within black urban communities in Gauteng.

I would like to interview the principal, a few teachers and a few parents in selected schools. These interviews will take the form of an unstructured discussion, 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 identity of the school, the principal, the teachers and the parents will be protected. The analysis of the data will be included in the thesis and may be used in future in articles published in professional and scientific journals.

If you are willing to participate in such an interview, within the specified confines and safeguards, please sign below to indicate your consent.

School:

Interviewee:

Date:

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PRINCIPAL****PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:

Pseudonym:

Date of birth:

First language:

Where do you live?:

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of experience as teacher:

Years of experience as principal:

**INFORMATION ON SCHOOL**

Name of school:

Number of pupils:

Number of teachers:

Number of classrooms:

Platoon school Y/N?:

Feeding scheme Y/N?:

**FACILITIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

Do you have a staffroom?

Do you have an office to yourself?

How many members of administrative staff work at this school?

Does the school have its own telephone?

Does the school have its own photocopier/fax machine?

How many computers are there in this school?

#### **IN-SERVICE TRAINING FOR PRINCIPAL AND STAFF**

How often are you able to attend courses/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****PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:

Pseudonym:

Date of birth:

First language:

Marital status:

Spouse's occupation:

Age and gender of children:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

Where do your own children attend school?

Where do you live?

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of teaching experience:

Standard/grade presently teaching:

Have you attended any workshops/courses on parent involvement?:

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS****PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Full names:

Pseudonym:

Age:

Marital status :

Number of children:

Age and gender of children:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. | 8. |

Do you have any foster children/children of relatives living with you?

**ACCOMMODATION**

How long have you been living in your present house?

Do you own the house you are living in?

How many people are living in the house?

Does the house have inside running water?

Does the house have electricity?

How many bedrooms?

Does the house have a study/work area for children?

**OCCUPATIONS OF FAMILY MEMBERS**

The highest school standard passed by wife:

Other qualifications?

The highest school standard passed by husband:

Other qualifications?

Occupation of mother:

Presently working?

When last did you work full time?

Occupation of father:

Presently working?

When last did he work full time?

Does anyone else in the house contribute to the family income? If so, who?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: PRINCIPAL****A INTODUCTORY QUESTION**

- How would you describe the parents of this community?

**B GENERAL INFORMATION ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT****1 School policy on parent involvement**

- What is the policy of this school on parent involvement?
- Is it a written policy/unwritten policy?

**2 Parent governing structures**

- Is there a governing structure in place, in this school?
- What is the name of the structure?
- When was it established?
- What are the tasks of the governing body?
- How often do they meet?
- Are there any other structures on which parents serve?
- How will new legislation affect governing bodies in this school?
- To what extent is the governing body affiliated with a political party or union?

**3 Communication between the school and family and vice versa**

- How do you pass information on to parents or to guardians?
- Are there any opportunities for parents to come to the school and talk with teachers?
- How often are such opportunities created?

**4 Parents as volunteers**

- In what way(s) do parents assist the school?
- If they are asked to help, who shows them or informs them what to do?

**5 Parents and homework**

- To what extent are parents involved in their childrens' homework?
- How is this explained to them?
- What is the policy of the school with regard to involving parents in academic matters?

**6 Parenting**

- Do you think parents in this community are bringing up their children in a correct manner?
- To what extent does the school assist the parents in their parenting task by for instance having talks on topics such as: health, drugs, choosing subjects in secondary school, et cetera?

**7 Community involvement**

- In what way is the community, for example the church or businesses, involved in the school?

**C EXTERNAL FACTORS, THE SCHOOL AND THE FUTURE**

- Do politics still have an influence on what is happening in the school?
- Do teachers' unions still play an important role? Please explain?
- How do you see the future of township schools?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEACHERS****A INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

- Describe what is it like being a teacher in a township school? (Discuss a typical day/ Describe an insident to illustrate.)
- Has being a teacher in Mamelodi changed in any way during the past years? Explain.

**B PARENTING**

- How would you describe a 'good parent'?
- To what extent are parents in this community involved in the lives of their children?
- How would you describe the relationship between parents and their children in this community?
- How do parents generally discipline their children?

**C FAMILY STRUCTURE AND HOUSING**

- What is the composition of the average household in this community? (ie single parent homes, extended families, nuclear families, etc).
- What is family life like, in your community?/Describe a typical day in the life of a family in this community.
- What influence does the structure of the family and the circumstances under which they live, have on the child?
- What is the status of the child in the home?
- Who generally looks after the child after school hours?

**D GENERAL UPBRINGING/EDUCATION OF CHILDREN**

- What is the role of the family in the upbringing and education of the child?

- What is the role of the school in the upbringing and education of the child?
- If a child is not living with the parents, how do you see the role of the guardian?

## **E COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS**

- How often do you contact parents?
- Why do you contact them?
- How do you contact them?
- When are parents able to speak with you about their child?
- How often does this occur?

## **F PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

- In your opinion, what is the role of the parent in education?
- How would you define parent involvement? ✓
- What experience have you had of parent involvement? ✓
- What do *you* as a teacher do to support parent involvement? ✓
- In what ways are parents involved in your class?
- In what ways are parents involved in this school?

## **G ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- Do you think parent involvement could be of benefit to pupils, the school, and the teachers?
- In what way?

## **H BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- What are the barriers to parent involvement in this school and in this community?

**I TEACHER TRAINING AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- In what way did your basic training equip you to work with parents?
- What has the years of experience as a teacher taught you in this regard?

**J THE SCHOOL AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- Who should initiate parent involvement - the school or the parents?
- What role does the principal play in home-school relations?
- In what ways can parent involvement be improved?
- What role would you like parents to play in this schools?
- Do you feel that parents need to be trained to fulfil this role?

**K CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Is there any change in attitude to parent involvement following the 1994 elections?
- How do you see your future as a teacher?

**PARENTS: INTERVIEW GUIDE****A INTRODUCTORY QUESTION**

- Describe what is it like, being a parent in Mamelodi/Describe an incident to illustrate what it is like, being a parent in Mamelodi.
- Who taught you how to be a mother/father?
- Discuss the informal ways in which you were taught how to be a mother.
- Discuss the formal influences/training you had which helped you to bring up your children (ie the influence of women, groups, the church, the school etc).

**B CHILDREN AND CHILDCARE**

- How important are children in the African culture? Explain/give examples to illustrate.
- What is your opinion of today's children?
- How do children in the townships spend the afternoons? and the weekends?
- Who disciplines the children in your home?
- In what way are children disciplined?
- If the mother works and someone else cares for the child, who teaches the child what is right or wrong, and how is this done?

**C HOMEWORK, EDUCATION AND PARENTS**

- Do children get homework to do in the afternoons? Do they have tests/examinations to study for in the afternoons?
- How is this homework controlled?
- In what way do you think parents should be involved in the education of their children?
- Would you like to be more involved? Explain.
- What prevents you from being more involved?

**D COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME**

- How do you find out what is happening at school?
- How do you find out how your child is doing at school?
- When you speak to your child's teacher, what does he/she tell you?
- Have you attended a class meeting at the school?
- How are you treated when you go to the school, or phone the school, or write to the school?

**E SCHOOL MEETINGS AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS**

- Does the school present concerts or sports days or any other social functions?
- How often do these take place?
- Do you attend? How often?
- When are parent meetings held?
- What happens at parent meetings?
- Do parents play a role at any of these functions or meetings?/Do parents help to plan parents' meetings?/Do they address parents at these meetings?

**F PARENTS AT THE SCHOOL**

- Are parents asked to help at school (such as with the preparation of food, or accompanying the children on a field trip)? Other examples?
- Do parents help in the classroom? Explain.
- Do you think the school arranges enough opportunities for parents to become involved in the schooling of their child?
- What else should the school be doing about this? Give suggestions.

**G CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- In what way would you like to be involved in the education of your child/children?
- How do you see the future of your children in South Africa?

**INTERVIEW BETWEEN JN VAN WYK (JNVW)  
AND TEACHERS FROM SCHOOL B**

JNVW I'd just like to ask you: describe to me what it is like being a teacher in a township?

MARY It is quite challenging. Because you see, as we come from rural areas and then we come here and the situation is different; the kids have lost that respect more than in the rural areas. You've got to work hard in order to go with the situation in the township, because children come from different backgrounds. The situation is violent in itself and then you as a teacher, you must try to bring the situation down, because you'll find that the situation is bad at home and when the children come to school, they are somehow nervous. There have been shootings. There has been violence.

JNVW Does that still happen?

MARY Yes, although it is gradually fading out, it is still there. It is still there.

JNVW And how do you feel Sam?

SAM Well, I was born and bred in an urban area - I am used to urban area life. I find myself at home, because I have climitized to the situation and I have been teaching here; bringing the children up in the right perspective, showing them what is expected of them now. I like teaching; I am not a certificated teacher, to me it is a call, so I don't see problems which other persons might see. In my calling as a teacher, every problem that is there, this calling of mine has a solution for every problem. So I feel that every time when I wake up in the morning, I want to praise God that I am going to work and feel that I could

stay here, even in the holidays! I'd rather spent 95% of my life here rather than at home! So to me it is fine, I don't have stress. So I cannot get sick.

JNVW Amos, you are nodding your head - do you agree?

AMOS Yes, to a certain extent. Basically, being a teacher here has two sides to it. One, your professional training does not cater much for the situation here.

JNVW Even in the type of training you had in a small college that was very well-organized and at grassroots-level?

AMOS It would also depend on the kind of students. For me, I can handle the situation at all levels professionally. The training that I had was more designed to suit a situation that is conducive for progressive education. But if you come to the practical situation here, you find that the situation is completely different from the textbook-situation of what a school should be. Your personal character comes into play now where you, with the help of your professional background, which helps you to define two cultures that are in existence here. You have a certain community culture, that has been disturbed, a violent culture, and then a school culture that is being developed. You are then beginning to move into concepts that you cannot solve problems with the use of conflict. But at the same time, after school hours, the students still go back to the very community that practices their culture which we are trained to get rid of in the school. At times it is frustrating, depending on the character of a person. There are certain weaknesses that might put you in a situation to loose your integrity as a teacher.

JNVW Cathy, do you think that being a teacher in Mamelodi has changed in any way during the years that you've been a teacher?

CATHY Well, to a certain extent, it has, because some children nowadays are not like, I should say, their behaviour, are not like the children of the early seventies,

that is before the riots. The children nowadays are a bit, should I say, they are on the side of fighting more. And yet, in those other years the children were quite calm. Today, I mean as blacks, when a child provokes you and you reprimand him, you feel you can use a stick, 1-2-3, then these days, perhaps you thrash a child and you might hurt her, then he or she takes that complaint home and you are surprised that the parents come the following day and come and say, 'but why was my child hit, and why was she hit alone?' Perhaps you tell the parent that it was not a matter of hitting the child that much, except that it was a mistake. So all in all today's children are unlike children of previous years. I think they have some temper, I don't know whether I should say it is the temper that might have built in within their parents those days. In our language we say, '**the child takes after the parent**', meaning 'you take this temper from your parent because your parent might have been the victim those days'.

JNVW           Somebody like to comment on this?

SAM            Yes it is true, because we are the people of 1976 when the things started. I won't say we were perpetrators, I was taking my final year in training, but there were ones that would go up and down against education at that time. We were still boys at the high school, but we still respected our teachers. You wouldn't find a boy going into the streets having a cigarette, but now you'll find that a boy will have a cigarette in front of the teachers, and also having a beer. With us, the respect was there and what is happening nowadays, is very hurting, because if our children are dragging feet, the feet will not come to school.

JNVW           I've noticed this when I was driving into Mamelodi, that at 08:30 or 09:00 there are still children in the streets.

AMOS           Maybe the children are still carrying the pain of their parents. I don't know whether this has to do with the social dynamics here. A violent society will

always have a second, third generation that is violent, because the first generation has been a violent one. So I don't know whether this is caused by the social factors. There has been a culture of resistance in black areas for a very, very long time. You experience that resistance is reflected on the children today. I cannot say to somebody if you are not here at 08:00 I am not letting you into the school. If they arrive at 08:10, they expect to get into the school. They will not accept the fact that now I am late, I will not be let into the school.

JNVW But is that good practice as far as education is concerned that a child that has got no limits or discipline?

AMOS It is also the social fabric. Today my neighbour cannot tell me that what I'm doing is wrong. I can listen to my parents also to a certain extent. In the past, if I did something wrong, my neighbours could take me and spank me, there was no grudge about that. But today they cannot even try. That is the breakdown of the African social fabric that has contributed a lot to people or to children not following in the footsteps of the elders.

JNVW This conversation is turned around towards parenting ...

MARY Yes, what is lacking, according to what I have discovered, is parent involvement. It has led to a very bad situation, because if my child leaves home at 08:00 and I am at home, what time is he going to reach the school? If, as a parent I am going to try to at least control my kid, and Amos will do this, and Sam, at the end there will be smooth running at most of the schools. The children today are negative, you see.

JNVW But why do parents allow this?

MARY Most parents don't allow it that much. It means that nowadays children have taken control of their parents instead of parents controlling their kids.

- JNVW Even at primary school level?
- MARY There is no level, I can say, because at primary school at standard 4 or 5, the two classes, they have already sort of joined the high school classes. There is that situation.
- JNVW But what lead to this - you've mentioned one factor: the African culture?
- MARY Yeah, the African culture has broken down. The situation in the country, the apartheid system as it was has brought those changes. Because, you'll find that the father is an exile, the mother is alone at home, the brother is also in exile - that kind of relationship. These children that we are now having, grew up in such situations, where a policeman would come and knock the whole night, taking them out, kicking them, those situations. So these children now see life as being useless. They are no more interested in anything. Now there is nothing that they can do on their own. They have no interest in anything. So it starts from the family background at home. Black people have originally united as families and had extended families, brothers-in-law, uncles, all stay together and you wouldn't see them quarrelling or whatever. They were united.
- CATHY Just to add to this: it is really true. In those days, Africans were one, but because of this system we started do divide ourselves. If I reprimand her children, they have guts to tell you, 'you are not my mother, you cannot tell me what I am doing is wrong'. But those days back, an elderly person used to say a word - that child would show respect, but nowadays, they even show facial expressions....
- JNVW In another school that I went to, the teachers said that if they asked for the parents to come to school, the vast majority that arrive are grandparents.
- CATHY It is true. The real parents are not involved.

- MARY They are the young generation.
- AMOS And on top of it, there are several problems to it. For example, a child would go home and say, 'I need money, say R200,00, for a course called gymnastics'. There is no gymnastics here. Parents are not in the know and a situations develops where he loses confidence in himself. The child is a little bit literate and wants to play big on the parent. Seeing that they are not literate they find himself in a situation where he is embarrassed by the situation. So at times they feel they cannot ask certain things of their children. They ask, 'how are things going', and the child says, 'you know dad, that course called gymnastics...', and the other children laugh. The children feel that they know better. Some parents go to an extend where they withdraw from actively taking part in the school, and failing to do that, puts the child in a position of command. At 08:00 the child is still at home, and now they say (to the parents) that they have extended the time until 08:30.
- JNVW But how can one change this whole culture or this lack of culture of learning and discipline?
- MARY I should think by starting to educate parents; that is our most focal point. Parents need to be educated and motivated to be involved in the education of their children. And they mustn't always listen to what their child is saying; they must come to school to confirm a situation. A child will then be afraid to lie and tell stories at home, knowing that the parent will ultimately come to school. So, by parents not coming to school, the child knows, 'I can go home and tell them anything', and they'll start thinking that the parents believe anything they are saying. Some would even say, 'no, there are no teachers at school' when they return to their homes at 10:00 or 11:00, and the parents will say, 'oh, okay, there are no teachers, okay, stay then'.
- CATHY Yes, and some of the parents believe much in their children, because in that case when the child comes back early from school and tell the parent that

there are no teachers, or that the teacher has trashed him, that parent doesn't even try to find out if there is any truth in the story. The parents seem to be loving their children to the extent that everything the child tells them, is true. Some parents even side with their children.

AMOS

Also, there is a shift in the practice in the teacher of today compared to previous years. I would always make a follow-up on certain children if I know they are from a particular background, but today it is difficult to even get the background of some children, because to some extent, the teachers don't go beyond the area of operation. Once we move out of the school yard, that is where our responsibility ends. But in the past it was practice to go beyond. The school developed that relationship with families, but today we don't have that.

JNVW

What caused that breakdown?

AMOS

I think during the days of struggle with the youth taking the leadership. If they would question me and say, you should be going to school,. Then I would say: 'You are the one that should be toi-toiing here and you are doing nothing. You tell me not to toi-toi, but you are doing nothing. You want the situation to remain as it were.' That culture developed from 1976 onwards when the youth took control of things over their parents. There is a saying that parents used to say, 'don't challenge a white man'. Don't challenge a white man. There were several reasons for that, because if they do that, they could lose their job and food won't be available for the family. But being a student I don't know the responsibilities that the parents have. I can always go and do whatever i want to. So there is that situation. So you had the youth taking up the struggle and it makes them adult automatically and make certain demands to the family. Because of the teachers resisting the formation of Students' Representative Councils, you'll find teachers in conflict with the students. Parents were on the side of the teachers. So you have the situation where they say, 'the Government should continue oppressing us'. So the parents lose their

role and the teacher loses respect. In general the teacher in the past contributed so much in the oppression of the townships and were viewed as enemies - parents coming along to join the so-called enemy. So they no longer have control over the school. That is basically what is happening now.

CATHY I agree with Mary when she said that we need to educate parents.

JNVW But who is going to educate the parents?

CATHY If we meet them as teachers. But let us say all parents come, it is difficult to have them take suggestions we put. Only a few will take it, but a large group don't like to take that. Then they'll tell you, 'we are old' or 'we have jobs to perform' and also 'you must educate the children!'.

MARY I should think that the Government must also be involved in this issue, because that was the Government who put us in this mess now. Our education is now falling apart and the Government was fully responsible for this by dividing the education departments, and whatever. If we had one education department, I don't think that we wouldn't have been in this very situation. We would not be having this high illiteracy rate. Most of the parents are illiterate. If they were educated, they would have seen things differently.

JNVW But what must the Government do?

MARY They must start to encourage parents, they must be taught, there must be adult schools. The parent involvement, they must make it a subject. They must make that a subject somehow. Parents must be taught to address the issue of education. How to involve themselves in the education of children. Because if we are going to do it as individual schools, parents don't come. They can just make it like an issue like the Aids project. They can make it Parent Involvement projects where parents are trained to cope with the child who is delinquent, a child who doesn't go to school. They will then be in a position

to address the different situations, but right now, they are just confused. When we call them to meetings, they just say, 'I don't know what is happening to my child. I can no more control him'. So now they are trying to push every thing back to the teacher.

JNVW           What do you say, Sam?

SAM           The question of educating the parents: I should think, the class teacher must call his parents one evening, telling them that your child is like this and that - there should be communication between the teachers and parents. I'm not talking in terms of calling the whole school, but every teacher should call his classes' parents. In that way people will get to understand one another. At the same time I am facing a problem - my kids are attending a school in town. Mr Lawrence, the principle, calls us during the week for a parents' meeting. Here we cannot do it, because the parents knock off very late and we can thus only get them like on a Sunday morning before they go to church. I notice that whites have not got this problem; but the black parents have. The whites, they travel short distances to work, but us blacks travel many kilometres. That is why things have to be done on a weekend. It is very, very busy weekends. On weekends they have also got weddings, funerals, all these things. I have noticed that also black people are now burying during the week. Maybe you are working very far, and a professional is able to move around, but around 95% of our parents are illiterate. In fact, we are now, the parents of this generation, educated. As we grow old, we will be able to monitor the situation. As time goes on, we will reach that area. But you see, I approach things from a Biblical point of view. I'm a minister at the same time as being a teacher. The problems which other people are seeing, I don't see them, because when I look at a problem, already I have a solution. I live a stressless life. People will speak and magnify the problem which I can solve it. It depends from which perspective you see it.

JNVW We now have two suggestions: The one is that you feel that you can get the children of your classes' parents in and perhaps educate them in the sense that you teach them something on how to handle the children. Your suggestion is that you feel that it is perhaps not enough. That the Government in some way must also be educating parents as they are educating the youth with projects such as Aids.

MARY Yeah, I should think that if we concentrate on it, we could do it here in our school by educating a small group. And maybe in another three or five schools they will also be doing it. And at the end of the day, parents are sometimes changing, you can get them, talk to them, and they will understand for that moment. If they go out of the school yard, they meet their friends who have kids in other schools who'll say, 'why do they bother you so much? You have no time to rest, you must go there evenings and weekends'. That one will say, 'no, where my child is, there are no meetings. When the child goes to school, that is where the responsibility ends'. What is the parent going to do? He is going to take the child out here and take it to the other school where he is not going to be overloaded, where no-one will say, 'check the books, sign for homework'. We did have such meetings in this very school. We used to call meetings and class meetings and only a few would come. And the ones who will be co-operating will be three or four, the rest of them, you won't see them and if you call them, and they won't come again.

AMOS I am inclined to differ from Mary here. Involvement of Government is going to fail dismally. Projects undertaken on a large scale, what I have read, is failing, like Sarafina II. Large-scale project undertaken by Government is very expensive and ineffective. If they did this, as Jeremiah suggested, at a smaller scale, we take up the responsibility to involve parents, that would be the most effective.

JNVW We are talking about the smaller-scale involvement of parents rather than having it in a bigger project.

SAM

Yes, but there is one disadvantage. The training of black teachers has not involved certain skills, for example management. We are only taught how to manage a class, controlling books. The part of where does the parent come in, is not there, only the scope with the children and books. So, parents are not part of the package of management. I think that we basically need workshops. Those who have skills in a particular school will hold staff workshop to show us how to involve parents, so that teachers can take responsibility and not having to say that the Government must do this. It is your responsibility as an individual teacher to look into the background of the children and their parents. These methods are applicable where you market something. You as the representative would go from place to place trying to sell your product, and if you are good, people will buy everything that you are saying. I am supporting the suggestion of doing things on a small scale, it will grow gradually. You should use the same method used for marketing in organising the parents. Once parents are well-informed, it will grow, and we will have commitments. They are not committed, some of them, right now, because they are less concerned. Can you imagine, during the time of Jesus Christ, when he was on earth, people would wonder, 'who is this guy, having a cross? Women would cry for this man, and He would say, 'don't cry for me, cry for your kids!'. And the guy was beaten. And when He was beaten and hanged on the cross, he spoke nicely to one of the rascals. But we, of this century, we wish that we could have been there, because we understand Him now! We people are living here at this present moment. What I am saying is this, let us work at things in a small scale, and it will grow. Let us use the biblical way of doing things. God planted one tree that became a forest. I say, let us be patient, okay? In comparison, a person who plays, let's say soccer, a sportsman, if he is going to play his sport with the aim : 'I'm going to beat every person on earth'. That is a very wrong objective. If he is going to play his sport with love, success will cater for itself. Let us love calling the parents to a meeting, let us love being a teacher. Let us not wanting to hit the headlines - the teachers have done this . No! No! - one seed will produce another.

- JNVW If we feel there is a need to involve parents and somehow the teachers can help training the parents in the parenting task, what is the role of students? Say now our goal is to improve parent involvement, to what extend and how should students be involved?
- AMOS Well, it will depend on the kind of school - whether it is a primary school or a secondary school. In a primary school we need to let the people do basic things, like correcting books. These things leave little room for democracy. Democracy will come at a later stage at the secondary school. There you can say, 'certainly it seems that you are not really interested - how do you think it should be structured?'. When they give contributions; something they have contributed to, they are most likely to participate. So in terms of running a school, maintaining discipline, the extra-mural activities, that's where you get people involved. The level of involvement will be to say, 'sit and let us talk about a problem' before you expel children. Say to the student leaders, 'we have this kind of problem, help us to solve it'. Canvas it among the student population, to find out their position.
- JNVW Just because I am old and grew up in another era, I always wonder just how much responsibility can a young person of 16 or so take? Are they able to contribute, like for example, you want to expel a child? Are they able to really evaluate the whole situation as an adult would and give well-thought out solutions?
- SAM No, they don't have to evaluate these situations, but to accept the expulsion. Because if you expel the kid without having his or her story of what has happened, they will immediately resist the action of the management. So you must take them on board. The students will then realise why this happened, and there won't be any disruption at school. For example, we were discussing the strike concerning the matric dance - for me it seems that the principle has said a clear 'no' without even discussing this with the students, and knowing the history of the students' activism in this country, one should never do that.

JNVW It seems that there is a lack of understanding from everybody's point of view. Do students need to be trained?

AMOS I think so, yes, depending on what kind of job you need them to do. Saying they must be prefects, you must take them for one week on a school camp to get a course on student leadership. In this way, yes, they need to be trained.

JNVW Do students need to be either trained or consulted if a school had a campaign to improve parent involvement?

MARY I should think that it is very important to first get the views of the children. We as teachers will act as mediators, seeing that there is this gap between parents and children. We as teachers are going to be mediators. We are staying with the kids for many hours a day, we know their problems, how they feel, what they want and what they dislike. And pupils these days are more free with their teacher than with their parents, because you as a teacher, you can drive them in your lessons, you can drive them to any situation where you want, their views and their ideas - you are able to draw ideas from their minds and that you can use to educate the parents. When you then address the parents, you already know the needs and the ideas of the pupils. Then you can get the parents' ideas about the children, and if you mix them, something can maybe come it which will join the two groups, so that pupils will be free to discuss anything with their parents and not only with their teacher. We are trying to bring these two groups together. And we, being at the centre, I should think we can do that. They must communicate with each other, because communication between children and parents are very important - if they don't communicate, then there is a problem.

JNVW To wrap up - can everybody tell me how you see your future as a teacher in South Africa, the new South Africa?

SAM My God! That is a good question! Because of redeployment, 'my hart is baie, baie seer. Ek is baie jammer, my toekomst is nie reg nie. Ek is baie

bekommerd daaroor. Wat sal gebeur? Miskien hulle sal my vat na 'n ander skool. My budget sal nie reg wees nie.' I am not quite sure what is happening. One feels like getting out of the teaching fraternity. One feels like looking for employment somewhere, because you are not sure what is happening. They are speaking of letting off teachers. In fact, I have applied for the package. Some of the peoples' applications have been approved, some not, with reasons best known to them. Some of us want to go out before they will re-employ us to a school where you don't want to go to, but they say, 'no stay, because of your potentiality' which I don't want to use any longer. And at the same time I feel sorry for my pupils which I like so much. But what will happen if they place me somewhere where I don't want to go to. If you are told where to and you refuse, it is debatable in court, you see. Why must I debate my profession? It is like we don't get the real truth, you understand. Others they come with this story, others they come with that story in the middle of nowhere - and I don't want to be in the middle of nowhere. Even if somebody comes here and tells us the real thing, we will never believe him because we have dialogued an insecure situation in our lives. I personally am not thinking what I will do; I don't take a decision, because I know that once you take a decision, when you are hurt, you hurt yourself. Now, I want to relax a little bit and be sober before I take any decision.

JNVW

And you, Amos?

AMOS

(Laugh) Depending on the length of time I have spent in the field of education, in the next 5 years I quit that education, my future is still bright as a businessman. If I stay in education, I still think doors are open for me - it is just a case of knocking on the right doors. Young teachers should put themselves in a position where they are indispensable, specialising in certain vital areas. So nobody can start pushing you around to help you leave the department. They will say, 'thank you for your services, you can leave'. So one needs to look at very specific areas, 'where do I capitalise, where is your contribution', and I think in that way your future is secure.

MARY

I should think that teaching was a very good profession in the past, but now you just come to work because you've got to work. You used to enjoy teaching, you used to come and teach and see the fruits thereafter. Right now you can't teach kids, you try all methods and resources available, but kids have turned away and it seems that you just talk alone. And I am the kind of person who don't want to do something which fails. I want to do something that succeeds. I want to work hard and see that my children go forth to other classes with good results. But these days, I really don't know. That is why I said to the principal, 'I think maybe the problem is with me, or whatever', because there is not much progress in class. You approach it from this angle, from that angle, eventually you are just negative. Especially with me - I am teaching Afrikaans - and they don't like it at all! I have to fight to instill the love for this language in them and to convince them that this language is here to stay, but they seem to be negative. I am defending the language they don't like, so it becomes a complicated issue, and that frustrates me. I feel that they are wasting my time. What am I doing here? Because I am teaching Afrikaans and also Science, which is another complicated subject, it frustrates me that they don't like it. Because there are experiments involved and they are not interested in it, it puts a lot of stress on you. That frustrates you. That puts you in a position to say, 'maybe its time to look for another trend and be out of this education'. But if I go out, who must go in? If I leave the situation as it is now, I must fight to improve it and must maybe take more steps. Because now we are in a situation where we are trying to build most of the things that have collapsed, and that is very confusing. The children are confused, we are confused. There is a lot of change in the Government, in the education structure, and whatever. Maybe I must give it a chance, and maybe after these changes, people will be more motivated. Because this is the type of education they wanted so long, or their parents wanted for so long, and now that it has reached that level, maybe everything will settle down in time. So that is why I am spending a lot of time doing introspection: 'am I approaching the subject correctly' or 'am I doing the right thing'. These things are disturbing sometimes. We will feel comfortable to be at work. See what you are doing,

have good results. Rather than working hard, but the results are not clear. So it seems as if there is something wrong with the method you are using, or (with) yourself.

JNVW

And you, Cathy?

CATHY

The world is confused in as much that even though one would say, 'I am optimistic that perhaps things will come right one day', it seems that things are going from bad to worse. Personally speaking, it is just a few years before I go on pension. Then I said to myself, 'in this situation, I think I must leave. But on second thoughts, why should I act cowardly? With whom shall I leave the small ones who have been entrusted to me?' But with all these bad things that are happening, if only God could spare us time and perhaps the Government too might change one day - we are always hoping for the best, even on the hard days. Things might go well one day. We are prepared to teach these children despite the fact that there are hardships and hold ups. Primarily we took this course, I for one, took it because I have said to myself, I have love for the small ones and I like distributing ideas to the small ones. I like trying to bring up the small ones in the correct way, but with the situation that is transpiring right now, it is terrible. And as for this re-employment it is very demotivating teachers. I am thinking, with my age and so on, to getting right to the far north of the Transvaal - my home is in the Transkei. So, in my mind, I think of that. With what type of people shall I be with in that place? So now you see, all these things work in one's mind. You now see yourself in the desert. There is no longer that love for teaching, and yet in the past I used to say there is no profession as noble as the teaching profession, because all the professional people come from a teacher. But now days, when I pinpoint the problem, it is just this confusion - we do not know really what to do - and when it will be. So I think we must just pray, pray, pray.

MARY And to add what Aunty Cathy has said, all those big people are earning big salaries, you know, but teachers are lowly paid. That is another thing that will drive teachers out of the teaching fraternity, because they are the lowest paid, and they carry such a big load. They are teachers, they are social workers, policemen, everything. I am a teacher, but now I have to change into a social worker because there is a child that is hungry, she hasn't eaten anything since yesterday. You have to go and cook porridge; the class is waiting for you. You have to prepare something, maybe a piece of bread and tea and then you go back to class. Problems at home, got to sit down with the parents, got to call the parents, one is crying, you are just running around. When you reach home, you are exhausted. At the end of the day you are going to die, and you are going to leave your kids without a cent, because you are the lowest paid!

AMOS And on top of it, there is one other problem: Teachers have the most less creative professions of all.

JNVW Less creative?

AMOS Yeah, less creative in terms of survival. They are creative in terms of distributing knowledge, but in terms of survival, less creative, along with nurses. I don't know whether it is our education because it is so regimented. I am a teacher - I am going to die a teacher, I am a nurse - I am going to die a nurse. Income? Only as a teacher. I don't know if it is part of the education. We also come to say to people 'these are the rules, and nobody goes beyond these rules'. Probably that is why the most stress is people working in education, police, and the nurses. We thus confine ourselves to 'I am a teacher'; it ends here'. The three professions have stress because we have to survive. We are not very creative on how are we going to come out of this situation. We have more time than any other people. We knock off at two, and between two and twelve o'clock midnight, what do we do? That is wasted time! At my age, when you go into teaching, you don't think of any other income than being a teacher, end of the story. You grow old with this

attitude, and when you are old you can't come out of it. Unless we start now at my age, there is very little we can do in the future.

CATHY Thank you Amos, but I think a teachers is a very devoted person whose strength is really exhausted in the classroom at the end of the day, so you can't be creative when you are so mentally as well as physically exhausted after school still go for something else. Now all you are thinking of is relaxing. Maybe your idea of relaxation is different than mine - you go out, you read books, but you can't be occupied. If I want to do some other work after school, you want to, but the body is tired.

AMOS Let us compare ourselves to politicians - policy formulation, going through legislation. At times perhaps they work 15 hours per day. University lecturers sometimes work 15 hours per day because of the load of work. I work 6 hours - what do I do with the other 6 hours? For example, people go through policy formulation, it is a very exhausting job, you go through passing legislation and you go till midnight sometimes. If I want to survive, I need to compare myself with a guy who maybe works overtime. Does he ge paid? No. Do I? No. So we are in the same situation. The difference is, they earn a bigger salary. So if I am earning a smaller salary, I must create something for myself on the other hand to survive.

CATHY Health-wise, not all people are up to that, because of the present situation. You see how such diseases as migraine, heart complaints, ulcers have developed, because of the present life. So people don't just sit at home because they are lazy or they don't want to do anything, but health-wise things are down.

JNWW Thank you very much.