

THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THEIR
CHILDREN'S HOMEWORK AT PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE
UMLAZI DISTRICT, MAYVILLE CIRCUIT, KWAZULU-NATAL

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S HOMEWORK AT PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT, MAYVILLE CIRCUIT, KWAZULU-NATAL is my own work and that all sources I used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged with complete references.

SIGNATURE

(Mrs S. Parmaswar)

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late grandparents
Mr & Mrs Oddy Latchanna, who inspired me to focus on education
and my husband
Ronnie Parmaswar,
for his continued support and guidance throughout my studies.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the involvement of parents in their children's homework in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal. A literature review investigated the nature of parental involvement in learner schoolwork, the role and function of homework in education, models of effective teacher practices to ensure parental involvement in homework and an empirical study that investigated perceptions of teachers, managers and parents regarding effective parental involvement in homework in education. The findings indicate that most teachers agreed that parental involvement in homework is important for learner achievement. The literature review and empirical investigation showed that lack of parental involvement was due to socio-economic factors. From the findings of the investigation, recommendations were made for parents, teachers, school managers and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to encourage effective parental involvement in their children's homework and other aspects of their child's education.

KEY TERMS

Parental involvement

Influence

Homework

Relationship

Socio-economic

Teacher

Learner

Homework policy

LIST OF MOST FREQUENT ABBREVIATIONS

SGB	School Governing Body
DoE	Department of Education
TIPS	Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork
SPLASH	Student-Parent Laboratories Achieving Science at Home Programme
SMT	Senior Management Team

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Hornby (2005:467) conceptualises education as the method by which society hands down knowledge, culture and values from one generation to the next. The purpose of education is to develop individuals holistically (physically, emotionally, morally, mentally and socially). This may be accomplished by teachers, family members, church or other organisational groups in society. Formal education is usually carried out by schools (private or public), agencies that employ men and women who are professionally trained for this task (Hornby 2005:467).

Mestry & Grobler (2007:183) view education as a lifelong experience, starting from birth and culminating at death. The educational process requires a great deal of adult supervision in the formative years of a child's life. It is during these early stages of a child's life that government policy places parents in the role of monitoring their children's activities, such as homework and their involvement with friends (Mestry & Grobler 2007:184). According to The Parent Institute, research conducted in 2005, on parental involvement in their children's homework indicated that from the day children are born until they graduate from high school, they spend 30% of their working hours at school. The remaining 70% is spent outside school and most of that time is spent at home. This implies that parents may be the most influential teachers in the life of their child (The Parent Institute 2013).

The Parent Institute goes on to say that "children are naturally curious, love to learn and are learning all the time whether the process of learning is planned or not. Thus, the home environment can be viewed as a fundamental part of the child's life, since more time is spent at home than at school, the time spent at home can be important learning time" (The Parent Institute 2013). This view is supported by Macbeth (2003:3) who states that "a parent can give their children more individual attention than a teacher and the mother in particular has a close, often intense, relationship with her child".

Eita (2007:1) mentions that homework can be seen as an everyday part of school life. Most children come home from school with one or more assignments to be completed and returned to school the following day or a within a few days. However, the importance of homework is increasingly becoming recognised. According to Cooper (2007:1) homework in the early

grades should encourage positive attitudes and character traits and allow for appropriate parental involvement in homework which reinforces skills introduced in class. In secondary schools homework should work toward improving standardised test scores and grades.

According to Macbeth (2003:4) “Educators set homework to consolidate and practice work already done in class or in preparation for the next class. Homework can also be given when introducing tasks that extend beyond work already done in class that need to be built upon. Homework can assist slower children to catch up with quicker children. It can also test learners’ understanding of work covered, or their competence in skills. Homework also teaches learners to work independently and to develop self-discipline”.

Naidu et al. (2011:118) emphasises that in South Africa and many other countries, parents are grappling to cope with their role as active stakeholders in education. According to Naidu et al. (2011:130) “parental interest and support is a very important factor for their children’s success in school”. Epstein (1987:110) and Van Rooyen (2012) argue that a school community with well-implemented practices yields learners with positive results. Lemmer & Van Wyk (1998:1) reported that where families learnt together the children’s grades improved and the children enjoyed learning. This implies that supportive parental involvement can boost learner homework efforts and effectiveness (Naidu et al. 2011:133; Pretorius 2014:55). This view is supported by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:310) and Balli (1998:142) who agree that when parents help their children with their homework, children believe that their educational pursuits are worthy of their time and effort.

According to Mahlangu (2014:178) researchers over a number of decades have been investigating partnerships between the child, parent, school and community. The Modern Learning Theory, such as Social Learning Theory (Epstein 2006:55), emphasise the overlapping spheres of influence of school, family and community which are necessary for effective collaboration as one of its seven principles. Skinner (Ervin, Ehrhardt & Poling 2001) maintains that education should be enjoyable and effective by modifying behaviour, through modifying the environment the child is in.

Eita (2007:3) maintains that Skinner suggests that when parents work with their children it does not only form a strong parent-child bond, but that when praise is given for completing homework correctly, the child’s self-esteem improves. Parents who provide support to their children ask open-ended questions during the learning period, promote factual and cognitive

learning whilst at the same time reinforcing critical thinking. Therefore, the most obvious area where parents can get involved on a daily basis is by ensuring a supervised homework routine.

It is therefore important for us to understand the role of all stakeholders in the field of education as outlined in the South African Constitution (Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights). Section 29 of the Constitution enshrines the right to education and defines the responsibility of the state. In addition, the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 emphasises the state's view that parents play a pivotal role in the support of a child's education.

However, in South Africa many problems exist. According to Mestry & Grobler (2007:176) in today's society, schools and parents are responding to increased expectations, economic pressures and time constraints. This is evident in the low attendance at many parent meetings, their lack of involvement in fundraising projects and the lack of interest shown by many parents in their children's schoolwork and homework. This view is supported by Eita (2007:4) who states that "many parents find it difficult to visit the school personally, but may still be involved in their children's schooling through supervising homework, monitoring school activities and assisting with learning".

Gezani (2009:1) mentions that the legacy of the system of Apartheid has left many parents in South Africa with very little or no formal education. These parents still need assistance on how to be productively involved in their children's education. Kruger (2002:44) supports this view: "parent involvement does not happen by itself, principal and educators are responsible for bringing it about". Eita (2007:4) is of the view that school programmes and teacher practices are needed to organise family and school relations so as to encourage and assist those families who would not otherwise get involved.

For this reason improving parental involvement is one of the most challenging tasks facing various stakeholders in the education system today. This study examines parental participation in education, namely on the individual, the home environment, cooperative governance and community involvement and the role and function of homework in education.

1.2 Rationale and Motivation

The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, advocates that parents must be actively involved in school governance through participation on the School Governing Body (SGB). This requires parents to be involved in their children's education with the opportunity to actively promote the culture of learning. The Act also makes provision for the parent of each child to be provided with regular reports, in writing, on the academic progress, general behaviour and conduct of the learner (Department of Education, 1997). In this way parents are able monitor their children's progress. With opportunities for parental participation made by the Department of Education (DoE) and regular reports on the learner's progress, parents can build a partnership with the school and teachers, so as to ensure the learner success (Mahlangu 2014:175).

The Budget Speech delivered by Minister Pravin Gordhan in 2012 indicated that the government planned on spending R207 billion on education during the year (Francis: 2012). Parents, the private sector and the state have made large financial contributions to education. Parents should, through their financial involvement, ensure effective teaching and learning. According to Epstein (1986:18) the intellectual development of children takes place in the first 17 years and parents play an important role in developing their child's mind. This emphasises that parents have an important role and need to be involved in the formal education of their children.

Spaull (2013) in a report for the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), revealed that South Africa was facing an education crisis. "Most South African learners cannot read, write and compute at grade appropriate levels with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate" (Spaull 2013). In January 2014, after the release of the 2013 Matric results, Spaull added that "learners are pushed through the system until Grade 10" (Wilkinson 2014). This is of grave concern since this is an indication that only a small number of learners obtained matric exemption. Spaull further indicated that a lack of skills in the country was due to a combination of many social factors (Wilkinson 2014).

Professor Jonathan Jansen, the vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State and a prominent commentator on education, stated that the school drop-out rate has had a

significant impact on the country, for example, when the 2013 matric class started Grade 1 in 2002, there were 1 261 827 learners; by the end of Grade 12 their numbers had fallen to 562 112 (Wilkinson 2014). This implies that approximately 55,45% of these individuals are left with no qualification at all beyond the level of Grade 9 (Wilkinson 2014). Parental involvement has shown some positive results. According to Trautwein et al. (2007:176) academic achievement developed more favourably in classes where teachers frequently set homework activities. He adds that homework assignments are likely to be most effective if learners are motivated by their parents.

Clay (2006) states that teachers strive to establish partnerships with parents. To support learning and communication is fundamental, but unfortunately many teachers have not been trained to, or practice proactive communication with parents. According to Epstein (1995:701) communicating and collaborating with parents is one of the six major types of parent involvement practices which is critical to establishing strong working relationships between teachers and parents. Mestry & Grobler (2007:176) are in support of this view and state that the benefits of parent involvement include enhanced school performance, reduced drop-out rates, a decrease in delinquency and a more optimistic attitude towards school.

According to Macbeth (2003:4), many teachers experience a range of problems relating to learners not completing or not doing their homework at all. In most cases this is due to time constraints and large class sizes in public schools where homework is reviewed without introspection into problems that may exist. Learners, who may have copied, did not complete or did not do their homework at all, may still not have mastered the content or skills. By the same token, many teachers may never know if the learners have learnt the content or skill. The teacher may then move on to new content, which would be linked to previous knowledge or skills. When learners are asked to link the new content to previous knowledge, they are often unable to do so. As a result teachers re-teach the content and waste valuable teaching and learning time. Consequently the syllabus is not completed within the prescribed time.

Macbeth (2003:4) states that homework is given to strengthen existing knowledge. In addition, some homework activities are designed to allow the child to discover or draw

conclusions. With the assistance of an adult (parent, grandparent, etc.) it allows the child to develop other life skills which are important in the development of a holistic individual able to make a significant contribution to society. It is therefore important that parents or grandparents embrace their duties and become involved in their children's homework.

In their interaction with teachers, parents indicate that when they questioned their children about homework, the response they got was "we did not get any homework today". This is an indication of a breakdown in communication between parent and child, teachers and parents. As a result there is poor academic performance in curricular and extra-curricular activities. According to Ramirez (2002:51) teachers have experimented with various technologies to communicate with parents in innovative and time-efficient ways, but the full effect of these changes have not been experienced as yet.

According to Sheridan (2009:336) parents have a significant and constant influence on their children's development. Thus, they need to be part of an array of interventions targeted at enhancing their involvement in their children's homework and other aspects of their children's schooling.

Teachers have requested that parents get involved in the monitoring of homework tasks. Very little success has however been achieved. According to Eita (2007:2) the home, school and community need to collaborate and communicate effectively, so as to achieve the aims of quality teaching and learning in the classroom and extend this to the home environment.

Eita (2007:73) states that teachers can structure homework to meet certain objectives and establish activities to meet the individual circumstances and needs of each family by:

"Helping parents to assist their children with their homework, will outline the importance of homework in the field of education and the role of parental participation in school governance".

Eita (2007:73) further indicates that information from research can assist schools to build on home routines already in place. This can be done by assisting parents to become effectively involved in everyday activities of the school and by providing meaningful ways for parents to become involved in homework and the child's mastery of basic skills. The way to go about this is by providing parents with information and resources to assist them at home during the weekends and school vacations.

The data from this study may be useful to teachers, parents, school managers and DoE officials. It provides insight into the topic and may guide training programmes for teachers on how to devise homework that engages parents and other programmes. The data may assist parents with effective involvement in their children's homework and other aspects of schooling. The data offers strategies on the management of parental involvement in learner homework for the DoE officials and school managers.

1.3 Research Problem

Over the years policymakers and educators endorsed the need for school, family and community partnerships to improve education (Van Wyk 2001:116). However, in spite of the current conditions facing the South African education system, public schools are unable to build a strong healthy relationship with parents and the community despite the fact that teachers and parents share the goal of assisting learners develop to their full potential.

While the learner is at school and under the teacher's care a great deal can be accomplished in the development of the learner, this however needs to be reinforced at home. Homework tasks further develop life skills like order, organisation, persistence, perseverance and goal directedness. Sheridan (2009:336) states that the most prominent and influential setting for learners to learn and master life skills, is the home. Favourable environmental routines create conditions and patterns conducive for optimal performance, the impact of which reinforces classroom learning. Empirical studies evaluating the efficacy of homework interventions as well as the contribution of parents in school activities, are of prime importance for school psychologists and associated professionals (Sheridan 2009:334). The direct input of parents as partners in the education process at public in South Africa schools is still highly questionable and it is difficult to understand why there is little, or in some cases an absence of parental involvement in homework.

This leads to the following question:

To what extent are parents involved in their children's homework?

Several research questions may consequently be formulated as follows:

What is the nature of parental involvement in education?

What roles do parents play in their children's homework?

What are the perceptions of the participants (parents, teachers and school managers) of parental involvement in homework?

Which models can be applied for the improvement of parental involvement in homework?

What guidelines can be devised to encourage parental involvement in homework?

1.4 Objectives of the research

The research aimed to:

Explore the nature of parental involvement in education.

Determine what roles parents play in their children's homework.

Explore what the perceptions of the participants (parents, teachers and managers) are on parental involvement in homework.

Establish which models can be implemented for the improvement of parental involvement in homework.

Devise guidelines that could assist in improving the quality of parental involvement in education.

1.5 Research design and Methodology

This study involved a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods of data gathering were used. This method was chosen because of its exploratory and descriptive nature which is in keeping with the objectives of the study. The method allowed for a starting point regarding parental involvement and moved to what was less known about parental involvement in homework.

Personal and focus group interviews were used to gather data. Focus group interviews with parents and personal interviews with school managers and teachers from two public secondary schools in the Umlazi District, KwaZulu-Natal, were conducted.

A qualitative research design was used to explore parental involvement in their children's homework. An interview schedule (Appendix 1) was used with the parents in the focus group interview. This was done to establish the views and opinions of parents. Interview schedule (Appendix 2 & 3) was used with teachers and SMT in the personal interviews on parental involvement in education and most importantly in homework.

Details of the research design and method appear in Chapter 4.

1.6 Explanation of concepts

The following concepts are fundamental in the context of the study and require further explanation.

- Teacher

This is any person that teaches, educates or trains other persons at an educational institution or assists in rendering educational services or education auxiliary or support services provided by or in an education department, but does not include any officer or employee as defined in Section 1 of the Public Service Act, 1994 (South Africa 1994:3).

- Learner

Any person receiving an education or obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.

- Parent

According to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 a parent is:

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

- Parental involvement

Squelch & Lemmer (1994:93) define parental involvement as follows: "it is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities which may be educational or non-educational". It extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children's homework. Parental involvement implies mutual cooperation, sharing and support.

- Influence

The effect somebody or something has on the way a person thinks or behaves or on the way that something works or develops (Hornby 2005:764).

- Homework

According to Macbeth (2003:2) homework may be defined as: "work related to the formal school curriculum, set by teachers to be completed by learners out of the class (normally in the home) within a specified time".

- Relationship

The way in which two or more things are connected (Hornby 2005:1228). This study will focus on the relationship between parent and child, school and parent and school and community.

- Socio-economic

According to Hornby (2005:1399) this is the connection with society or the study of society and its economics.

- School homework policy

The school homework policy implies a plan of action for dealing with parental involvement in homework throughout the year. It includes clear objectives for learning, instruction for completion and explicit instructions for the learner for involving family members in certain portions of the assignments (Van Voorhuis 2003:326).

- Secondary Schools

According to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, a public school or an independent school is a school which enrolls learners in one or more grades from Grade 8 (eight) to Grade 12 (twelve).

- School managers (SMT)

Persons responsible for the management of the school, this may include the principal, deputy principal and the Heads of Departments.

1.7 Outline of the study

This study will be presented in five chapters as outlined below.

Chapter One: Introduction to the study

The introduction incorporates the study undertaken in a broader framework of relevant theories and research. This leads to the main research question, ie the involvement of parents in their children's homework. It presents the aims and objectives of the investigation, a description of the research methodology, the value of the investigation in the field of education and a possible explanation of concepts.

Chapter Two: Literature review

A review of related literature forming the theoretical background is provided. The implications of parental involvement in homework and its effects on learners is reviewed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This entails the research design, the sample and the sampling procedure, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis. The focus is also on the reliability and validity of the study and research ethics.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Discussion of Empirical findings

This contains the discussion and presentation of data collected from the document analysis, focus group interview with the parents and the personal interviews with the teachers and school managers. This analysis provided insight into the perceptions of the participants on parental involvement in homework.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the results of the study and presents conclusions drawn from the research. It also makes recommendations for additional research.

1.8 Conclusion

The orientation, background and concerns of the extent of parental involvement in their children's homework and educational activities were outlined. The research problem and the aims of the research have been described in detail. Motivation for the undertaking of this study was also outlined. In the following chapter, a literature review on parental involvement in their children's education and homework will be given.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AND HOMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

According to Mouton (2005:87) the purpose of a literature review is to explore how scholars have theorised and conceptualised the issue of what they have found. This is supported by Henning (2006:27) who is of the opinion that a literature review is used to contextualise a study and to argue a case. McMillan & Schumacher (2010:73) add that the two reasons for conducting a literature review is to (1) establish important links between existing knowledge and the research problem being investigated in order to enhance significance, and (2) provide information about methodology that can be incorporated into a new study.

The literature reviewed is to locate the study in the context of the already identified and known facts on the topic being researched. It thus prevents a researcher from repeating and duplicating research unnecessarily. Instead, it enables one to identify areas for further research, based on knowledge of the topics that have already been explored (Henning 2006:27). In this study the literature reviewed incorporated both primary and secondary sources in the form of books, newspapers, journals, papers delivered at conferences, circulars from the Department of Education, and government publications, theses and dissertations.

The literature reviewed approached the problem from two angles. Firstly, to present a perspective on parental involvement in education including an overview of relevant theories and a brief historical development of parental involvement as well as to present the most recent developments in South Africa. An attempt has been made to place the information on parental involvement in the context of the present study by indicating how the information links with the research questions. Secondly, it is to present the role and function of homework and models of parental involvement in education.

According to Voorhuis (2011:220) parental involvement in informal education is not a new concept. It existed since the dawn of humankind. This implies that parents would have been

involved in the education of their children informally. Berger (1983:1) states that in prehistoric times (during the period between 6000 and 5000 B.C.) parental involvement was a crucial factor in the education of their children. Children were taught rules and regulations of both the family and of society at large. Parents taught their children various processes needed for the existence of mankind since children needed to survive and develop by learning from adults how to gather food, to hunt, to herd cattle and to produce crops.

According to Sibiyi (2005:33) a system existed whereby traditional ways of life were passed on from parents and elders of the community to the children. This type of education prepared children for life in the community. They would have been equipped with knowledge and skills to enable them to fulfil their roles as adults in their communities. According to Eita (2007:2) parents form a fundamental part of the child's life through an informal partnership with the community and the school. This view is supported by Voorhuis (2011:222) who stipulates that learners do better at school when their parents, teachers and others in the community work together to guide and support the learner's learning and development.

Macbeth (2003:3) states that homework is seen as a component of an interwoven system in the field of education. This can foster a healthy relationship between the teachers, parents and community.

In the rest of this chapter the following aspects will be addressed, theoretical perspectives on parental involvement in education and the development of parental involvement in education.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives and Development of Parental Involvement in Education

The following paragraphs will focus on the theoretical perspectives and development of parental involvement in education.

2.2.1 Theoretical perspectives on parental involvement in education

According to Christie (1985:29) an educational system forms part of a wider society and has changed with time. The practice of parental involvement, including the ways in which homework has been controlled, has vastly improved. The quality and quantity of research in the area of parental involvement, has also developed beyond recognition. Understandably

each scholar's work is distinctive. Some focus on family involvement in special education; early childhood education; elementary middle and high schools etc.

Chrispeels (1992:2) states that two main strands of research influence current discussions about home-school partnerships. The first is the family learning environment that has positively affected the learner's school achievement. The second entails school initiatives that involve parents in school matters.

Researchers such as Auerbach (2007), Cucchiara & Horvat (2009) and Lareau (2003) argued that parents with a higher educational and economic status tend to be proactive in relationships with schools and are able to acquire resources to assist their children. Comings, Reder & Sum (2001) add that parents with less education and fewer economic resources have greater difficulty in assisting their children with schoolwork.

Against this broad background two theories can be identified that deal with parental involvement and homework in education. These are:

- The theory on Parental Involvement as Social Capital
- Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The following generic aspects can be deduced from these theories.

Drago-Severson et al. (2009) and Prins, Toso et al. (2009) indicate that social networks within an adult education class can provide critical support for learning and personal fulfilment for isolated adults and these benefits may also be extended to support their children's education. Epstein (1987:121) believes that the perspective of shared responsibility for the school and home emphasises the co-ordination, co-operation and complementary nature of schools and families. It also encourages collaboration between the two, since schools and families also share the responsibilities for the socialisation of the learner. These common goals for learners are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work together.

In this process according to Epstein (1996:3) the complexity of the interaction of schools, families and communities shows how essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individual's at home, school and in the community. These social relationships can take place at an institutional level or an individual level. With this kind of thinking the assumption is made that the mutual interests of families and schools can

successfully be promoted by the policies and programmes of the organisations and the actions of individuals in the organisations.

In an earlier study by Epstein (1987:130) research revealed that some practices of families and schools are conducted independently, while others reflected the shared responsibilities of parents and teachers for the learner's learning. "When teachers and parents emphasise their shared responsibilities, they support the generalisation of skills required to produce successful learners. Their combined endeavour pushes the spheres of family and school influence together thereby increasing the interaction between parents and schools and creating school-like families and family-like schools" (Epstein 1987:130). This view is supported by Lemmer (2007:218) who states that good school, family and community partnerships lead to improved academic achievement, self-esteem, school attendance and social behaviour.

A "school-like family" recognises each learner and reinforces the importance of school, homework and the activities that build academic skills and feelings of success (Epstein 1992:502). Epstein (1995:702) later added the community as a third sphere where family-like settings are created, including, service and events to enable families to support their children. Community-minded families help their neighbourhood and other families. It is fact that schools and communities are very interested in programmes and services that are "family friendly". Family friendly schools welcome all families and not just those that are easy to reach.

As an extension of this "school-like family" idea, Epstein (1996:214) designed a theory called the *Theory of overlapping spheres of influence*. Epstein, in this model focussed on the following underlying perspective about family and school relations. Firstly, *schools and families have separate responsibilities* and secondly, *they have shared responsibilities as well as sequential responsibilities*. This, points to an overlap of the responsibilities between parents and teachers. Parents teach skills to their children until the time of their formal education, which is around the ages of five or six. Teachers then assume the primary responsibility for the learner's education, but parents still have to be involved (Epstein 1987:121-126).

Some learning practices are conducted separately by schools, families and communities and others are conducted jointly in order to strengthen the learner's learning (Epstein et al. 1997:3). The learner is the key connection between the home and the school.

According to Epstein (1995:702) learners are the key to a successful school and family partnerships and if learners feel cared for and encouraged to work hard by their parents and teacher, they are more likely to do their best academically and to remain in school.

Mahlangu (2014:177) states that parental involvement entails what parents do naturally in the home to socialise their children, and what schools can do to help parents to be more effective in the home environment. Members of the community represent an important part of the learner's learning environment. The development of relationships between the community and the school assists learners through the exchange of information and the provision of support services not available within the school. Therefore, parental involvement creates a sense of security and comfort to learners.

According to Fenske (2005:45) learners develop in a complex system of relationships within various levels of their environment. The innermost levels, or the micro-systems, refer to the activities and interactions encompassed within their immediate surroundings, this includes both the home and school environment. The second level in a learner's environment is the meso-system, which consists of the connections between the different micro-systems that influence the learner's development. It is here that a parent's involvement in the school environment helps to promote the learner's academic progress.

Epstein (1986:38) emphasised the importance of parental involvement in both junior and senior grade levels and further states that families send their children to school, where they hope their children become learners with the tools they need to succeed in life. Schools take these children from and send them back to their families, where they assume the families will provide the support that their children need to grow and learn. This is a circle in which home and school share and build the resources of the children.

Another important way, in which parents can help their children to do better in school, is by helping them develop language skills. Experts agree that language is the key to learning and a learner who can express his/her ideas is well on the road to success (Lemmer & Van Wyk 1998:2). Laurie (2012) indicates that parents play a key role in their children's literacy development and school success. While it may be challenging to reach out and connect with parents, if every effort is made it would make a difference. These views are supported by Lemmer & Van Wyk (1998:2) who indicates that reading activities increase vocabulary and improve thinking skills, while listening to books being read also helps learners develop a positive attitude towards reading.

According to Laurie (2012) fostering a literacy rich environment may come as second nature to teachers. Parents face many challenges such as a busy work schedule, caring for younger children or elderly parents and limited English or literacy skills. Epstein (2010:20) reports that lower income and some middle-income parents feel unprepared or inadequate to help their children with higher level homework or to support their children with reading and writing. These may be factors affecting parental involvement in their children's homework.

The home, community and school form a partnership with a common goal, which is the education of the learner. This partnership can only be successful if all role-players diligently honour the duties they have been entrusted with. One can only agree with Eita (2007:24) who states:

“When educators guide the involvement and interaction of parents, parents become involved in ways that benefit their children. Parents must be provided with useful information and skills to become more involved in their children's school programme. Interaction of parents with their children reinforces the teacher's goals for better school work”.

According to Epstein (1996:4) when teachers frequently use practices to involve families in homework, learners gain more skills than similar learners whose teachers do not involve families. It is also true that learners need to know that someone is supporting them. This view is supported by Lemmer & Van Wyk (1998:4) who state that learners can be successful if they feel that someone cares deeply about whether they succeed or fail and if someone is proud of their successes and their efforts.

As stated parental involvement in homework is important in developing specific skills that learners need to acquire. According to Sirvani (2007) parental involvement can take place various ways, such as: communicating with their children, parenting, volunteering at school or in the community, collaborating with the community and decision making. Since parents and their children form part of the *Theory of overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein 1996: 214) skills such as responsibility, independence, motivation and communication can be acquired through parental involvement in homework.

The following paragraphs will provide discussion on the development of parental involvement in education.

2.2.2 The development of parental involvement in education

According to Fafunwa (1982:9) learning does not necessarily only take place within the walls of a classroom. There is a possibility of learning from communal activities such as farming practices, dancing, hunting and fishing. The use of fauna and flora and traditional medical remedies is a natural process whereby children or young adults can learn from their parents. This has already been discussed. Knowledge and skills gained in this way are passed on in an informal way.

Berger (1983:2-3) states that parents were obviously not professionals and depended on their intuitive and experiential knowledge when teaching children. Parents taught their children using the method of “show and tell”. Children who did not meet the required standards expected by the parent or family group were punished. As time went on the education systems around the world evolved, moving to formal mass schooling. Where teachers taught children in the formal institutions and parents were known as the secondary teachers (Berger 1983: 2-3).

- **Parental involvement in early societies**

Berger (1983:02) states that the oldest known systems of education in history had two common characteristics: (1) they taught religion and (2) they promoted the traditions of the people. In ancient Egypt the temple schools taught not only religion, but also the principles of writing, the sciences, mathematics and architecture. Berger (1983:3) also comments on education in India, where much of the education was carried out by the priests. India was the fountainhead of the Buddhist doctrines that were taught in its institutions to Chinese scholars who, in turn, spread the teachings of Buddha to the various countries of the Far East (Berger 1983:2). The Torah and the Talmud were the basic sources of information about the aims and methods of education among the ancient Jews. Jewish parents were urged by the Talmud to teach their children such subjects as vocational knowledge, swimming and a foreign language.

In referring specifically to the Pedi community in South Africa during early times, Sibiya (2005:38) explains that a group of elders took charge of the general education while selected individuals conducted the specialised education known as the circumcision initiation into manhood. Parents were actively involved in the education of their children during this period.

They taught their children skills such as responsibility and respect for the parental home and community.

Young females were taught life skills related to home-making, cleaning and plastering, sweeping the courtyard, cooking, brewing beer, baby care, assisting with agricultural activities and so forth. Young males were taught life skills such as caring for the livestock, attending to cattle diseases and breeding, ploughing, harvesting and such special trades as metal work and basketry.

Sibiya (2005:38) adds that the traditional education conducted by parents and elders was lifelong and effective. It was comprehensive and became integral to society. It taught young adults to understand the traditions and values, as well as the politics of the day. It taught them the skills of the various trades and careers as well as their civic and economic duties in service of the community.

Berger (1983:2) asserts that in Greece there were regulations that governed people to teach their children how to read, write and swim. Schools were in sessions for hours and parents had the right to choose the school they desired for their children. Roman parents were actively involved in the education of their children. According to Gezani (2009:15) modern educationists like Rousseau, Pestalozzie, Locke and Froebel extensively studied the importance of parental involvement in education by proposing theories and concepts. Pestalozzie was regarded as the father of parent involvement and he was an advocate of parents as primary teachers, while Froebel saw the mother as the first teacher of the child.

From the discussion above we can gather that parents have been involved in their children's education since the dawn of humanity. Parents in different communities have engaged with elders to teach their children traditional ways in order to ensure the continuity of the community. This type of education may have been informal but vital skills were passed from one generation to the next. Parents engaged with schools with the primary objective to educate their children, teaching the children to read and write so that these skills are used to fulfil civic and economic duties.

- **Parental involvement in modern societies**

The United States of America and Great Britain have been selected as developed countries. In addition the education system in the United Kingdom has influenced the South African education system in critical ways in the past century.

Jowett & Bangisky (1991:1) highlights parental involvement as one of the most important issues in the educational debate in Great Britain, stating that the interest in parental involvement was fuelled by legislation. According to Gezani (2009:15) the Plowden Report, was presented in Great Britain in 1967. This report was accepted by all stakeholders (parents, researchers, teachers and government) in order to study parental involvement from a broader perspective. This report stated that learners for whom adults are responsible were the link between teachers and parents and it stressed the importance of building a partnership between teachers and parents.

According to Gezani (2009:15) studies conducted in Great Britain, such as the Taylor Report (1977) and the Warnock Report (1978) were seen as valuable in the contribution to understanding parental involvement in education. In 1984, according to Gillard (2011) the British government issued the Green Paper. This legislation encouraged parental representation on school governing bodies and wished to see more effective functioning of school governing bodies. It was only two years later that the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, summed up the Education Act of 1986 No. 2, in which radical changes would be made in terms of parental involvement in British education. This Act placed more power and responsibilities on the school governing bodies, by increasing the number of parents on the committee and making parents answerable at annual meetings. The responsibility of sex education, parenthood education and moral education was no longer that of the teachers but that of the parents on the school governing body because if it was taught it had to encourage learners “to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life” (Gillard 2011). This was seen as an attempt to “re-moralise” the nation by Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of Great Britain.

According to Woestehoff (2011) parental involvement programmes in the United States of America are strongly supported by all stakeholders, including the rights of parents to get involved in the public schools their children attend. This is based on the constitution, federal or state laws or the Supreme Court rulings of the United States of America.

Woestehoff (2011) adds that parents in the United States of America have specific rights under the “No Child Left Behind Act”. The guidance documents, written to interpret and support the “No Child Left Behind Act”, stress the value of parents as partners in all aspects of school and school policies. Meaningful parental involvement is one of the cornerstones of the reform initiatives contained in the “No Child Left Behind Act”. Therefore, it is essential that State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies, or schools, communicate with parents throughout the schools improvement process. Schools welcome parents as key partners in addressing the academic issues that led to the schools being identified for improvement.

According to Levin (1997:262), relatively few parents are actively involved in their children’s education, or in their homework tasks. Parents who were involved may drop off after the first few years. The preference of most parents is not the involvement through school governing bodies, but to be involved in their children’s homework or other school activities.

However, Woestehoff (2011) further explains that parents have rights in the American Education System which states that they must get informed about their children’s progress by becoming involved in school activities and participating in school programmes. Woestehoff noted that was not the case. Gentry (2011) supports Woestehoff, by stating that only one-fifth of parents consistently attend school programmes with nearly one-third of learners in the United States of America saying their parents have any idea of how they are doing at school.

According to Min Xu (2010:237) parental involvement in homework and school activities has a positive effect on learners. He concluded that parental aspirations or expectations for their children’s education attainment had a strong correlation with their child’s academic achievement. In other words learners benefit from parental involvement in homework since parents have a positive influence on their children’s motivation and evaluation standards (Min Xu 2010:241).

The following paragraph will discuss parental involvement in South Africa.

- **Parental involvement in South Africa**

There is no evidence that formal education existed in South Africa before colonisation. Claasen (1995:455) identified two phases of education, namely an informal phase and a formal phase. The informal education provided by the parent has already been discussed.

Around 1654 there were very few schools in the Cape, according to Christie (1985:30) the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) did not pay much attention to education. Behr & McMillan (1966:89) describe the education system during the Dutch regime as formal elementary education involving instruction in the doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church. Learners were engaged in the learning of prayers, basic reading, writing and arithmetic. Not all learners who lived in the towns went to school and the situation in the countryside was even worse since there were no schools for “trekboer” children (Christie 1985:30). Parents were forced to organise and pay for travelling school teachers who went from farm to farm giving instruction. These teachers were not always “suitable”, parents wanted their children to be able to read. One of the main reasons for learning to read was that religion was important and their children needed to know how to read the Bible.

Christie (1985:32) continues that education for African people only started in 1658 when the first school in the Cape opened for slaves who were brought in from Angola, West Africa, Madagascar and Delagoa Bay. This was the first evidence of formal schooling offered to “African people”. The slaves worked as artisans, domestics and farm labourers for the Dutch settlers. These slaves were unable to understand the language of their masters. According to Behr & McMillan (1971:357) the primary aim of education at the schools for slaves was to teach the Dutch language and to receive religious education, which was regarded as the most necessary qualification for church membership. Slave parents sent their children to these schools where no age restriction for admission existed. It was not uncommon that adult slaves would attend afternoon classes receiving the same type of education as their own children (Behr 1963:404).

Behr & McMillan (1966:322) mention that as time passed, the role of parents and the church had a strong influence on schooling. The government subsidised schools which met with its requirements. Schooling was not free of charge. Inspectors kept some kind of connection between subsidised schools and the government. Most of these schools were in the countryside.

In the Province of KwaZulu-Natal (otherwise known as KZN) parents had local control of education and they had a voice in the education of their children (Behr & McMillan 1971:45). According to Desai & Vahed (2010:188) parents were interested in sending their children to school. The first schools for Indians were established by missions. From as early as 1865 Indian parents sent their children to plantation schools. Desai & Vahed (2010:188) explain that Father Sabon of the Roman Catholic Mission requested financial assistance from the KwaZulu-Natal government stating “many Coolies have expressed their earnest desire to have a school established for them and their children”. Father Sabon took the lead when the KwaZulu-Natal government declined the request for government schools. He established a school for 30 pupils in 1867 with books in Tamil provided by the Ceylon Mission. In 1867 a Reunion Estate hospital was converted into a classroom for Indian children on the estate.

Indian parents in particular played an active role in requesting schools for themselves and their children. In cases where little or no government intervention was forthcoming, parents built schools with their own funds and arranged for teachers to travel from India. Although many Indian parents were themselves semi-literate or illiterate, their children’s homework and school activities were not disregarded (Desai & Vahed 2010:188). Parents monitored their children’s homework tasks.

However, the education of African people in South Africa was a poignant issue. Very little was provided by the Dutch. Under British rule, education was solely the responsibility of missionaries.

Between 1948 and 1994 the South Africa experience of parental involvement in the education of their children was as unique as the policy of apartheid was to the country (Gezani 2009:20). It differed from the rest of the world in terms of historical, political, social and economic factors. Gezani (2009:23) states that South Africa experienced a shift in its education system in 1949 when Dr D.F. Malan took office. According to Mkwanazi (1993) the Eiselen Commission was appointed to look into the education system and made recommendations to the National Party Government. This commission gave rise to the Bantu Education Act No. 47 of 1953. Part of the Act regarding parent involvement Section 6(1) of Act No. 47 states:

“.....subject to the provisions of this Act, the minister may, on such special conditions as he may stipulate and in accordance with such general principles as he may determine in consultation with the Minister of Finance, out of money appropriated or set aside by Parliament for native education subsidise any Bantu school established or maintained by Bantu authority, or any native council, tribe or community or assist in the establishment or maintenance of any such school”.

Parents now had a much more important role to play: They had to establish and build community schools so that their children could learn. Parents had to control and finance the education of their children in formal schools. Mkwanzazi (1993) states that the Act also allowed parents to participate in the management of Government Bantu Schools, at regional, local and domestic councils and on other such boards. This is further Behr (1988:67) who states that “The National Education Act No. 39 of 1967, Section 2(h) supported the Bantu Education by giving parents the right to participate in the education of their children through school boards and management councils”.

According to Van Schalkwyk (1988:150) parental involvement was in the form of school governance, it was during this period in South Africa’s education system that there were two parent bodies: A statutory and a non-statutory body. The two bodies were only successful in some schools and communities. Some schools were closed during the 1980s due to school boycotts. Van Schalkwyk (1988:150) continues that these bodies had both successes and failures around the country and that the non-statutory bodies, which were well-established in the rural areas, succeeded in executing their duties and functions.

During this time the degree of parental involvement in their children’s homework and school activities varied. African parents were now concerned with school governance and reducing inequalities (Lewis & Motala 2010:285). According to Mestry & Grobler (2007:176) this additional responsibility placed a strain on the partnership between the home, school and community.

With a change in governance in the country in 1994 came a change in the education system. A democratic education system that would equip future generations to live their lives as equals. This change happened against the background that countries around the world moved towards the decentralisation of education, with a rhetoric claim that “decentralisation will improve the quality of education” (Fiske 1996:2).

According to Lewis & Motala (2010:286) South Africa's decentralisation of education was further motivated by political and economic considerations. Politically, the post-apartheid government was committed to devolving power to the people and meeting "the aim of redress and equity in the provision of quality education" (DoE 1998: Section 34). Economically, the new South African government found itself with insufficient financial resources to meet the educational needs of the country.

The South African Department of Education encouraged parents to involve themselves in the education of their children. The *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE 1995:21) states the importance of parent and community involvement:

"The principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system, by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision-making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups and role players. 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". (DoE 1995a:21).

South African parents had finally been given the opportunity to become active in the education of their children. The apartheid education that they had received was left in the past. The new education system redressed inequalities and redistributed educational chances. It was supposed to prepare people to play their part in a productive economy.

Another important development during this time was the Hunter Report Committee (1995:51) which recognised that parents had both the right and the responsibility to participate in the education of their children by releasing the so-called *Organisation, governance and funding of schools* report. This report outlined the responsibility and authority entrusted to parents in the formulation and adopting of school policies. Parents could comment and make suggestions with regards to decisions taken by the school through the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Parents were tasked to perform various functions like the maintenance of school buildings, the purchase of textbooks and materials and the purchase of equipment through their participation in governance matters. The White Paper No. 2 entitled: *The Organisation, guidance and funding of schools* was released a year later stating that SGBs must involve all stakeholder groups in active and responsible roles. It encouraged tolerance, rational discussions and active decision making (DoE 1996a:16).

According to the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (DoE 1996b) each public school was to form a governing body by January 1997, which was to comprise of an elected representation of parents or guardians of enrolled learners at the school, teachers, learners and in the case of secondary schools, non-teaching staff and the principal as ex officio member. This Act recognised the role parents and the community could play in the process of teaching and learning. This process encouraged parents to help the school their children attend achieve its vision and mission.

Lemmer (2007:218) states that in many countries, including South Africa, the trend in education reform was to give parents, and in some cases community members, an increased role in school governance. However, due to the lack of involvement by parents on the SGBs a wide range of issues persist. This pattern of reform has a range of expected outcomes such as creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning, developing a mission statement for the school, promoting the best interest of learners, ensuring the safety and security of learners, deciding on school uniform policy, participating in disciplinary action and formulating a policy regarding the determination of school fees (DoE 1996: section 39).

Lemmer (2007:218) adds that a considerable body of evidence suggests that changes in the governance arrangements at schools are only weakly related to teaching and learning. These views are supported by Mncube (2009:102) who states that South African parents are not playing their role as governors. Their reluctance to participate in SGBs may be due to their low educational levels or power struggles with SGBs. This lack of interest has resulted in the crisis many schools find themselves in.

According to Mahlangu (2014:175) democratic participation in decision-making requires teaching people how to participate, making them feel comfortable and empowering them to feel competent and capable. Schools should build strong relationships where there is on-going communication between all stakeholders so has to ensure a healthy learning environment for learners.

Van Wyk (1996:112) indicates that most of the African parents who studied in South Africa were not involved in the monitoring of homework, study programmes or attending school meetings of their children. This was due to various problems of a more social nature such as illiteracy, working long hours and extreme poverty in certain communities. Children in many cases were left to be cared for by grandparents or older siblings.

In an earlier study Mkwazi (1994:27) found that most teachers and principals attributed the lack of parent involvement to the parents' lack of interest in their children's education. Mkwazi states that teachers were unaware of processes that could be used to involve parents in their children's homework or other school activities. Mkwazi (1994:27) also states that teacher training did not include preparing teachers in assisting parents with their children's progress because of a broader social, economic and political context prevailing in the country.

Clearly parents are inactive when it comes to participation in their children's homework. Parents, non-involvement could have to do with the fact that homework may be defined as "work related to the formal school curriculum, set by teachers to be completed by learners out of class (normally in the home) within a specified time" (Macbeth 2003:2). This indicates that homework should be completed while the learner is at home, in the care of their parents. In South Africa, like many other countries, considerable challenges to parental involvement in education are brought about by factors such as poverty, unemployment, social inequality and general socio-economic decline (Badenhorst & Koalepe 2014:243).

Parental involvement in the SGBs as outlined by Mestry & Grobler (2007:178) has a core function of promoting the educational interests of the school and consequently of the learners. This process of involvement also fosters a good relationship between the home, school and community. Parents should be empowered and equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to facilitate learning at home and make informed decisions about the future of their children. According to Badenhorst and Koalepe (2014:244) learner's academic performance is an important issue since there is an ever increasing need for highly skilled people in all sectors of the labour market in all economies of the world.

According to Mestry & Grobler (2007:180) and Lemmer (2007:220) the learner is the connection between the home and the school. Lemmer (2007:220) states that activities in the form of homework may be designed to engage, guide and motivate learners to produce their own success. If learners feel cared for and encouraged to work hard by both parents and teachers, then they are more likely to do their best academically and to remain in school.

This section attempted to provide a systematical review of the development of parental involvement in education through the ages. The focus was placed on the development of education in early societies followed by the development of education in modern societies

and the development of education in South Africa. The intention was to provide substance to this section by relating the core issues to the main research questions.

The new South African government has given parents more opportunities to get involved in the education of their children. Homework is viewed as an educational activity that parents can engage with.

The study will now focus on the role and function of homework in education.

2.3 The Role and Function of Homework in education

The following paragraph should assist in understanding the importance of homework in education. The focus is on the reasons for setting homework, features of homework in education and the requirements for the organisation and management of homework.

2.3.1 Reasons for setting homework

Macbeth (2003:4) identifies a range of reasons for setting homework. Teachers normally set homework to consolidate and practice work already done in class. Learners might require more examples of a mathematical problem so as to understand the concept being taught. This can be done through homework. Teachers can also use homework as preparation for lessons in the class. Homework can similarly be given when introducing tasks that extend beyond work already done in class and needs to be built upon. Homework can assist academically slower learners to catch up with quicker ones. It can also test learners' understanding of work covered or their competence in skills.

Trautwein et al. (2009:176) suggest that an important reason for giving homework is to enable learners who do not otherwise contribute much to a lesson to participate. It also allows low-ability learners to benefit from spending more time on homework assignments, because low achievers need more time to reach the same level as the more gifted learners.

According to Cooper (2007:1) the reason for setting homework in the early grades should be to encourage positive attitudes and character traits, allow appropriate parent involvement and reinforce simple skills introduced in class. For secondary grades, homework should work toward improving standardized test scores and grades.

As indicated, homework is an integral part of education. Homework informs parents about what is taught at school, prompts communication about school matters and communicates standards and expectations. These effects are believed to be positively associated with school achievement.

2.3.2 Features of homework in education

Macbeth (2003:5) suggests that homework has many effective features. It must be part of a carefully devised learning programme and should be related to the curriculum, though it may go beyond it. In this way it must confront the present limits of the learner's knowledge. Homework should also have a purpose and must not be set randomly. Teachers must reflect upon the place and function of homework in order not to put learners under heavy stress. Homework should further be used to develop independent study techniques and make use of the home, the neighbourhood and the environment to obtain information relevant to learning. According to Macbeth (2003:4) homework makes use of materials and sources of information (including parents) that are not accessible in the classroom. It strengthens the educational partnership between parents and teachers and provides a means by which teachers can encourage parents to become more actively involved in their children's formal education. Homework also provides a means by which parents can see the sort of work their children are doing at school and by which they can assess the progress.

Macbeth (2003:4) explains that homework promotes learner's responsibility and independence. In this way the learner's interest in the subject can be improved. When interesting homework or assignments are given as homework, this enhances the learner's motivation. Homework informs parents about the curriculum and their children's activities at school. Homework also encourages parent-child communication on school matters.

Trautwein et al (2009:177) indicates that homework is seen as offering additional learning opportunities in which learning time is extended to the home environment. It is individualised and learners can theoretically continue working until their assignments are completed and they have acquired a deeper understanding of the content covered. In order for homework to make a difference in the learner's learning, it should include activities such as feedback, individualised enrichment assignments, the use of human and physical resources not available at school and parental involvement.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that teachers differ considerably in their capacity to appropriate homework assignments. Unfortunately empirical studies to support this claim are lacking (Trautwein et al. 2009:176). In addition, Lemmer & Van Wyk (1998:2) state that the most useful homework has little to do with textbooks and exercises, but it can be guaranteed to help learners become better learners and happier human beings. This idea is supported by Epstein et al. (1995:3) who states that a homework activity must be challenging and engaging, including higher level thinking skills and interaction with family members.

Homework must be part of a structured programme. Learners and parents can reflect on the curriculum while working in the comfort of the home environment. However, this is not what happens in reality in most cases. With a lack of empirical studies to support claims that teachers differ considerably in their capacity to appropriate homework assignments, this area needs further investigation.

2.3.3 Organisation and management of homework

According to Trautwein et al. (2009:178) an important aspect of homework assignment practice is the control of homework completion. The school should have a system to check that homework is set regularly. Schools that set homework frequently and where there is a check on whether staff set it, tend to achieve better academic results than schools that make little use of homework. According to Macbeth (2003:5), teachers setting homework must be mindful of the capabilities of learners. Teachers need to differentiate and take into consideration learner's individual differences and the domestic circumstances of different families when setting homework. Macbeth (2003:5) adds that homework should be thoroughly explained to learners in advance. Learners should know how to work, where to look for information and material, how to ensure and use sources of information, how to take notes and how to present the findings. Failure to do so can cause confusion and anxiety to both learners and parents.

According to Eita (2007:19), homework should be checked by teachers. Checking should take place soon after completion there-of, regardless of whether it was written, rote-learning or investigative work. Comments and other feedback regarding homework should be given to learners.

It is important to give both praise for good work and help where there are difficulties. Where misunderstandings emerge, teachers should adapt lessons to rectify them.

Macbeth (2003:5) states that parents should be informed about the nature of homework. This includes general information about the school homework policy, what facilities should be available in the home and how parents can assist with homework. It may also include detailed information about particular homework tasks. It is appropriate that this should be done in advance of the homework being given. Parents must also be informed about the school's assessment of the homework. Parents can assist by providing the appropriate conditions for learners to engage with their homework. According to Epstein (1995:3) some general preconditions which might form the basis for discussion with parents include access to a suitable working surface, basic equipment such as books and reference books. Time must be set aside for homework which is recognised and respected by all members of the family. Parents must show interest and support for their children's homework. Parents must display firmness regarding the completion of homework. Homework must create a sense of educational partnership with parents.

In addition Epstein, (1995:3) states that completing homework is not just about using the textbook and doing an activity or exercise, it also must be challenging and engaging, while at the same time developing the individual's higher level thinking skills and encouraging interactions with family members. Therefore it is essential that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to set homework activities that involve parents.

The next paragraph focuses on two different models of parent involvement in homework based on findings from studies on homework and parent involvement. Epstein et al. (1995:3) developed a homework approach called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) and Student-Parent Laboratories Achieving Science at Home (SPLASH) developed by Rillero, Gonzalez-Jensen & May (2000:11).

2.4 Models of Parental Involvement in Homework

2.4.1 Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)

Based on the findings from studies on homework and parental involvement, Epstein (1995:7) developed a homework approach called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) to promote learner's learning, parent-child interactions and parent-teacher communication. This interactive homework can be applied to any subject and any grade.

According to Van Voorhuis (2003:325-326) TIPS interactive homework assignments differ from traditional homework since they are assigned once a week or twice a month and learners are given several days to complete the activity to permit family involvement. Certain sections of the activity include instructions that prompt learners to involve family members with specific conversations or other interactions and parents provide feedback concerning how effective the activity was for them and their children.

TIPS activities are linked to the curriculum (Epstein 2002) they are graded and designed to extend the learner's learning. Thus with TIPS, homework becomes a three-way partnership at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Families can recognise and appreciate the efforts of teachers to keep them informed and involved. TIPS activities keep school on the agenda at home so that children know that their families believe schoolwork is important and worth talking about. This view is supported by Van Voorhuis (2003:326) who states that learners need as much guidance as parents about how to keep their families aware of and involved in the work they do at school. Over time, as TIPS activities are used each year, learners get the idea that their teachers want their families to know about what they are learning in class

According to Van Voorhuis (2003:326) there are over 500 activities and examples of TIPS assignments. Learners can, for example, conduct a simple science experiment at home by using liquids of different thickness and then discuss the results with a family member. As part of a language activity a learner could, for example, interview a family member about hairstyles that were popular when he or she was the learner's age and then the learner writes a paragraph about those hairstyles and reads it aloud to a family member. As part of a mathematics exercise a learner could ask family members for their shoe sizes or height and compute the averages. These are a few examples of TIPS activities that encourage the building of an educational relationship between the child and his or her family.

According to Epstein (1995:5) TIPS also helps solve important problems with homework. TIPS helps all family members to get involved, not just the few who know about mathematics, science or other subjects. The homework, however, remains the learner's responsibility. Parents are not asked to "teach" subjects or skills that they are not able or prepared to teach. TIPS encourage learners to share and enjoy their schoolwork, ideas and progress with their families. Families are allowed to comment on and request for other information from teachers in home-to-school communication.

Van Voorhuis (2003:326) states that the TIPS interactive homework approach has helped schools address many of the shortcomings in their current homework practices. With research-based TIPS approach, teachers promote better learner comprehension by identifying topics in the curriculum that benefit from interaction. Teachers gave instructions to the learners concerning the involvement of family members in certain sections of the assignments and also to protect family members from embarrassment for not knowing specific concepts. Teachers designed interactive questions that parents could answer without formal education or detailed knowledge of the subject. Each assignment included a section that asked parents to communicate with the teacher about their reactions and about the effectiveness of the assignment.

According to Epstein (1995:5) a TIPS programme can be developed in seven steps, by:

- Selecting the subject(s) for TIPS interactive homework

Here the teacher should discuss the subjects and grade level for which the TIPS process will be used. A team of teachers should be identified for each TIPS subject and grade level.

- Select one skill for each week for the TIPS assignments.

Teams of TIPS teachers should examine the sequence of skills that are taught in each subject throughout the school year. Teachers should identify one skill or learning objective each week that will promote an enjoyable and useful learner-parent interaction. These will be the topics for the TIPS interactive homework assignments.

- Adapting and developing TIPS activities to match the curriculum.

Teachers should work together during the holidays to examine existing TIPS manuals and prototype activities. Teachers must decide which of the available TIPS assignments will be useful for the skills they teach, or they must design new interactive homework to match the learning objectives in the curriculum.

- Orientation of students and families to the TIPS interactive homework process.

Teachers must explain the TIPS process and purpose to learners and to their parents/guardians. This may be done in letters to the home, discussions with learners in class, presentations at parent meetings or in any other way. Special attention is needed to inform and involve parents with limited reading proficiency or who speak languages other than English. Learners need to know that on TIPS assignments they are expected to show, share and talk about their work with a family member.

- Assign TIPS on a regular, family-friendly schedule to learners.

Teachers may give learners a few days or a weekend to complete each assignment to allow time for learners to work with a family member.

- Evaluating the learner's work and responding to family questions regularly.

Teachers must grade and comment on TIPS activities just as they would any other homework assignment. Teachers also respond to questions families write in the home-to-school communication section to encourage open channels of communication about learner's needs and progress.

- Revise and improve activities as needed.

Teachers must note any problems with particular sections of assignments throughout the year and revise activities or develop new activities as is necessary.

According to Van Voorhuis & Epstein (2002:300) the goals of TIPS interactive homework are to build the learner's confidence by requiring them to show their work, share ideas, gather reactions, interview parents, or conduct other interactions with a family member. It also links schoolwork with real-life situations and helps parents understand more about what their children are learning at school. TIPS encourages parents and children to talk regularly about

schoolwork and academic progress. It enables parents and teachers to frequently communicate about the learner's work, progress, or problems.

Epstein et al. (2002:301) states that the reason the TIPS process works is that it can be used with any text or curriculum. It helps teachers organise homework into manageable, focused segments and enhances connections between school and home. TIPS involves the learners in an interactive way and guides them to share and demonstrate their skills to their parents. It offers opportunities to link the real world experiences of these learners and their families. It provides families with the information on how to help at home and emphasises mastery of basic and advanced skills.

This implies that with TIPS, teachers can help families to stay informed about their children's learning activities regularly and with relative ease. It also helps learners complete homework which will promote greater success in school.

2.4.2 Student-Parent Laboratories Achieving Science at Home Programme (SPLASH)

According to Rillero et al. (2000:11) the goals of the SPLASH programme are to increase intermediate-grade learners' experiences as well as parental involvement in education. Educators involved in this programme send home hands-on science activities to involve parents in what their children are learning. For the programme to be effective, the at-home activities must relate to the science curriculum, but can also be applied to other learning areas.

Shymnasky et al. (2000:48) state that the bag that contains the resources or "the activity-bag" can serve as a connection between the home and the classroom. These bags are designed to promote the involvement of parents, relatives and caregivers in the learners' hands-on science education. It uses take-home literature based on enquiry, problem solving and designed activities that connect the school and the home. Shymnasky et al. (2000:49) refer to parent meetings as the starting point for these activities. The science teacher would explain the programme and the uses of the activity bags. Parents and their children then read the story together and explore various science challenges in the story as they occur, using the activity guide and equipment provided in the activity bag. The learner's responses and experience are recorded. Interview data collected by parents are then returned to the teacher and are used to confirm and assist the teacher's instructional planning.

The use of the activity bags demonstrates that family involvement can be achieved by designing meaningful, time-efficient and worthwhile activities to do at home. Children do not see the activities with their parents as “work” but they enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For the parents this programme provides learning and enjoyable bonding time with their children. Teachers use this parental involvement as a chance to establish a positive working relationship and a two-way line of communication with the parents.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on parental involvement in the informal and formal education of the learner. It looked at the development of education in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and South Africa. The focus on education was from the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652 to the inception of democracy in 1994.

Different theories by researchers on parental involvement offered a broader view on the extent of parental involvement. Epstein’s regard of the separate responsibilities of families and schools; the shared responsibilities of families and schools and the sequential responsibilities of families and schools in understanding the importance of parental involvement in the life of the learner had lead to the focus on *The theory of overlapping spheres of influence*, thereby showing the link between the parent, community, learner and the school. This also provided important information regarding the role of the school SGBs, parents, community and teachers as important stakeholders in education. Since the link between the home and school was established, the importance of the role and function of homework in education was emphasised. Models of parental involvement such as TIPS and SPLASH was developed for the purpose of setting structured homework that would engage parental participation and can be viewed as effective tools for teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The rationale for the choices made in choosing the schools in the study, data collection methods, data analysis, such as segmenting, coding, compiling a master list and enumeration will be discussed. In addition research ethics, and issues of reliability that had to be considered and how their application will be described.

3.2 Research Methodology

The research methodology consists of a literature study and an empirical investigation.

3.2.1 Literature study

Reviewing the literature enabled the researcher to focus on the problem, to select key terms, establish a framework, develop significance and to identify methodological limitations (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:99).

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to provide a background to the empirical investigation. A primary source is where original data is used (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:76), sources regarded as original written material are those of the author's own observations and experiences (De Vos et al. 2005:315). In this study, the researcher had direct interaction with the participants and viewed reports written by teachers.

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:76) secondary sources summarize, review, analyse or discuss primary source information as well as what is contained in other secondary sources. Secondary sources referred to in this study are review papers, textbooks and journal articles.

3.2.2 Empirical investigation

The empirical investigation consists of the following sections: research design, research paradigm, site selection, selection of participants, research process and data analysis.

3.2.2.1 Research design

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:490) a research design is the “...plan that describes the condition and procedures for collecting and analyzing data”. This plan helps to systematically address the central research problems and specific research questions for situating researchers in the context of the empirical world and to connect them to specific sites, individuals/groups and methods of data analysis. This research design is the blueprint that explains the procedures that the researcher follows in the collection and the analysis of data (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:91).

This study used a qualitative design to investigate the involvement of parents in their children’s homework in public secondary schools. The research question was concerned with understanding the social phenomenon of parental involvement from the perspectives of the participants (teachers, learners and parents). Hence, the researcher did not allow “manipulation or control of behaviour, or any other externally imposed constraints and controls which is typical of the quantitative approach” (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:321). A quantitative approach would have used a questionnaire to gather the perceptions, beliefs and practices of a sample of teachers or used two groups of participants placing restrictions on the study. By contrast, qualitative researchers believe that behaviour is best understood as it occurs (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:322). This view is supported by Creswell (2012:37) who states that qualitative research begins with assumptions and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach for the inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflectivity of the researcher and a complex description and interpretation of the problem.

The researcher had direct contact with teachers and was able to watch the extent of interaction between the participants (teachers and learners) and ask appropriate questions. If learners for example did not complete homework tasks, the researcher was on hand to ask the teacher what action was taken to involve parents in their children’s homework.

3.2.2.2 Research paradigm

Various authors (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:23; Maree 2008: 71; Creswell 2012: 20) explain qualitative research approaches or paradigms as “interactive qualitative designs”, “specific procedures involved in the research process”, “mapping designs” and “types of research design”. An interpretive case study approach was selected for this investigation. Creswell (2012:465) defines a case study as an in-depth exploration of a bounded system. According to Maree (2008:76), “case study research is aimed at gaining greater insight and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation”. The case study approach followed in this study is of an interpretive nature. As such, it is an attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them and explain the events of their worlds (Maree 2008:59), which is what this study attempted to do.

3.2.2.3 Site selection

Decisions on site selection are made for the purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research question (Maree 2008:78). A site in this context refers to elements of a population considered for inclusion in a study (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:326).

In this study, two secondary schools were purposively selected from the list of secondary schools in the Umlazi District, within the eThekweni Municipality. The schools have been identified as school A and School B. The schools are public schools and are both day schools, which implies that all learners are living with their parents or guardians. Both schools are under the control of the KwaZulu-Natal DoE. The two schools offer learning and teaching opportunities to learners from different backgrounds and are situated close to residential areas in Durban. Learners attending the schools come from the surrounding areas. There are however a large number of learners who commute from the townships just outside Durban on a daily basis.

School A and B in this study use English as the medium of instruction. A large portion of learners attending these schools are second language English speakers.

In School A: English, Afrikaans and isiZulu are offered. In school B: English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, French and Portuguese are offered. The two schools have suitably qualified teachers

as well as governing body appointed teachers. These are teachers who are employed by the SGB to supplement the teaching staff. In some cases these teachers are not qualified and lack teaching experience. Class sizes are large teaching and learning resources are insufficient and school furniture and other equipment are inadequate.

3.2.2.4 Selection of participants

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:138), selection of participants or sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for a study. Qualitative research is based on non-probability and purposive sampling because it seeks to obtain insights into particular practices that exist within a particular location, context and time. According to Maree (2008:179) purposive sampling means that the participants are selected because of some defining characteristics of the holders of the data needed for the study (Maree 2008:179). Purposive sampling was used for this study since the selection of participants, or sample, was composed of elements that contain the most characteristics, representatives or typical attributes of the South African population.

A relatively small sample, of teachers (ten level one and five school managers), was used as well as ten parents. The participants (teachers and school management) in the study were selected based on characteristics such as age and experience (refer to table 11 and 111). The parents chosen in the study to form the focus group had children attending either School A or B. Although both schools are conveniently located, some parents live outside the area under review. Ten participants (teachers and school management) were asked questions from the interview schedule (Appendix 2 and 3). Answers to the questions were recorded by hand and cassette.

3.2.2.5 Researcher's role

The researcher is familiar with the schools selected and is a level one educator at one of the schools. Consequently, familiarity with the participants and personal experience permitted a relationship of trust. Since she was aware of subject bias the necessary precautions were taken to remain as neutral as possible and follow the guidelines for research ethics as set out in paragraph 3.2.2.8

3.2.2.6 Research process

- The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to determine any possible shortcomings in the data collection method. A school with characteristics similar to the school of target group was identified. Questions from the interview guide for teachers and parents was pre-tested. The questions were administered in the same way as they were to be used in the actual interviews. It was found that the participants had difficulties in understanding certain questions. For example, participants (parents) were asked: How does your child/ your children spend their afternoon? The participants wanted clarity with regards to the time of the day. The question was then rearticulated and now read: How does your child/ your children spend their afternoon after arriving home from school? Issues regarding the items on the interview schedule needed clarification, such as the reason for asking a personal question such as: “What is the approximate average household income?” Some participants preferred not to answer this question while others only answered after it was explained that income could possibly be related to the availability of resources for the learners. There was also a need to make items clearer by using understandable terms and giving clear instructions, for example the question: “Is there parental involvement in your child/children’s homework? If yes, please explain.” Here participants were asked to explain the type or extent of involvement in homework. Another question that had to be altered was: “What would you describe as a challenge, when it comes to your involvement in homework?” Examples had to be given such as assisting and monitoring. In this way some of the items on the interview schedule were amended or eliminated so that the participants could complete the interview within one hour. This also prevented a wastage of time and gathering irrelevant data.

- **The interview guide**

According to Creswell (2012:218) interviews are the most commonly used qualitative data collection method. Creswell (2012:221) continues that an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Interviews can be seen as interchanges between participants in order to provide findings to a research question.

Maree (2008:87) indicates that interviews in qualitative research are categorized as structured, unstructured and semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study.

The final interview guide was compiled after the pilot study. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:195) the reasons for such a tool when collecting data as follows, “it is the most widely used technique for obtaining information from subjects. It is relatively economical, has the same questions for all subjects and can ensure anonymity. It can use statements or questions, but in all cases the subject is responding to something written for specific purposes.”

The interview guides designed for this study appear as Appendix 1 for parents, Appendix 2 for teachers and Appendix 3 for school managers. As explained in 3.2.2.2 an attempt was made to understand the participants’ reality by interacting with them about the main research question. The topics/questions on the appendices were not specific questions that were asked during the interviews. Instead they were applied as guidelines for the interviews.

As an extension of the main research question, the questions in the appendices were applied in a flexible way. The aim of the questionnaire remained to obtain information regarding the role of homework in education and teachers’ reasons for setting homework. Most importantly the aim was to gather data regarding their perceptions on the involvement of parents in children’s homework and schooling. Most of the questions were open-ended in order to elicit the educator’s views, beliefs and attitudes as well as their views on parental involvement practices.

- **Focus group interview with parents**

Focus group interviews are used to obtain a better understanding of a problem or an assessment of a problem (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:363). According to De Vos et al. (2005:312) there are many advantages to a focus group interview. It is less time consuming than conducting numerous individual interviews. The group dynamic is a synergistic factor in bringing out information. Participants may express their honest feelings more confidentially within a support group of peers than during individual interviews.

All the participants (parents) met at the local sports field for the interview where the children in the area received free soccer coaching from a local sports club. This setting was ideal since group members were stimulated by one another's perceptions and ideas. Group members were unknown to each other but all had children attending the local schools. All the questions were posed to the group (Appendix 1) and the body language of the participants were carefully observed during these sessions.

The researcher was mindful of basic principles in conducting the interview process such as: showing respect and courtesy for the participants, ensuring confidentiality and demonstrating a high level of understanding while respecting each of the participant's individuality.

The participants agreed that a tape recorder could be used during the interview. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:363) a recording ensures that accurate data is collected and stored for later transcription. The focus group interview lasted for about 90 minutes.

- **Personal interviews with teachers and school managers**

Interviews were held with the participants from the two schools on a personal basis lasting approximately one hour. This method provided insight into the body language of the participants as they responded to the questions. All participants agreed to the use of a tape recorder.

3.2.2.7 Data analysis

All the recordings were transcribed and reviewed. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:369) data preparation in qualitative research involves an interactive and inductive process. Which allows for data to be gathered first and then synthesised inductively generating generalisations.

In this study the researcher identified central themes as suggested by Delamont (2002: 171). The process began by collecting; organizing; transcribing the data into segments; coding; describing; categorizing the data and developing patterns and compiling a master list and enumerations.

- **Segmenting**

The data was divided into meaningful analytical units. Segments, ranging in size from a word, a sentence and in some cases a few lines important to the research were identified and bracketed to indicate where they started and ended.

For example where participants referred to “homework policy” it was placed in brackets and given a code.

- **Coding**

McMillan & Schumacher (2010:371) state that coding can be described as a name or phrase which is used to give meaning to a segment. Codes can be activities, quotations, relationships, context, participant perspectives, events, processes and other actions and ideas.

Data was divided according to a classification system. Segments were analyzed so that each segment obtained at least one code. The following codes were used: policy, involvement, training, management and challenges. Codes were then grouped to form categories such as: homework policy, involvement in homework and challenges faced by parents.

- **Compiling a master list**

All the categories were put on to a master list which reflected the research question and sub-questions. The following list was compiled: involvement of parents, existence of homework policy, function of homework, perceptions of parents and importance of homework management.

- **Enumeration**

The frequency of certain observations was noted to help identify important ideas and prominent themes. With the assistance of an audiotape, interviews were transcribed and this became the primary data source for analysis, since the aim of the focus group interview and the personal interviews was to understand the experiences from the participant’s point of view. According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:366) “all data must be analysed by

repeated assessments of the interview transcript, identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data”.

Extracts from the data was then selected and paraphrased. The researcher used inductive data analysis to discover relationships or patterns that emerged during processing of the raw data.

3.2.2.8 Research ethics

The consent of the participants was obtained prior to the commencement of the study and a full disclosure of the purpose of the research was made available. The participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants remained anonymous and their confidentiality was protected.

A letter (Appendix 4A) was also drafted, requesting permission from the Circuit Inspector to conduct an interview with teachers, school managers and parents. Before the schools were visited, permission was granted by the principal of the schools in the study, on condition that official programmes and classes were not disrupted. In this way co-operation, trust, openness and acceptance from all the participants was obtained. All participants were satisfied with the length of the interviews as well as the selected time and place of convenience thereof. When the participants were given the consent form (Appendix 4) they were informed that the interview would be recorded and assured privacy.

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:339) the setting and participants should not be identifiable in print. Thus the locations and features of the setting was disguised to appear similar to several possible places. Officials and participants reviewed a report before it was finally released.

3.2.2.9 Trustworthiness, reliability and validity

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is maintained by way of validity (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:330; Creswell 2012:259). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:330) state that validity refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of phenomena and the realities of the world whereas Creswell (2012:259) explains that “validating findings means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through different strategies”.

De Vos et al. (2005:332) states that credibility, it is established when the context, participants and settings are interpreted and presented truthfully. Johnson and Christensen (2000:208) state that reliability in qualitative research may be viewed as the fit between what is recorded as data and what has actually occurred in the setting under study.

In this study the practical steps as set out by Maree (2008:113) were followed, i.e. “combining individual interviews with information from focus groups and an analysis of written material on the topic”; to “submit your transcripts or field notes to the participants to correct errors of fact”; to “document the category labels you create”; to “ask an independent coder to code some of your data”; “allowing participants and other people who may have a specific interest in the research to comment on or assess the research findings, interpretations and conclusions”; “providing copies of a draft report to your participants and ask for written or oral comments on the report”; to “remedy the problem of bias”; to “provide understanding from the participants’ perspective”; “choosing your quotes carefully”; “maintaining confidentiality and anonymity” and “stating the limitations of your study upfront”.

Validity of information was primarily determined by the participants’ willingness to share their experiences with the researcher in a confidential atmosphere. All participants voluntarily shared information in response to the interviewer’s questions.

To ensure what was recorded is reflected in this study, all information and conclusions were verified by the participants after the initial interviews and then again after the analysis of the data. All participants were informed that they would be shown the findings upon completion in order for them to comment.

3.3 Conclusion

The research methodology and design has been described. The characteristics of qualitative research and the rationale for choosing the qualitative approach were set out. An explanation of the pilot study was given. The selection of the participants for this study, the sample size, researchers’ role in maintaining confidentiality and anonymity were also set out. The focus was on the research process and how the data was analysed using segmenting, coding, compiling a master list and enumeration. The reliability and validity of the data and research ethics were also explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The findings of the empirical investigation into the involvement of parents in children's homework will be presented and discussed. This includes data analyses from the focus group interview with parents and the responses to the personal interviews conducted with the teachers. The two schools exhibit a lack of parental involvement.

As stated previously, the researcher wrote down the actual sentences and words used by the participants during the interviews. Notes were made by an assistant during the focus group interviews. The researcher recorded the interview sessions with each participant. The notes recorded during the interview sessions were used in presenting and analysing the data.

4.2 Findings from the Empirical investigation

TABLE I: Characteristics of participating schools

CHARACTERISTIC	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B
Number of learners	1168	1200
Number of teachers/staff	46	45
Number of parents' meetings per year	2	2
Percentage of parent attendance at meetings	10%	10%
Means of communication	Telephone, letters	Telephone, letters, short message service
Homework policy	No	No
Residential areas learners come from	Asherville, Mayville, Clare Estate, Umlazi, Lamontville, Chesterville, North Beach, KwaMashu	Umlazi, Lamontville, KwaMashu, Clare Estate

TABLE II: Teaching experience in years (teachers)

PARTICIPANT	SCHOOL	NUMBER OF YEARS
Participant A	A	2
Participant B	A	9
Participant C	A	20
Participant D	A	18
Participant E	A	9
Participant F	B	35
Participant G	B	30
Participant H	B	10
Participant I	B	3
Participant J	B	6

TABLE III: Teaching experience in years (SMT)

PARTICIPANT	SCHOOL	NUMBER OF YEARS
Participant V	A	30
Participant W	A	32
Participant X	A	30
Participant Y	B	39
Participant Z	B	34

The data collected during the personal interviews with the teachers and managers and the focus group interview with the parents was analysed as follows.

4.2.1 Personal interviews

The majority of respondents indicated that parental involvement in homework was very important for a learner's success and they showed great interest in the topic when interviewed.

Six major themes emerged from the analysis of the educators' responses:

4.2.1.1 Written homework policy

Teachers felt that officially involving parents in homework was not a common practice. The selected schools did not have a homework policy. School managers do however check if teachers set homework regularly. The managers also confirmed that they were unsure if the homework was designed to involve parents.

These views do not correlate with the research of Lemmer and Van Wyk (2002:9) which found that 58% of South African primary schools have a written homework policy. Similarly, Van Wyk (2001:121) found that 74% of primary school teachers stated that they have a policy of involving parents in learning activities at home, in contrast with 24% of teachers in secondary schools.

The teachers at the two schools support what Van Wyk (2001:121) (in par.2.3.1) reports, that is, "Good homework habits of learners and the support of parents in activities prove to be beneficial to learners". However, as indicated in paragraph 2.3.3 "schools rely mainly on the common wisdom concerning the role of parental involvement and this is seldom formalised in policy documents, which are widely distributed" (Eita 2007: 54). According to Eita (2007:55) (in par.2.3.3) "to implement effective parent involvement, schools and families should jointly produce written policies and these should be regularly revised and distributed to all families".

The SMT Handbook, authored by the DoE, emphasises that managers must be conversant with all relevant policies, which includes the homework policy. Such a document is an invaluable tool in assisting teachers to plan, organise and execute their main tasks.

It is safe to assume that in the case of these two schools “a written homework policy would legitimise the importance of parental involvement and will provide a framework for homework activities. It would be these policies that would help teachers and parents on how they could take part in homework” (Eita 2007:54). The selected schools are not making use of a tool that could support them in involving parents in homework.

4.2.1.2 The role of homework in education

Many of the participants understood that homework is important for a learner’s success at school. One teacher summarised it well by saying “all learners, regardless of their ability, race or socio-economic background can benefit from well-designed homework, if only we as teachers had the necessary training and skills”. Another teacher emphasised that “we as teachers can assist the child by also emphasising the role of homework in education and show children under our care how the skills learnt by doing homework can be adapted to life in general”.

Teachers also gave various reasons for assigning homework. One said that homework was given to “reinforce what was done in the class and also to get learners to prepare for the next lesson”, and according to another “weak learners and learners that do not participate in the class are given the opportunity to grasp concepts done in class”. A third teacher said that “it’s to develop the child and teach life skills such as independence and time management”.

As stated in paragraph 2.3.1 “homework plays an important role in education and is an important component in academic achievement”, Balli (1998:142). This view is supported by Macbeth (2003:24) who suggests that aside from academic achievement, homework promotes self-discipline, it makes use of materials and sources of information (including parents) which are not accessible in the classroom and provides a means by which parents can see the sort of work the child is doing at school according to which they can assess progress.

Eita (2007:17) (in par. 2.3.1) points to the fact that homework expands the time spent on a learning activity. In order for homework to make a difference in a learner’s learning, it should include activities such as feedback, individualised enrichment assignments and the use of human and physical resources not available at school such as parent involvement.

In summary, homework is apparently given in the two schools in support for classroom teaching and as an opportunity for learners to develop their own skills.

4.2.1.3 Teacher practices to involve parents in their children's homework

The teachers indicated that involving parents in homework has many challenges, such as lack of time and not knowing parents because they only see them once or twice a year for a short period at the parents' evening.

The study found that both schools had poor attendance at parents' meetings although they "make every effort to call parents to meetings, especially when learners do not do their homework". Further reasons for poor attendance are the fact that "some learners live in boarding houses, since their parents live in another province and in some cases we have lots of child-headed homes". Another comment was that "some parents are unable to read and comprehend English, so it would be difficult for them to assist their children". It was also said that "the only time I involve parents or guardians in homework, is when the learner has to conduct an interview in a social science lesson that forms part of oral history". It was also mentioned that "teachers were not trained to involve parents in school activities and were poorly equipped to design homework that needed parental involvement. There is a severe lack of skills even in communicating with parents".

Evidently the majority of teachers never attempted to give homework which required parental involvement, although they realised that parents should ideally be involved in homework.

As indicated in paragraph 2.3.3, "schools should provide information and ideas to families about how to help at home and with other curriculum related activities, decisions and planning, by providing useful information and skills on how to help at home, teachers can encourage parents to talk with and work with their children" (Epstein 1995:15). In support of this view, Lemmer and VanWyk (1998:1) (par 2.3.3) state that "helping children at home is not only limited to supervising homework, but also includes encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring and discussing".

Although teacher practices to involve parents are vital to the development of the child and beneficial to the parent, research by Parker & Wang in 2012 has stated otherwise. The research revealed that 56% of working mothers and 50% of working fathers say that they find

it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. As for unmarried mothers, 49% indicated that due to their difficult financial circumstances, working full time was the ideal situation for them.

Similar research conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) in 2013 revealed that only a third of the country's children (33%) lived with their parents and the rest lived with single parents, on their own, with relatives or in foster care. Just over 39% of children live with mothers only and about 4% live with fathers only. Child-headed households where the oldest sibling is not yet 18 years old, represents 0.5% children in South Africa.

As indicated, teacher practices to involve parents in their children's homework was lacking in this study. Although the circumstances in the schools make it difficult to comply with accepted norms, teachers have to strive to involve parents or guardians by way of effective strategies in homework.

4.2.1.4 Teacher training regarding parental involvement

All the teachers in the study indicated that their initial training did not prepare them for parental involvement homework. One teacher said that she "cannot remember any coursework being done at university that trained (me) to set homework to involve parents". School A and School B did not use professional development programmes to empower teachers regarding parental involvement. Teachers suggested that if the DoE offered training courses on parental involvement, they would attend them.

According to one teacher "universities should develop coursework for training prospective teachers on how to design homework to involve parents, other stakeholders could also get become involved in this venture to develop teachers".

In a similar study conducted in Namibia, the majority of the participants mentioned that they had "not been adequately equipped to involve parents in homework" (Eita 2007:58). The teachers at these schools declared that they needed training or assistance on how to involve parents in homework. Similar sentiments were expressed by the teachers in this study.

Hamby (1992:61) (par 2.3.3) indicates that “a lack of training for teachers is serious as parents are unlikely to become involved without intervention from school”. This view is supported by Van Wyk (2001:124) (par 2.3.3) who states that “when research results indicated that teachers needed training to conduct parent-teacher conferences, this implies that higher education institutions involved in pre-service training of teachers need to re-examine the skills, knowledge and attitudes that teachers will need to work effectively in schools in the future”. Teachers can only promote parental involvement in homework if they have been properly trained to employ the correct methods.

Second language English teacher in this study said that she “wrote a letter to all parents of Grade 10-12 learners to inform them about the importance of checking and assisting with their children’s homework”. Evidently regardless of the lack of support from SMT and formal training with regards to parental involvement in homework, teachers assigned homework and used various channels of communication to inform parents about children’s homework.

According to another teacher, “I asked a parent to help the child by monitoring the completion of homework. This was to be done with the assistance of a homework diary the subject teacher had to write a comment to the parent at the end of every lesson for that day”. School A used this method with some of their “problematic” learners, noticed a positive change, where parents played a more proactive role in their children’s homework and learners completed their homework regularly.

Van Wyk (2001:129) (par.2.4.3) declared that “teachers can promote parent involvement in homework by acting as facilitators rather than experts, thus schools should provide training for teachers and teacher education programmes should make parent involvement a core module”. Supporting this view Eita (2007:59) states “the importance of schools having homework policies cannot be over emphasised”.

In the absence of homework policies at both schools in this study, parents and teachers are unable to understand how parents can be involved in their children’s homework. This study also revealed the large number of learners who continuously fail to do homework. All participating teachers indicated that they would welcome any training offered to help or assist them in planning homework to involve parents.

4.2.1.5 Management of parental involvement in homework by SMT

SMT in this study indicated that the selected schools did not have a homework policy and that there were no programmes in place to involve parents in aspects of the children's education, especially with their homework. SMT knew that no training programmes were available to teachers on how to involve parents in homework. One member of the SMT of School B stated that they would review current programmes so as to overcome existing problems.

A member of the SMT of School A further indicated that "when monitoring takes place, managers check if teachers set homework on a regular basis". This system "does not take into account homework to effectively involve parents" according to another SMT member. SMT members also stated that there needed to be a concerted effort for all stakeholders to get together and design a homework strategy or policy to involve parents in homework.

According to an article written by Wilkinson "It is very important, we call parents to school to fetch reports. By giving the parent the report directly, we ensure that parents never come at the end of the year and complain about their kids failing because we have kept them up to date throughout the year. We emphasise to parents that they need to monitor their children's progress" This was the response to questions in an interview where SMT were asked about the importance of effective management of parental involvement (Daily news 2013:13). The response can be applied to homework issues.

SMT play an important role in supporting teachers. At this stage it seems as if the lack of effective parental involvement may have resulted in the general apathy of parents to get involved in their children's homework.

4.2.2 The focus group interview

Below are the perceptions of parents on parental involvement in children's homework as set out. The majority of participants indicated that it is important for their children's success that they get involved with their children's homework. However, they also said that there are many hindrances preventing them from getting involved, as highlighted during the interview. The responses from the focus group interview can be summarised as follows:

4.2.2.1 Homework policy and practices to involve parents in homework.

The majority of parents in the study indicated that they were aware of the importance of homework, and felt that they were doing their best to assist their school going children despite the severe challenges they faced. In an extreme case, a young mother said that she was unemployed with three other smaller children and found it almost impossible to attend to her school going child's needs (including assistance with homework).

One parent said, "I never saw a homework policy, but I do know that the teachers assign homework". Other parents supported this statement. One stated that, "the school has never informed me about a homework policy. I bought my child a diary in which homework must be recorded so that I can monitor my child's homework". At least two parents who had attended SGB meetings told the focus group that, the teacher and management component had never informed the parent and learner component about a homework policy. In response to this a parent said that "no effort is made on the part of the SMT to devise and implement a homework policy that would involve parents".

Parents continued that they were "not aware of any homework policy" and that they "did not receive any official instructions" from the school with regards to "their duties about homework", although there were "some discussions about it at parent meetings". They also said that a relatively small number of teachers gave homework. The homework that was given required an insignificant amount of parental involvement. One parent recalled having to sign his child's book after the homework was done because it had to be handed in the next day. Another one remembered an assessment grid that had to be completed by her after her child had completed his homework.

4.2.2.2 Hindrances to parental involvement in homework

Although parents are aware of recent developments in schools, such as the formation of SGBs, they do not know what the functions of these bodies are. A large number of parents did not know about the existence of school policies on homework, discipline and the dress-code of the schools their children attended.

By implication they are also not informed about DoE's policies regarding the responsibilities of parents and feel they lack the necessary skills to assist their children. They experienced the following hindrances with regard to their involvement with homework.

- **Physical hindrance**

Parents in this study gave a lack of personal finances as a reason for being unable to assist their children. Two African parents were unemployed, single females and were recipients of the South African Social Services grant. The lack of finance made it difficult to visit the school because of the high cost of transport. African parents also indicated that they could not attend parent meetings and SGB meetings since these took place in the evening when some still had work commitments. Others said that it was dangerous to travel by public transport to the city at night.

One parent said that, "it's difficult being single with three children. My company paid the school fees for my first born and I use the Social Services money to pay for transport from the township to school". According to Mncube (2009) (par 2.3.3) the lack of participation by African parents in the former Model C and former Indian schools was because most of the meetings were held at night, despite the guidelines from the DoE, which emphasise the undesirability of doing so. Lotter (2003:13) (par 2.3.3) states that despite receiving relevant guidelines, many former white and Indian schools continue to hold elections for SGB members at night. This means that a true representation of the community on a governing body is not reflected.

By contrast, Indian parents in the study lived close to the school, but excused themselves because they are full-time employees. They would have to obtain permission to leave work early to attend a meeting if it was held on a week day. According to one parent said "we live in a high-paced world with demands on parents even greater than before. Both parents have to be economically active, so sometimes there is little time available for on-going monitoring of children's schoolwork, homework and even any involvement in school governance".

- **Intellectual hindrance**

A few parents argued that parent participation depended on the parent's educational level. One remarked that, "even parents who have available time to monitor their children's homework are unable to do so because of limited reading and writing skills".

Some better educated parents shared their concerns that Outcomes Based Education (OBE) left them feeling inadequate and even more changes were now being made by the DoE. They are also concerned that the implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) would make it difficult for parents with limited skills to assist their children, since there is a change in the content being taught at different grades. In this regard Mncube (2008:77) (par 2.3.3) mentions that parents were becoming passive participants due to their lack of education and because many school activities are new to African African parents.

Some parents indicated that they moved their children to urban schools after 1994 because of "better schooling opportunities". This was because some parents were of the opinion that there are better schools in the urban areas and they did not expect to be asked to be active participants in their children's schooling or homework.

From the responses of the focus group interview it appears that no attempt has been made to educate parents on their expected role or explain to them how they could get involved in homework or other school activities. Depending on the subject, some parents can make effective contributions in matters relating to finance (school fundraising projects) and discipline. Simultaneously, it must not be forgotten that SGB can become dysfunctional because of illiterate parents that did not attend or had no interest in the SGB.

- **School environment and leadership**

Parents felt that the schools did not create a welcoming environment. The school do not have a visitor reception area and according to one parent "we have to wait for a while in the corridor of the school office before someone from reception will come to assist us". Another parent said that "not all schools can afford to have a comfortable visitor's lounge or reception area. The school staff and management can however adopt a positive attitude by conveying warmth and sincerity. A neat and functionally arranged principal's office will leave parents with an impression of professionalism".

The existence of an unwelcoming environment was less important to one parent as she was more concerned about not getting an opportunity to meet with her child's teachers. The teachers were only available in the morning before school started.

Parents also expressed their concerns regarding poor leadership at the schools. A parent said "Principals should provide the support teachers need in fostering a healthy relationship between the school and the parents. Principals serve on the SGB and can help plan school events that would encourage parental involvement and especially the involvement of the community. The principal can build partnerships with local religious and sporting bodies".

Based on the responses from parents in the study, the indication was that a warm welcoming school environment as well as the interaction and experience with teachers, SMT and parents can make a difference.

- **Communication**

Parents of children at School A were unhappy about not being informed about SGB meetings, and in some cases parents' meetings. This was attributed to the fact that children were not giving their parents the school-to-home communication. School B had a bulk short message system in operation as well as the school-to-home communication. This meant that parents were informed even if their children never gave them the school-to-home communication.

Some parents, who were second language English speakers, had a problem reading English. These parents also expressed their concerns about not receiving the child's school progress report because the children did not pass it on to their parents. An optimistic parent felt that, "teachers need to work with us, we as parents want to get involved in our children's education and I am sure teachers will welcome our involvement"

4.3 Conclusion

Data collected from the empirical investigation was discussed and presented. Personal interviews with teachers and SMT revealed the non-existence of a school homework policy, the importance of homework in education, the severer lack of teacher practices to involve parents in homework and the lack of parental involvement in school governance. Teacher training regarding parental involvement requires a much more concerted effort. Data also revealed the necessity for an effective management of parental involvement by SMT.

The focus group interviews reinforced some of the sentiments shared by the teachers regarding the lack of a school homework policy and practices to involve parents. Hindrances to parental involvement in homework were discussed at length.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study, presents the main findings of the personal and focus group interviews, outlines the main conclusions emanating from the findings and offers recommendations on strategies that can be employed by teachers and SMT in addressing parental involvement in homework.

5.2 Summary of the study

Chapter one presented the framework of the study included were the research questions, aims research methodology and design. The problem statement deals with the involvement of parents in their children's homework as explained in paragraph 1.3. it was pointed out that homework tasks develop life skills that benefit the child, with characteristics such as order, organisation, persistence, perseverance and goal directedness (cf. par. 1.3). The involvement of parents as partners in the education process in schools is however a highly contestable issue because the reasons for their involvement, is not well understood (cf. par. 1.2) in this section it was also pointed out that educators are not receiving relevant support and training required to fulfil their roles. In addition it was shown that parents sometimes neglect their parental duties as stipulated by legislation (cf.par.1.2). These challenges highlighted that there is a need for teachers to be effectively trained to perform their duties effectively and efficiently (cf. par.1.2).

Chapter 2 presented a literature study. The literature review covered a variety of aspects namely, theoretical perspectives on parental involvement in education, parental involvement in early and modern societies, parental involvement in South Africa, the role and function of homework in education and the functioning of different models of parental involvement in homework (cf. par 2.2; 2.3; 2.4 and 2.5).

In Chapter 3, the research design and methodology were discussed in detail and framed within a research paradigm. The methodology used was presented and discussed (cf. par 3.2). The pilot study (cf. par. 3.2.2.6) and the selection of participants were discussed (cf. par. 3.2.2.4). The role played by trustworthiness and validity in qualitative research and

achievement thereof was mentioned (cf. par. 3.2.2.9). The chosen method of data collection was personal interviews with teachers and school managers and a focus group interview with parents (cf. par. 3.2.2.6). The collected data was analysed through coding (cf. par. 3.2.2.7). The chapter also addressed the significant issue of research ethics (cf. par. 3.2.2.8)

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis and interpretation of the research results. The perceptions of school managers, teachers and parents with regard to the research questions were provided. Detailed information from the personal interviews and the focus group interview was established through a process of data-analysis were given. Important themes that emerged through the analysis were used for the discussion in chapter 4.

In this chapter the conclusion, findings and recommendations will be discussed in detail. The findings are based on the first four research questions that deal with the nature of parental involvement in education, the functions of homework in education, the models that can be implemented for the improvement of parental involvement in homework and the perceptions of the participants on parental involvement in homework. The last research question that deals with guidelines that should assist in improving the quality of parental involvement in homework is addressed in the sections on recommendations in paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5.

5.3 Findings

5.3.1 General findings

Parents have for a long time been viewed as primary teachers. As such they provide a family learning environment that included critical aspects such as care, order, organisation, persistence, perseverance and goal directedness. As such parents can obtain a wide range of “benefits” when they concern themselves with the education of their children, for example, by knowing that their children acquire better results this way, that failure is minimised, that the absentee rate decreases, that behavioural problems are lessened and that their children will engage more consistently with learning activities.

Teachers, as subject-specialists, should accept and promote the involvement of parents in school matters such as homework. It is true that common goals are best achieved when there is good co-operation between parents and teachers. In this respect teachers should at a

minimum, improve their communication with parents and ensure that they meet parents personally at school meetings.

SMT are not familiar with strategies which involve parents in school matters such as homework. SMT tend to blame parents for not getting involved and they do not know why, how and when parents should get involved. It is clear that SMT do not possess the skills to implement strategies which involve parents in their children's homework.

5.3.2 Findings pertaining to the Research Questions

- **What is the nature of parental involvement in education?**

As mentioned, parental involvement in formal education existed since the dawn of mankind. As time progressed and education became formalised, parents played an ever increasing role in their children's education. However in modern societies parental involvement is showing a decreasing trend. In South Africa some groups of people were not afforded the opportunity to get involved in their children's schooling. Parents from so-called African communities received little support from the government. The only education available to African parents was mission education which focused on converting them to Christianity. It was only later, when the needs of society changed that parents realised how important it was to educate their children. Indian parents, on the other hand, showed great interest in educating their children by asking for schools and in some cases building schools at their own expense.

It has also been found that in current society parental involvement can still be improved upon in a number of schools. Areas that must be addressed are, amongst others, attendance at school meetings, monitoring of their children's school attendance and academic progress, as well as the involvement in fundraising projects.

- **What roles do parents play in their children's homework?**

It has been found that parents are aware of their parental responsibility however due to various socio-economic constraints they are unable to actively contribute to their child's academic progress through involvement in homework.

Parental involvement in homework is a home-based type of involvement in children's education. Homework involvement ranges from monitoring or support to guidance. The parent can provide space, materials for doing the homework, develop rules for avoiding distractions, and become involved in the tutoring and doing the homework with the child.

It has been found that in both School A and School B parents' roles in homework varied. While in some cases parents supported their children by monitoring homework, others were unsupportive.

- **What are the functions of homework in education?**

It has also been found School A and School B did not have any formal procedures in place regarding a school homework policy. Homework is related to the formal school curriculum and is set by teachers to be completed by learners out of class.

Homework can strengthen co-operation between parents and teachers and enrich what has been taught in class. Homework also teaches children to work independently, develop self-discipline, instil life skills and time management. If used correctly, homework can play a vital role in education. It makes use of materials and sources of information (including parents) which are not accessible in the classroom. It also expands the time spent on a learning activity.

Homework can also provide a means by which parents can see the kind of work the child is doing at school, and they can assess progress. For teachers homework enables them to see which learners have not understood concepts, allowing them to set additional activities to reinforce that concept. For learners homework has the advantage of preparing them for tests and exams.

- **Which model can be applied for the improvement of parental involvement in homework?**

By studying the models set out in paragraph 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 as well as applying the information obtained from this study the use of an interactive homework model could be implemented in schools. This model must however be used as part of the normal homework

programme. A key element of the interactive model is that it compels family and even community involvement. Certain sections of the homework activity include instructions prompting learners to involve family members. Parents could even be requested to provide feedback concerning the effectiveness of the activity for them and their children.

Apart from the increased parental involvement brought about by an interactive model, teachers will have to be encouraged to play their part. They must ensure that the homework forms part of prescribed curricula, i.e. they have to plan and organise homework in a systematic way. It is impossible to apply activity-based homework in a stand-alone fashion. They must form part of a school project and be driven by a team of teachers. This group must make use of a kind of “activity-bag” from which all school assignments have to be selected.

- **What are the perceptions of the participants on parental involvement in homework?**

A relatively large number of teachers never give homework that requires parental involvement because they do not know how to do it. In addition, they believe that parents “lack interest” in their children’s progress at school and it would therefore not make sense to involve them in any kind of homework project. Parents in actual fact think the school environment is unwelcoming and that teachers are unwilling to get them involved.

Certain parents are under the impression that socio-economic factors influence the extent to which they can get involved in their children’s schooling. Some are illiterate or semi-literate and do not have the skills to help their children. Problems range from child-headed households, Aids orphans living with grandparents, lack of electricity or running water, no space to do homework (informal settlements). Both children and parents have household responsibilities leaving parents insufficient time to devote to homework.

Clearly both educators and parents are deeply concerned about the success and wellbeing of learners.

5.4 Recommendations

As mentioned the last research question in particular will be addressed in this section. Obviously the first four questions are thus not excluded from what is recommended here but will indeed serve as basis for the following recommendations.

5.4.1. Recommendations for schools

Both the SMT and teachers should use innovative ways to bring parents closer to the school and identify roles that parents could play at school. They could, for example, participate in the disciplinary committee, help to renovate the school, fundraising, etc. SMT, teachers, parents and learners could form committees to formulate policies for the school, such as, disciplinary policy, dress code policy, homework policy, etc. These policies should promote a positive teaching and learning atmosphere. All parents must be given a copy of these policies at the beginning of each school year upon registration of their child. All these documents should be made available in the language that the parent is familiar with.

Educator unions at site level should work on strategies for effective learning to take place when educators have to attend union activities or workshops. Teachers can design worksheets for work to be done in their absence and parents could volunteer as supervisors. The SGB should give copies of financial reports to the parents and stress on the importance of school fees and fundraising. Communication channels between the school and parents should be established by the school. Teachers and SMT should attend professional development workshops that will equip them to design homework that would encourage parental participation.

The different roles parents can play in the education and homework of their children should be made clear in school-to-home letters or a school newsletter printed in the two main languages of the school population. Parents should be encouraged to attend meetings. In cases where learners live far from school, the SMT and teachers should host meetings at a time convenient for all. The large number of second language English speakers could require the assistance of an interpreter at meetings. The SGB can assist by hosting events that will encourage parents to participate, as well as to emphasise the importance of parental involvement in homework and schooling.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the KwaZulu- Natal DoE

The KwaZulu-Natal DoE should initiate training programmes on parent involvement for teachers and SMT.

For teachers entering the profession, the DoE can enter into a partnership with universities in the province and offer training programmes on parental involvement as part of a fulfilment towards a degree in education.

The DoE can also offer training to parents on how they can get involved in their children's curricular and co-curricular activities. Most parents have the interest, but lack the necessary knowledge and skills to play an active role in the education of their children.

The DoE should take the initiative to plan induction programmes for new parent governors elected or co-opted to SGBs. These programmes could equip parents for their functions on the SGB. The programme must also demarcate school management duties, encourage parent-teacher collaboration through sub-committees to advice on issues such as learner behaviour, discipline and school uniform.

Schools in the different circuits can initiate symposium, calling for the different stakeholders to engage with each other and develop innovative methods to involve parents in their children's education.

5.4.3 Recommendations regarding guidelines that could encourage effective parental involvement in:

- **Communication**

Communication between parents and teachers can take the form of informal discussions, formal consultations, telephone conversations, exchange of correspondence (notes in child's notebook or homework record book, e-mails and short message service), circulars, parents' evenings, open days and home visits.

For many South African teachers teaching in multi-cultural schools means facing language barriers. Effective communication skills are essential at schools that reflect South Africa's multi-cultural society.

Written communication should therefore be done in the language that parents are familiar with. All newsletters or written notices should be translated. When parents call at the school, an interpreter should be made available where required. Teachers should receive training in the second language spoken at the school as well as in improving their communication skills.

The school could offer Adult Education classes to strengthen parent involvement in education. Currently, Adult Education classes are part of a DoE programme to improve the literacy rates. Schools can start a school radio programme, a small FM radio station that provides everything a school needs to get daily messages on the air.

School A and School B used learners to relay information to the parents. Learners were for example tasked with taking home the term-end and year-end report card. This was a problem, since many parents reported not seeing the child's report card. Some parents reported not seeing these. Schools can give learners letters to take home with forms to be returned (return slips) encouraging parents to respond to invitations to receive their child's progress report. By doing this the parent will be given the opportunity to engage with teachers and discuss matters such as school fees, learner's conduct and homework and academic progress.

Parents and teachers need to work together. This requires a substantial change in teacher and parent attitudes and practices. Unless schools are prepared to overcome the "language barrier", they cannot hope to enlist effective parental support.

- **Homework**

Teachers can plan parent evenings for giving parents the assistance they need to help their children with projects. Parents can use these evenings to clarify instructions that were given to complete a school project. Interactive homework should be assigned to give learners at least two or three nights to complete the work so that most parents have time to interact with their children. Assignments over a few days also take cognisance of the fact that some activities require learners and parents to gather materials that may not be available at home. Teachers must design assignments that could be completed over the weekend when parents say they have time to work with their children.

In cases where the child works with a guardian or single parent, teachers can make arrangements to ask parents to offer support to each other by forming a parent support group. This will help because where parents work at night, have other children to take care of or other obligations that may reduce their time or may be semi-literate or illiterate. Parents should be encouraged to monitor homework every day by ensuring that homework is completed and checked for accuracy. If possible, parents should establish a regular place and a time for the child to work on his/her homework. Teachers should provide information about how parents can help their children at home as well as to establish a general homework schedule, example Maths and History on Monday; Accounting and Life Science on Tuesday.

- **Programmes for the improvement of Homework**

The TIPS and SPLASH programmes discussed in Chapter 2 are designed specifically to keep learners and their families talking about school work. They are suited for promoting interactive learning activities such as homework. With the TIPS programme teachers are required to use their higher level thinking skills. Interactions with family members are enhanced and learners that make learners think, write, gather information, collect suggestions, explain, demonstrate, draw, sketch or construct things and conduct other activities together.

With the SPLASH programme teachers develop special activity bags for each science unit. Each activity bag contains a science-related children's book, interview questions, suggested enquires and simple equipment to explore ideas embedded in the children's literature. The literature in the bag is important because it provides a natural starting point for teachers and parents to discuss science ideas with learners. Since the literature is read by the parent to the child, the wide range of topics and view-points will stimulate, which makes learning more meaningful.

- **Curricular and extra-curricular school activities**

Schools can invite parents to help organise and attend field trips and school activities. (e.g. speech and awards day, matric dance, sports events, etc.). Parents can be trained by counsellors to assist their children to make the correct subject choices to attend college for future careers.

Schools can also encourage fathers to play an active role by offering books for them to read with their children and having days in the school year where children can bring their fathers along. In cases where the father is absent, a male guardian that the child views as a role model can attend.

Schools can also post online information relevant to all stakeholders on their website. Information on the website can include admission requirements for learners, school fees and learner's homework given for different grades. Parents can use an interactive website to become involved by joining different committees and posting the progress of the committees online.

Parents can be invited to workshops arranged by the school to give them the opportunity to air any concerns and listen to invited speakers. Parents and teachers can look at goals that could be set for parent instruction, namely to enhance the quality of the guidance parents give their children at home, parenting styles, communication between parent and child, study methods and subject choices.

Training programmes for SGB must be continuous. Parents must be informed about the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996, which states the essence of parental involvement in the life of a school. The development programme should help parents understand their functions on the SGB, provide a clear demarcation of their school management duties and encourage parent-teacher collaboration through advisory team links on issues such as learner behaviour, discipline, school uniform and school finance.

Parents can also become involved in teacher education. A certificate in parent involvement for teachers can be of great value to parental involvement in any school. This would only be possible with the implementation of an action team under the auspices of the SGB.

Schools can encourage volunteers to work in the neediest schools and support reading and maths instruction. Volunteers can collect unwanted books from the community and start a

library in schools that do not have one. Retired maths teachers can be encouraged to offer assistance to teachers and support to learners. Parents can be encouraged to participate in the schools nutrition programme and volunteer to make lunch for children who come from impoverished homes. Parents can also be included in the planning phase of fundraising projects.

Teachers can encourage parents to foster an interest in the languages studied at the school by letting their children write letters to friends or relatives, read aloud to each other, play educational games and discuss current affairs. This will improve the learner's reading and comprehension skills as well as foster a healthy relationship between parent and child in where education would be viewed as valuable. Teachers can give parents reading lists and encourage them to purchase books for the children to use at home. Parents with financial problems can make use of donations, discount's and used bookstores.

Since illiteracy and semi-literacy amongst parents have been identified in this study, they can approach other parents or grandparents as reading buddies in a specially designed reading programme. In the secondary schools non-working parents and grandparents can become part of a network to help other parents.

Teachers can also give parents a list of museums, historical sites, nature centres and theatre performances that parents can visit together with their children. This would encourage conversation about schoolwork.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

5.5.1 Further research on teacher practices to involve parents in homework

The importance of parents to children's school academic performance and the success of homework intervention programmes give emphasis to the continued inquiry into parent's roles and their influence on their homework. Therefore future studies need a more detailed investigation of the use of programmes such as SPLASH and TIPS.

5.5.2 Expansions of research to other contexts

The present study involved teachers, SMT and parents' view and experiences. This only represented a few of the stakeholders in the education system. Future studies of parent-child interactions and homework should extend the findings from to how learners relate to homework and how parental involvement in homework relates to curricular and co-curricular achievement.

5.6 Limitations of the study

A qualitative investigation such as this study using a small sample of 15 teachers and 10 parents cannot be generalised. It does however suggest that teacher practices and experiences form the basis for improved parental involvement in homework. The views of teachers and parents are merely described in this study. There is also need for learners to express their views and experiences in order to formulate effective homework policies and improved practices.

The literature study and interviews, revealed that similar situation existed in School A and School B and a pattern emerged that the perceptions of educators on parental involvement in their children's homework is merely a reflection of a small sample of the two public secondary schools in the Umlazi District within the eThekweni Municipality.

Future research into the involvement of parents in their children's homework with a focus on the perceptions of learners is recommended in order for effective homework policies to be formulated.

5.7 Conclusion

This Chapter focused on the summary, findings and recommendations of this study. A summary of the study thus far was given and conclusions were drawn. From the analysis of the data in Chapter 4 recommendations were made for the schools in this study, the KwaZulu-Natal DoE and parents. Recommendations were also made for future research into the perceptions of learners with regards to parental involvement and the implementation of the TIPS and SPLASH programmes. The researcher also highlighted the limitations of a study of this nature.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE TO BE USED FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS

➤ INTRODUCTION

- Would you introduce yourself by telling us the following about yourself and your family:

What is your occupation?

Are you a single parent or married/have a partner?

What is the approximate average household income?

How many children attend school presently in your home?

➤ HOME ENVIRONMENT

- How does your child/children spend their afternoon at home, after they arrive from school?
- Are you aware of your child's homework policy?
- Does your child/children have homework record books or diaries? If no. Explain.
- Does your child/children receive homework? Who supervises him/her at home while they are doing their homework?
- What is your view: Should homework involvement/supervision in homework be the responsibility of the mother or father or both parents? Explain.
- Have you ever heard your child read? How often do you buy or borrow reading material from the library for your child/children?
- Explain how you obtain source material for your child's/children's homework, assignments.
- Briefly describe where your child/children do his/her homework.
- Does your child/children have access to a suitable working surface, example desk/table, chair? And where is this area? Is this area free from any distractions, example television, radio and the sounds/noise of children/adults?
- Did you assist you child/children in the construction of a structured schedule (timetable) that also includes a set time for homework which is recognised and respected by all members of the family? If no, explain.

- What is your view with regards to the quantity of homework your child/children does?
- Is there parental involvement in your child/children's homework? If yes, please explain how.
- Are you stern about the completion of the homework? Do you check the work done by your child/children? If no, explain.
- Has the subject teacher sent home projects/assignments to be done by you and your child? Was any feedback requested? If yes explain.

➤ **SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

- Do you receive any school-to-home correspondence regarding School Governing Body meetings? How often is this? How has this body assisted you and other parents?
- Are you a member of the School Governing Body? If no, explain. If yes, are you aware of the duties of the School Governing Body?
- Do you participate in any school activities, and if yes, what are they? If no, explain reasons for not participating in these activities (e.g. Parent meetings, SGB elections, fundraising events).

➤ **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

- Do you receive a progress report from your child/children's school at least once a school term? How do you receive this, by mail or does your child give it to you?
- How often do you enquire about the progress of your child/children at school? If never or seldom, explain why.
- The understanding of educational academics is that if parents are involved in their child/children's homework and education, it will have a positive effect on their academic progress? Agree/disagree. Explain.
- Do you explain to your child the importance of education or homework?
- How would you describe the relationship between you and the educators of your child/children? If poor, explain why.
- Explain the challenges you are faced with when it comes to your involvement in homework (assisting/monitoring)?

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS TO BE USED IN PERSONAL INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

- Please state the number of years of teaching experience you have.

HOMEWORK

- Does the school have a homework policy? If no, what guidelines can be put in place to encourage parental involvement?
- Are parents aware/given copies of a homework policy?
- Is there a system used to check if educators set homework regularly? If no, explain.
- Explain your reasons for setting homework for learners?
- When setting homework, do you take into consideration learner's individual differences and domestic circumstances? Explain.
- Do you sufficiently explain the homework to learners, the time it will take to complete and how it will be assessed? Explain how you go about doing this.
- Do you check homework immediately after completion? If no, explain why not.
- Do you think it is necessary to give learners feedback about homework? Explain.
- Is it important for educators to give praise for good work and help where there are difficulties? Why or why not?
- Is parental involvement important for homework? Explain.

COMMUNICATION

- What means of communication do you use to inform parents about their role in assisting/monitoring their child/children with homework? Explain why you use this method.
- How often do you communicate with parents regarding their child/children homework? If never or seldom, explain.
- How do you rate the channel of communication between the school and parents? If poor, what can be done to improve communication?

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Explain why parents should be involved in the homework of their child/children.
- Explain the role of the family in the upbringing and education of the child in the community (norm, values, culture).
- Explain how the community can get involved in the education of children.
- Explain the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework?
- What is the rate of attendance at parents meeting/SGB meetings? Explain what can be done to encourage parents to attend these meetings.
- Please give your comments regarding teacher training with regards to parental involvement in homework and communication with parents.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SMT TO BE USED IN PERSONAL INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

- Please state the number of years of teaching experience you have.

HOMEWORK

- Does the school have a homework policy? If no, explain. If yes, is it available to all parents?
- Is there a system used to check if educators set homework regularly? If yes, explain. If no, explain why no system exists. Explain how this issue can be addressed.
- Do you think that it is important to manage parental involvement in school activities/child's homework? Explain.
- As SMT, what guidelines can be devised to encourage parental involvement in homework?

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT/ PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Comment on the percentage of parent attendance at teacher-parent meetings, SGB meeting, school activities (sports day and fundraising events)? Explain what can be done to improve the attendance.
- Is parental involvement in school activities important? Explain.
- Explain why parents should be involved in the child's/children's homework.
- Explain the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework and the education of their children?

APPENDIX 4A

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

86 Protea Road
Asherville
Durban
4091

20 June 2013

MR T. T. MTHEMBU
Umlazi Circuit Inspector

Dear Sir,

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR CIRCUIT

I am a Master's student at the University of South Africa, conducting a research project entitled: The involvement of parents in children's homework at public secondary schools in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit.

I humbly appeal to you to permit me to conduct my study in your circuit. The study will only involve Level One educators and managers who will be selected to participate in an in-depth interview to be conducted at a convenient day and time after school.

Focus group interviews will be conducted with parents at two public secondary schools to gather data on their perceptions regarding parental involvement in homework. All information (names of participants and school) will not be revealed.

The following information will be given to all participants:

1. Their identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
2. Participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at any time.
3. They will be shown the findings before submission to ensure that their contribution is accurate and acceptable.
4. All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
5. They will not be forced to disclose information they do not want reveal.
6. Written notes and audio recordings will be made and stored in my personal safe for five years and thereafter be incinerated.

I hope that the findings of this study will be beneficial to the teachers, the schools and the Department of Education as a whole.

My contact details and that of my supervisor appear below. Should you require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

This study is supervised by Professor C. VAN WYK, telephone number (012) 4415702

My contact details: cell 084 483 0010; e-mail address: sparmaswar@vodamil.co.za

I thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely
Saloshnie Parmaswar

If you understand the request and agree to permit the study, please sign the consent form below.

.....
CONSENT FORM

I (full name) hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and consent to the study being undertaken at my school.

.....
Signature

.....
Date

APPENDIX 4B

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

86 Protea Road
Asherville
Durban
4091

20 June 2013

The Participant

Dear Participant

RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

I am a Master's student at the University of South Africa, conducting a research project entitled: The Involvement of parents in children's homework at public secondary schools in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit.

I humbly appeal to you to participate in this study by consenting to be a member of a focus group which will comprise only of parents of learners attending secondary public schools in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit. The interview will be conducted at a time and place convenient to.

Note to participants:

1. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
2. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
3. You will be shown the findings before submission to ensure that your contribution is accurate and acceptable to you.

4. All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.
5. You will not be forced to disclose information you do not want reveal.
6. Written notes and audio recordings will be made and stored in my personal safe for five years and thereafter be incinerated.

This study is supervised by Professor C. VAN WYK, for any enquiries telephone (012) 441 5702.

My contact details: Cell 084 483 0010; e-mail address: sparmaswar@vodamail.co.za

I thank you in advance.

Yours Sincerely

Saloshnie Parmaswar

If you understand the request and agree to participate, please sign the declaration form below.

DECLARATION FORM

I (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and consent to participate in the study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

.....

.....

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4C

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

86 Protea Road
Asherville
Durban
4091

20 June 2013

The Participant

Dear Participant

RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

I am a Master's student at the University of South Africa, conducting a research project entitled: The involvement of parents in children's homework at public secondary schools in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit.

I humbly appeal to you to participate in this study by consenting to be a participant in an interview of teachers of secondary public schools in the Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit. The interview will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you.

Note to participants:

1. Your identity will not be divulged under any circumstance.
2. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.
3. You will be shown the findings before submission to ensure that your contribution is accurate and acceptable to you.
4. All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.

5. You will not be forced to disclose information you do not want to reveal.
6. Written notes and audio recordings will be made and stored in my personal safe for five years and thereafter be incinerated.

This study is supervised by Professor C. VAN WYK, any enquiries telephone (012) 441 5702.

My contact details: Cell 084 483 0010; e-mail address: sparmaswar@vodamail.co.za

I thank you in advance.

Yours Sincerely

Saloshnie Parmaswar

If you understand the request and agree to participate, please sign the declaration form below.

DECLARATION FORM

I (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and consent to participate in the study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I desire.

.....

.....

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4D

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

86 Protea Road
Asherville
Durban
4091

20 June 2013

The Principal

..... Secondary School

Dear Sir,

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am a Master's student at the University of South Africa, conducting a research project entitled: The involvement of parents in children's homework at public secondary schools in Umlazi District, Mayville Circuit.

I humbly appeal to you to permit me to conduct my study at your school. The study will only involve teachers who will be selected to participate in an interview to be conducted at a convenient day and time after school.

Interviews will be conducted to gather data on their perceptions regarding parental involvement in homework. All information (names of participants and school) will not be revealed.

I hope that the findings of this study will be beneficial to the teachers and the school as a whole.

My contact details and that of my supervisor appear below. Should you require any clarification please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

This study is supervised by Professor C. VAN WYK, telephone (012) 4415702.

My contact details: cell 084 483 0010; e-mail address: sparmaswar@vodamil.co.za

I thank you in advance.

Yours Sincerely

Saloshnie Parmaswar

If you understand the request and agree to permit the study, please sign the consent form below.

.....
CONSENT FORM

I (full name of Principal) hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and consent to the study being undertaken at my school.

.....
Signature

.....
Date

